

**“IN EACH OTHER WE TRUST”:  
REIMAGINING COMMUNITY, ECONOMICS AND THE REGION IN  
CENTRAL NORTH CAROLINA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**In Each Other We Trust: Reimagining Community, Economics, and the Region in  
Central North Carolina (Under the direction of Dr. John Pickles)**

This dissertation examines the creation and circulation of a complementary currency, the PLENTY, within four contiguous counties in central North Carolina. Using a participatory research action model, this dissertation argues that the production of community through the PLENTY's monetary space and alternative economic function creates an opportunity for residents within this region to rearticulate their relationship to people and places within and outside of the region. This alternative regional form is different than the dominant conception of the region as "the Triangle," which is based around the global connections that meet up in Research Triangle Park and which have concretized over the past 50 years. The dissertation stresses the ambivalence with which this alternative regional form is realized either in idea or in practice due to the discursive limits PLENTY users put on the geography of community. While the PLENTY provides the possibility to practice a spatial ethics in which one's sense of responsiveness and care follow the complex lines of connection fostered by a diversely global sense of place, this potential remains latent when conventional relations between community, economics and place are not deconstructed.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### *Community is Disintegrating*

Community is disintegrating. But community is not necessarily out of joint in the way that has become so common in public declarations or in the discourses that legitimize so-called community-based politics (Etzioni 1994; McKnight 1996; Sennett 1994); community is not a knot of relations that once existed in a more connected state but now appears loosened up, unbound, depleted or frayed due to the free movements of capital, the decay of traditional institutions and interactions, the transgressions of state agencies into the realm of civil society, or the loss of socio-cultural values. Rather, it is this very understanding of community that is coming undone (Agamben 1993; Derrida 2001; Nancy 2007). And with the disintegration of community comes the unraveling of community's assumed role as a phenomenon which articulates identity and place and sets the parameters for ethical action through geographical imaginaries of responsibility (Massey 2005; Popke 2003; Popke 2006). In short, community's role as a political category to organize collective action is shifting.

The genealogy of community as a political category charts a trajectory within which the performance of identity takes place in specific locations—an articulation that has seen resurgence as the rhetorical underside of blasé globalization's aspatial, cosmopolitan ethic: entrenched localization and logics of place-based purity (Breckenridge and Pollock 2002; Harvey 2000; Sandercock 2003). Community takes

place. Therefore, one's understanding of place is fundamental. The validation over the last two decades within "leftist" theory and praxis that community takes place—a validation that shifts from decrying this process as symptomatic of community's own place-bound, militant particularism to celebrating this process as an opportunity to realize various modes of solidarity through space—has emerged alongside an intersecting set of debates that draw attention to the relationality of both community and its components: identity and place (Esteva and Prakash 1998).

The tradition of cultural studies has explored in depth the relational construction of identity and how that relational basis prevents any essential identity from actually existing (despite whatever performances of self can be witnessed in the real world) (Hall and du Gay 1996). Identities are always already constructed in relation to other identities. Furthermore, identities are constructed through multiple (sometimes simultaneous) relations and have multiple actualizations. More recently, those working at the transdisciplinary intersection of anthropology, cultural studies, and geography have recognized the relationality of place (Massey 2005; Thrift 2004). Place is not a container of activity nor is it simply the realization of meaning within an abstract space of presocial flows. Place is a site of articulation, a space of negotiation, an unfolding set of relations that meet up and become a temporary order (before becoming something else). Just as there is no essential identity, there is no essential place (despite performances of the politics of place which pursue purity in place, as if place could be abstracted from a space of flows). Places exist in relation to other places and in multiple forms. Neither identity nor place can be completely

mapped because of this unfolding process of relationality, a process that is always occurring (Amin and Thrift 2002; Massey, Allen et al. 1999).

Community, too, has (more reluctantly) been recognized as a relational construction, as an articulated, temporary ordering of socio-spatial relations (Lepofsky 2003). It is now no longer possible to posit that community exists as an essential category of social life (if it ever was). While the politics of community can still try to achieve community as a being, such politics will always be an incomplete territorialization of community's becoming. This is not merely the fodder of intellectual theorization; it is realized in all the ways in which community must be put to work when deployed as a political project (Brent 2004). When community takes place, community is always already disintegrating. Community leaks.

The politics of community become interesting in how people and institutions negotiate the always occurring disintegration of community and the relational nexus of identity and place. It is not enough to note the relationality of community. To claim that everything is related prevents recognition of the power-geometries at work in every territorialization of community (Massey 1999; Massey 2005). The politics of community unfold as the negotiation of the very relations which constitute community's becoming. In other words, the politics of community is about the ways in which community becomes territorialized, about the very form of community's relationality. The challenge is not celebrating pure deterritorialization of community or its reverse: any particular territorialization. The politics of community is about the negotiated process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. This shifts the



question of community within the realm of politics from what is this community to how will this community become realized.

Conventional models of community politics cut off this negotiation by resorting to already visible territorializations: neighborhood, race, class, gender, nation (Joseph 2002). Yet more and more attention has been given to community politics which try to articulate territorializations of community which are not yet clearly visible in the horizon of the social and whose politics of community present practices that are counter to the hegemony of presently visible community (Mertes 2003; Mertes and Bello 2004). Many of these efforts have been collapsed under the category of “the multitude.” The multitudinous proliferations of community are constructing new ways to live community as a political category by creating modes of solidarity which deploy unfamiliar geographical imaginaries of responsibility. While many of the intellectual debates over the existence of the multitude often focus on its globality (treating “the multitude” as the new political category of what had previously been referred to as “the people” or “the masses”), many projects of the multitude are not clearly “global” (nor “local”). Rather, what makes the multitude interesting is the ways in which place, and therefore community, gets negotiated as a translocal event. The globality of what has come to be known as the multitude is a proliferation of disseminated deterritorializations and reterritorializations which produce splintered spatial configurations (Harcourt, Escobar et al. 2001). As such, many realizations of the politics of community within the multitude are place-based, not place-bound. Such politics of community present a challenge to the hegemonic geographical imaginary of ethics which continues to dominate the ways in which

community is put to work: understanding responsibility as a distance-decay model in which those closest should be more responsive to each other and one's sense of responsibility steadily decreases the further one is from a central point that represents the self as an enclosed ethical subject. A relational understanding of community prevents such pointillism from the geographies of responsibility and makes ethics a process of negotiating the articulation of relations. Community is disintegrating. How do I/we want to put it together? How do I/we want to have community take place?

*Spacing the Politics of Community Through the Relationality of Money*

This dissertation examines how a group of people and institutions attempt to forge a politics of community through the development and circulation of a localized complementary currency. In this case, the negotiation of the relationality of identity, place, and community is activated through an intervention in regional economic relations. In its own discourse, it is an intervention into the geographies of responsibility within and beyond the particular regional formation within which it takes place. It is an attempt to create a space of encounter through the use of money. Complementary currencies have a long history—indeed, what is now placed under the rubric of “complementary currencies” predate the currently conventional nationalized currencies that are recognized as legal tender (Fayazmanesh 2006; North 2007)—and not all complementary currencies attempt to negotiate community. Indeed, such monetary systems take diverse forms. Yet much of what has emerged into the loosely congealed contemporary complementary currency movement has pursued an agenda to use money more ethically by drawing upon the relationality of

money. The “complementary” label has been attached to the most recent multiplications of currency for several important reasons.

First, the international rise of complementary currencies in the last 20 years as a political project has developed in large part as a response to perceived problems in nationalized currencies (primarily that national currencies are incapable of achieving ethical relations—read as widespread prosperity and the capacity of (non)human flourishing—because their value is based in scarcity and they are distributed through debt-generating usury systems). As a political tool, complementary currencies are defined as not being money sanctioned by a nation-state and therefore more freely integrated into social life (Lee 1996; North 2007). Because any alternative status is still ambiguous given the breadth of the international movement (some systems and organizers are much more antagonistic than others towards dollars, pounds, euros, and yen) and because those within the movement recognize that diverse forms of money have proliferated (i.e. frequent flier miles, company scrip, etc.) which can support existing economic practices, the term “complementary” is preferred over “alternative.” This choice expresses an implicit recognition within the international complementary currencies movement that there is no necessary correspondence between this type of monetary reform and a particular political program (despite the Left-leaning tendencies of many of the most outspoken advocates of complementary currencies). The politics of complementary currencies is not pre-given and must be negotiated (just as national currencies had to be constructed through an unfolding set of negotiations (Gilbert 1999)).

Second, complementary currencies are treated as complementary because they operate within complementary spaces (Williams, Aldridge et al. 2003). Such currencies negotiate a liminal economic geography between the sanctioned space economies of state money and its others. Despite the popular rhetoric of unfettered globalization spreading across the planet, even apparently ubiquitous, “global” money, like dollars, have specific (if dynamic) geographies of circulation (Leyshon 1995; Leyshon 1996b; Leyshon 1998). For example, the recent housing boom in the United States is argued to be largely underwritten by the Federal Reserve’s selling of Treasury bills to China and Japan (Schifferes 2006). Many believe that over a third of dollars in circulation reside in East Asia, a recent shift in this geography of money and one that can be easily upset by changes in the international value of the dollar or the monetary policies of these countries—certainly dollars are neither just U.S. money nor flatly “global” money, but part of the unfolding array of political economic geographies of international relations and particular modes of globalization (Thrift and Leyshon 1999). While many of the world’s national currencies circulate at scales constructed with reference to the space economy of the nation-state, complementary currencies unfold with a different territorialization. Most of the currently existing complementary currencies take place at localized scales—from regions to neighborhoods (Lietaer 2001; Miller 2007). More significantly in terms of their definition as complementary currencies, such money has not achieved a smooth spacing in their territorializations and maintain their complementary distinction because of the very ways these monies striate the apparently smoothly territorialized spaces of national currencies through the networks of exchange at each of the scales

at which they operate. The spaces of complementary currencies complement the splintered territorialization of national currencies rather than reinscribe a simple, nested hierarchy in which money stays put. There are not spaces of complementary currency that exist outside of or isolated within the spaces of national currencies. There are crisscrosses and interchanges and relations through which national currencies and complementary currencies work in tandem to facilitate exchanges. Of course, the current power-geometries weigh in the favor of national currencies (in large part because of the work that has come before to make national currencies viable across wide trajectories and supported by particular crystallizations of power). Complementary currencies are not equal to national currencies in their ability to mediate purchasing power across space, but the complementary role is played when people choose to fill the lacunas of national currencies' flows with complementary currencies, and, in many cases, create these gaps (albeit temporarily) by choosing to use a complementary currency instead of a national one. Indeed, it is because even the most global monies do not go everywhere, but travel from place to place in particular movements, that complementary currencies tell us something important about the geography of money. Money reveals the leakiness of place and the impossibility of the local. It is always on the move, from here to there, connecting here and there. It is precisely at this juncture that many complementary currencies intervene in the space economy of money and seek to negotiate the ways in which money leaks from place to place. They offer a different scaling of the relations by drawing attention to the leakiness of place and offering one way to negotiate an intervention into how places come to be constructed.

The regional currency this dissertation analyzes does not circulate everywhere in the region nor does its use draw a clear boundary between the regional space of the complementary currency and the rest of the world where dollars mediate exchanges. It is a negotiated space in the making that calls attention to both the constructedness of national currencies' spaces as well as its own status as a complementary geography whose production must always rub up against other spaces of value and exchange. Furthermore, the spaces of complementary currencies are networked spacings that take place betwixt and between other spacings, such as the differently configured spaces of national money (which has its own disseminated forms that range from cash to electronic debiting).

Third, complementary currencies are often constructed as a way to engage the politics of community by presenting a complementary territorialization of community (Williams 1997; Williamson, Imbroscio et al. 2002). While a divide has emerged within the complementary currencies movement as to the proper realm of intervention (the "economic" realm of financial reform versus the "social" realm of community politics), most complementary currency systems directly attempt to build community in some capacity, even if the primary stress is placed on creating usury-free money or injecting capital in the places where "global" monies seem to avoid. Certainly in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States (and increasingly in Germany and Japan) complementary currencies are more community development initiatives than alternative monetary schemes (Greco 2001; Lietaer 2001; Lietaer 2004; Schroeder 2006). The social dynamics of money are highlighted: money as a mediator of exchange, money as an articulation of social interaction, money as a

means to generate and distribute social value. Money is fundamentally relational. Money traces relations and makes relationality visible, and, therefore, negotiable. As such, money is always already about community and complementary currency activists and practitioners are attempting to make good on this property of money.

But the unique contribution that complementary currencies make to the politics of community—one that retains its status of “complementary”—is in how community can be spaced through the circulation of money. While many complementary currency systems certainly retain pre-given, presumed territorializations of community and rely on a conventional geography of community which privileges the local and the propinquitous, the potential (which is just now being realized by many complementary currency activists, particularly in Europe and Japan) exists to marry the translocal movements of money with the translocal geographies of social life. Because complementary currencies reside in the liminal spaces between “global” money and the translocal, open places within which that money gets used, complementary currencies have the potential to build community in a way that acknowledges the openness of place and locality. They present an attempt to reconcile community as a meeting place within a space of flows in order to negotiate the form of that meeting. Money does not just leak out of place; money reveals the leakiness of place itself. As such, money can reveal the leakiness of community. Again, it is the negotiation of this leakiness, the mode of this relationality, that is at stake in the politics of community brought forth by complementary currencies. And it can go many ways. While the New Economics Foundation in London provides templates for “community” leaders to identify leaks

in the local economy (defined at the neighborhood scale) in order to plug those holes (Ward and Lewis 2002), complementary currency activists in Japan are using translocal networks of Japanese –speaking people to create new leaks in some local agrarian economies in sub-Saharan Africa to connect producers with consumers outside the leaky networks of agro-food multinationals that continually drain such local economies (and communities).<sup>1</sup> Such projects territorialize new modes of solidarity and produce community in open, and purposefully contingent, ways. Such projects hold the potential to create community among strangers without assuming that strangers are only the ones who lie outside the boundaries of “community.” There is an ethics of the stranger—different than the ethics of the other that has become a bland mantra of postmodern life (Dear 2000; Soja 2000)—in which strangers can enter into a mode of community that has come to be known both as “community without unity” and “the community of those who have nothing in common” (Corlett 1989; Lingis 1994). It is a community produced (and constantly becoming) through the sometimes accidentally, sometimes purposefully, constructed trajectories of space and place.

In this imaginary, community can extend beyond the face-to-face mode of interpersonal interaction to validate the diverse and complex geographies of interpersonal actions that are always already translocal and multi-scalar. As such, complementary currencies can take the familiar model of responsibility and

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<sup>1</sup> I learned of this project from Kenichi Kurita at an informal conversation with several participants in the E.F. Schumacher Society’s Conference “Local Currencies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Understanding Money, Building Local Economies, Renewing Community” held at Bard College in June 2004. Kurita, then a graduate student in economics at Hokkaido University in Japan working under Dr. Makoto Nishibe, came to the conference to discuss his participation in the “Q” project, an online complementary currency based in Japan (described by Kurita as a “glocal” currency).



complicate its geographical imaginary by injecting a complementary (not necessarily antagonistic) spatial formation. It is a both-and logic, not an either-or logic.

Community is both here and here, there and there. Therefore, one's allegiances lie here and there. Intervening in and using some of the networks of monetary flow, such spatial configurations become much more visible and much more possible to negotiate. Michael Shuman has it half right. It is not a choice between dating TINA or LOIS<sup>2</sup> (Shuman 1998). Complementary currencies acknowledge that neoliberal, free market capitalism is not the only way to construct a place's relationality within the world and give choice despite the There Is No Alternative rhetoric. But the implementation of complementary currencies does not have to turn inward to Locally-Owned Import Substitution (at a more localized scale than the state-based import substitution programs of Latin America and India).

Complementary currencies hold a potential to create new spacings of relationality that connect people and places differently. Territorializations we have not yet seen. It is a potential to be enacted through negotiation. But, as this dissertation will show, it largely remains an unrealized potential, in large part due to the failure to get beyond a romance with a closed territorialization of identity, place, and community as something that only exists here (even when that "here" is always elusive, always in motion, always beyond one's ability to give it a singular point in abstract space).

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<sup>2</sup> The specific reference is to an oft-made rhetorical move by Michael Shuman when presenting his ideas on local economic development: counterpoising "Locally-Owned Import Substitution" (LOIS) against the notion that to neoliberal globalization, "There Is No Alternative" (TINA) in such a way as to say that communities are like (heterosexual male) high school students looking for a prom date, deciding between two female options, LOIS and TINA.

*“Our Community, Our Economy, Our Money”*

This dissertation examines the creation and decline of a complementary currency in central North Carolina. This complementary currency has been privately printed, distributed, and managed by a non-profit organization called NCPlenty, Inc. Founded in 2001, the goal of NCPlenty, Inc. is to use a local currency called the PLENTY (Piedmont Local EcoNomy Tender) for multiple purposes: create new economic circuits of exchange between producers and consumers in a multi-county area in central North Carolina, direct the wealth that comes into the area from global circuits into these local circuits that do not extend outside of the area, and increase the sense of community between the people who constitute these local circuits of exchange (NCPlenty 2003). The organizers of the PLENTY want something different than to imagine the area as just a node in a global economy—a geographical imaginary that has become the dominant lens through which politicians, developers, and residents have envisioned the area over the last fifty years. But this desire does not simply express a hope to draw impermeable boundaries between those relations internal and external to the region. Rather, NCPlenty, Inc. and the movements of the PLENTY open up the opportunity to realize an alternative global sense of place (Massey 1994) in the area by calling attention to (and possibly redirecting) the ways in which people and places are connected through social and economic activity at a variety of scales (even while privileging the local). In seeking to reimagine the region differently than what the history of the region might allow, NCPlenty, Inc. offers its own counterhistory of regional construction that has its own set of visibilities (and invisibilities) about community, economy, and place.

On many of the promotional brochures for the PLENTY, NCPlenty, Inc. has printed the phrase “Our Community, Our Economy, Our Money.” It is the first term in that phrase that this dissertation primarily directs attention towards. What remains ambiguous in the unfolding of the PLENTY project is who constitutes “our community” and where exactly that community is. I argue that this is both the greatest asset and the greatest limitation of the PLENTY complementary currency: the ambiguity of community. But I do not posit the need for a clear definition of community in a discrete place in order to achieve success (as many community building projects attempt to do as part of the implementation process, so much so that a cottage industry has emerged on how to map one’s community and so even the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development publishes a guide for such mappings of community—including the use of GPS directed GIS mappings—in order to properly launch a community development initiative (HUD 1997)). Rather, I argue that the failure to articulate the importance of keeping “our community” ambiguous—and therefore open to interpretation and open to the multifarious, relational space of flows that always already constitute “our community”—underpins the limited circulation of PLENTYs and the reinscription of an already visible territorialization of community: one that is largely white, wealthy, highly educated, and already crystallized as a particular system of contextually elite social relations. As one of the participants in the PLENTY experiment states,

“Well the way that I understood originally some of the goals of the PLENTY were to not only to keep wealth within the community but to kind of change the way in which wealth was distributed... And I don’t necessarily think that that has happened because for several reasons, but because of the people who are interested and the way in which it’s been marketed and the places that are accepting the PLENTY, it’s become a very insulated group and it’s not necessarily going out to people who could use more support and economic wealth or even community building for that matter.

*It's almost duplicating an already existing community with a different layer added to it."* (my emphasis)

This failure to direct attention to the significance of community's ambiguity, to a mode of community without unity, has allowed the PLENTY to flow among a default community and its social and economic geographies which take place regardless of the existence of the PLENTY itself and which can be identified as an elite stratum of the region. This is a failure not only because it is limited in the ways in which community comes to be territorialized through the PLENTY networks, but also because of the insular geographical imaginary of responsibility which it evokes. This insularity is not just insularity of the "local" against the "global", but against particular networks within the "local" itself. It is a failure that produces a mode of community that closes off encounters with strangers both "outside" of and "inside" of the regional place. This despite the potential to reimagine the politics of community by constructing the "local" at the scale of a regional space economy with clear power-geometries inscribed by poverty, inequality, and exclusion.

#### *The Power-Geometries of the Diverse Economy*

One of the axes along which the regional power-geometries lie is on constructions of class. Because the PLENTY complementary currency is a mechanism whereby wealth can be distributed in ways complementary to the dollar economy and it can therefore not simply reinscribe the ways in which the circulation of wealth is crystallized through particular—and exclusionary—socio-spatial relations. Rather, the potential of the PLENTY as a unique community-building device is to deterritorialize lines of stratification—like class—by distributing social surplus differently, along new territorializations of connectivity and relationality. In

the regional space economy within which the PLENTY flows, this means that there is the potential to articulate people into new social and economic relations that are rendered invisible by the dollar economy, especially the dollar economy that has come to be incorporated into the dominant imaginary of the regional as a particular node in global economic relations. While the dominant imaginary produces a particular set of class stratifications (performed alongside and through gendered, racialized, and geographically-rendered notions of mobile identities) which direct money and capital to certain people and not others (as I will show below, the scientists of the region's research park, the beneficiaries of the area's universities, and increasingly, the "creative class"), the PLENTY offers an opportunity to cross those lines of stratification by producing new modes of solidarity through the distribution of social surplus through other relations which meet in this place. This intersection of community and economy has been promoted by growing research on diverse economies as a new form of class politics, one that requires an openness in how places and communities come to be constructed and a geographical imaginary of responsibility that can produce new territorializations of relationality in dynamic ways (Gibson-Graham 2006; Gibson-Graham, Resnick et al. 2001).

Yet, like much of the work on diverse economies that has begun to acknowledge the "reluctance" with which people let go of their familiar territorializations of identity, place, and community in order to achieve these new modes of solidarity, so too have those in the PLENTY initiative been unable to foster new productions of class. Indeed, as will be shown below, part of the failure to articulate an ambiguous notion of community can be seen in very ways in which

PLENTY participants go about distributing their social surplus through the circulation of monetary wealth represented by the PLENTY. Despite the goals of the PLENTY's organizers, the PLENTY has become a tool to keep wealth and social surplus within a small, regionally elite group of people rather than facilitate the ethic of openness that would allow the PLENTY's monetary wealth to represent the wide distribution of social surplus initially hoped for. And this is precisely the opposite of what the PLENTY is supposed to do.

### *Locating Myself in the PLENTY's Relations*

This dissertation tells the story of PLENTY and its politics of community primarily through the words of PLENTY participants themselves. But this is in no way an objective account or one that has pretenses to being a singular, authoritative truth. This story of the PLENTY is also largely my story as an “observant participant” to the unfolding of this complementary currency (Smith, S. 2001; Thrift 2000a). I have been an Advisory Member of the Board of Trustees for four years and have been granted the privilege to attend all the meetings, read all the emails, listen in on all the conversations, and otherwise witness the implementation of the PLENTY in order to conduct my fieldwork. But I am more than an observer of others' participation. I consider this to be a participatory action research project (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Kondrat and Julia 1997) and freely contribute advice, information, and labor to help plan and develop the circulation of the currency through the region. As with the other Board members, I wish that my ideas were taken up more often than they are but as with any collaboration, some ideas are swept aside or compromised to move forward. I openly acknowledge when I think

NCPlenty, Inc. is making miscalculations but I have made a point to keep my opinions about individuals' efforts and participation to myself (or at least to my field notes) as a way to negotiate the relationships within the organization and amongst the broader group of 200 participants. In the course of my research I have learned who feels allied with whom, how the currency often traces and reinforces particular social relationships more than circulate monetary wealth along new vectors, and the utility of social neutrality—lessons that are important when trying to understand the dynamics within any community.

Of course, social neutrality is a performative and negotiated positionality that morphs depending on the context (Fine 1994; Fine, Weis et al. 2000). I don't really like the sound of that term, neutrality, in reference to what I do. I feel uneasy about synonyms like uncommitted, uninvolved, or unbiased. Perhaps nonaligned is closer to what I mean. In a participatory action research project, it also seems dishonest at times to manage myself through mores of social neutrality. I endorse the social justice mission of the organization. My participation shapes public presentations for interested residents in the area, potential institutional partners, and other complementary currency and alternative economy activists. I have collaborated with members of the Board of Trustees to collect data about the project, analyze that data, and present findings to members, practitioners, and the public. When I conduct interviews or talk informally with those who use the PLENTY, I do not hide that I am a member of the Board of Trustees, a supporter of the endeavor, and not a conventional, disinterested social scientist. Aspects of my own social and economic geographies are intertwined with the circulation of PLENTY notes. I buy most of my

groceries at the cooperative store that transacts an average of \$500 worth of PLENTYs a month and helps redistribute some of these PLENTYs to local businesses and farmers through its supply chains. I have been a member of a community supported agriculture program with a farmer who is a registered, if skeptical, participant in the PLENTY network. I first got introduced to NCPlenty, Inc. through a close friend who was then the Treasurer for the group. Even my life partner has derived a (very) small portion of her income in PLENTYs—having served as the Teacher-Director of a cooperative preschool that accepts PLENTYs for partial payment of tuition. I live through the geography of the PLENTY everyday and my connection to the project through my research only highlights this fact. I could never erase this component of what I research and I wouldn't want to do so. It is because of my very lack of social neutrality that I am able to engage in ethnographic methods to conduct my fieldwork.

I still hold onto an ideal of social neutrality when negotiating the relationships that constitute the PLENTY community economy. I try to be as neutral as possible when others express their own meanings, desires, feelings, and justifications for action. I do this because it allows the conversations to continue and allows me to learn more about what those I am working with and alongside think and do. I am not constructing an auto-ethnography and their expressions are important to me. I try to be what Donna Haraway in a different context calls a modest witness (Haraway 1997).

I don't think of this as dishonest. It is similar to the times when a relative and I discuss Wal-Mart and he posits that the company is good because it gives people



jobs that wouldn't otherwise have jobs. "Well, not exactly," I think but don't say out loud because in my silence he continues and I learn more about his understanding of how the world works. Is that all that different than when some respondents to my inquiries about their participation in the PLENTY initiative respond that Wal-Mart is simply an evil corporation and the PLENTY is a way to fight Wal-Mart and its sweatshops in China? "Well, not exactly," I think but don't say out loud. I say I am playing devil's advocate when I ask for explanation or offer a contrary argument. But I let people read themselves into me and therefore let them read themselves to me. This is easier in my current circumstances than in others. Over 95% of the registered PLENTY participants self-identify as white and 90% hold a college degree (both of which hold for me, as well). Many do see themselves in me by just looking at me or reading my university-approved consent-for-participation form. The interpersonal power dynamics do not fall along clear cut—if they ever fall along clear cut—lines of powerful, privileged researcher and powerless, underprivileged researched. Indeed, one of my hopes as a participant is to help the Board diversify the spectrum of PLENTY users and connect this social circuit of wealth to those in the area who are more conventionally described as socially and economically marginal precisely because the ways in which the PLENTY currently serves an elite and how this then reinforces social stratification and moves the endeavor away from its social justice goals. I can do this because of my privileged markings. But I believe I need to do this using the discursive frameworks through which PLENTY users express themselves. By being a modest, curious, and neutral witness. To do that I need to listen carefully, keep all relationships open as potential opportunities for further

learning, and not allow myself to get in the way any more than I already do as someone so implicated in the PLENTY's meshworks. For some, that means I am a comrade in their anti-capitalist struggles. For others, I am a sympathetic ear to the woes of small businesses trying to keep up. I find this mode of neutrality useful when exploring the complicated terrain of community, in which a person can begin a sentence talking about how wonderfully welcoming and community-like their town is, how a complementary currency helps celebrate this openness, and finish the sentence expressing her negative feelings about the recent and rapid increase in the Hispanic population in that town.

It may not be entirely fashionable—and I hope I have conveyed some of the ways in which it is problematic—to talk about neutrality and ethnography, especially given the increased attention to critical ethnography within geography (Hart 2006; Hay 2005; Pryke, Rose et al. 2003). But I believe that it is a strategic positionality from which I'm able to produce knowledge in meaningful and useful ways (and perhaps even serves as one model for enacting a mode of community I wish the PLENTY would help produce). I hope that this dissertation proves to be a useful version of the PLENTY's story and how this complementary currency facilitated people's participation in the politics of community.

## **CHAPTER TWO: COMMUNITY, ECONOMY, REGION: SPACES OF ENCOUNTER**

### *Imagining Community in Economic Geographies*

This dissertation examines the ways in which people are actively using their own privately printed money to build community and create an alternative geography of the region in which they reside. By using money to achieve their goals, these participants in the PLENTY local currency are demonstrating a knowledge that has only recently gained acceptance within research on economic geographies: that money, and economic geographies in general, are interrelated and co-constitutive with social geographies and “non-economic” forces. This very simple assertion has opened up many new horizons of research within the fields of cultural, economic, environmental and urban geography. Much of the work that is being done to understand the dynamic and open relationships between “economic” and “non-economic” forces variously draws its inspiration from the cultural turn in Anglophonic studies of economic geographies within the last 15 years (Barnes 2002a; Thrift and Olds 1996). While some still debate whether or not economic and non-economic facets of social life inform one another, most research takes this relationality for granted and tries to understand how the two realms are conjoined within particular contexts.

Contributions to economic geography have demonstrated the need to account for conventionally “non-economic” factors when explaining and analyzing “economic” phenomena (Barnes 2002a; Clark, Gertler et al. 2000). Drawing upon

developments in anthropology, cultural studies, economic sociology, heterodox economics, and urban studies, as well as their own critiques of political economy, economic geographers have begun to explore the various ways in which economic geographies are always already so much more than economic. Economic geographers (and others) are still creating this hybrid field of cultural and economic geography in order to understand the complex nexus of economic and non-economic geographies within discursive formations and material landscapes. Debates take place over the proper assemblage of “economic” and “non-economic” factors, how to identify and measure each, and how non-economic relations are associated with cultural norms and practices (Amin and Thrift 2000; Gregson, Simonsen et al. 2001; Lee 2002). At times, the excitement to bring in the non-economic has flattened the analytic value of terms not conventionally associated with economic forms, especially the term “culture” (du Gay and Pryke 2002). Increasingly, culture is substituted for the non-economic, obscuring the content of cultural relations within the production of geographies and providing a simplistic (and at times reductionist) rendering of culture (despite Nigel Thrift’s claim that the best cultural geography right now is being done by economic geographers, himself included). Some are quite careful not to forget the lessons of cultural studies and contemporary cultural geographies and attempt to navigate the relationship between economic and non-economic relations delicately (Smith and Bridge 2003; Wright 1999). While debates rage over the appropriate (and value-added) use of the term “culture” vis-à-vis economic geography (see Antipode 2002), some have shifted the terms of the debate away from cultural economies towards community economies.

This semantic shift is most evident in the recent work of J.K. Gibson-Graham (Gibson-Graham 2003a; Gibson-Graham 2003b; Gibson-Graham 2006). Her studies over the last ten years of different forms of community economies have two main foci: that economic practices take on a diversity of forms (of which capitalism is only one and not always the most dominant) (Gibson-Graham 1996), and that economic practices take place through the social structures of community (and at the same time, produce those community forms)(Gibson, Cameron et al. 1999; Graham, Healey et al. 2002). Her work has directed attention to economic geographies that have conventionally been associated with expressions of community (i.e. cooperative industrial geographies in the Modragon region of Spain or localized, asset-based community development activities for unemployed residents of formerly industrial towns). This work indicates that community economies may refer to a much broader spectrum of activities and economic practices across a wider set of scales (Gibson-Graham 2006). Indeed, Gibson-Graham indicates that capitalism itself can be understood as a specific set of community economic practices rather than a globally integrated system in which places are either incorporated or excluded (Gibson-Graham 1996). In this way, Gibson-Graham opens up new ways to understand the relationship between the “economic” and the “non-economic” in economic geographies: rather than try to find the proper assemblage between cultural practices and economic activities, the processes of community can be highlighted to understand the ways in which economic geographies come to be articulated as well as how they become out of joint (both discursively and materially).

Of course, the connection between community and economics has a long history and weaves a thread between colonial and postcolonial anthropology, political economy, urban studies, and the “new” economic geography that is taking shape after its cultural turn. From Marx’s hopes for antagonist class actors to be produced from the very machinery of industrial capitalism that bears them as wage laborers (Marx 1990), through the Chicago School’s human ecologies that attempted to map the location and organization of communities within the industrial city (Berry 2001; Park, Burgess et al. 1925), to the “non-economic” forces that make firms embedded in places and causes the ever slippery capitalism to get stuck some places and not others (Markusen 1996), community and economy have been articulated in various analyses. But what appears to be new in the various forms of the “new” economic geography—and what appears as striking in Gibson-Graham’s work—is the way in which community and economy are articulated as a nexus of integrated and overlapping geographical processes that produce one another rather than act as separate realms of social life that either impact or are impacted by each other in a mechanical, cause-and-effect pattern.

For this analysis of the PLENTY community economy in central North Carolina, Gibson-Graham’s theoretical pursuits and related explanations are most useful to try to understand how community and economic geographies are co-produced and how they draw upon as well as alter the sedimented geographies of place in the region. But Gibson-Graham’s investigations into community economies are just one way to render this relationality (and certainly not the dominant one in the field). Three realms of inquiry into economic geographies can be identified that seek

to explain the relationship between economic and non-economic forces. Extending Gibson-Graham's insights, each of these three realms (including the realm of inquiry within which Gibson-Graham works) can be read as moments in the on-going development of geographies of community economies.

*Three Moments of Community Economies in Professional Geography, First Moment: Regional Geographies, Community Economies*

There are three main arenas of inquiry in which economic geographers (and others) are investigating this overlap between the economic and the cultural/non-economic forms. Each of these three can be understood as different ways to render community economies. Interestingly enough, the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*—the flagship journal of Anglophonic geography—published three articles back to back to back in December 2002 that represent these three research directions. The first article to appear in that issue is Richard Florida's "The Economic Geography of Talent" (Florida 2002b). This piece follows up from Florida's longstanding engagement with non-economic forces in the production of competitive regional economies (Florida 2002a; Florida 2002c). Florida remains within the paradigm of industrial geography (and even what is emerging as the "new" industrial geography (Barnes and Gertler 1999)) by directing attention to the political economy of place within an international circuit of capital and industrial location possibilities. But even within this paradigm, Florida's focus is on the non-economic—indeed, community—factors that can shape regional economies.

Florida's work—especially his examinations of the "creative class"—shifts the focus of the dominant paradigm with industrial geography and argues that firm location is less significant for regional competitiveness than worker location (Florida

2002c). This argument is a far cry from what can be considered labor geography (as is the case for the work of geographers like, Jane Wills, Jamie Peck or Andrew Herod (Hale and Wills 2005; Herod 1998; Herod 2001; Peck 1996; Peck 2002; Wills 1998)). What Florida posits is that regional economies need to attract a particular class of workers—the creative class—who are post-industrial, highly educated, cosmopolitan, and above all, mobile by choice (both in terms of where they live and where they work). The particular mobility of members of the creative class means that they can move with ease around the world—much like capital itself. Just as regions compete to attract capital, regions must compete to attract the creative class. But this class is not the *lumpenproletariat* of the industrial era that is at the mercy of capital. Rather, the creative class can create capital through entrepreneurialism and its high degree of talent. According to Florida, regions that can attract the most members of the creative class (at least for a short time) are regions that will gain capital investment. Therefore, regional economic development requires a shift from the tax incentives and legal maneuvering that attract firms towards the place-marketing that attracts the talented creative class.

The type of place-marketing that Florida espouses is one that highlights an area's cultural amenities in order to produce the community geographies that allow members of the creative class to feel at home. Florida and others have developed various indexes to measure a place's openness to the creative class. Such measures direct attention away from political economic structures towards indicators of “coolness” like nightclubs, ethnic restaurants, outdoor recreation, diversity of population, and a general sense of open-mindedness (Florida 2002b). Underpinning



this position is the belief that the real work of economic geography is forged through these spaces of cultural consumption. Here, information is shared through informal networks, new ideas get crafted, and solidarities (both business and personal) are forged. The cool spaces of cultural consumption become places of community in which the community of the creative class is fostered. This production of community creates a network of strong and weak ties that embed economic activities within the region that contains the highest degree of coolness. Regional economies, Florida argues, live and die by their ability to cultivate the production of community among the creative class (Peck 2005).

Florida's *Annals* article extends his work on the creative class to focus on one of its characteristics: talent. Florida sets out to create an index to measure the correlation between the location of talent and the location of high-technology firms (which for Florida represent the dominant form of the firm in the globalized, post-industrial economy). In this article, he posits that diversity—what he terms “low entry barriers for talent” because he assumes that the location of a diverse population correlates to a welcoming place for that diverse population—is a driving factor in bringing talent to an area. “Regions that are open to diversity are thus able to attract a wider range of talent by nationality, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation than are those that are relatively closed” (Florida 2002b, p. 745). Using several measures, including a “gay index”, Florida finds that the classic assumptions of industrial geography are reversed. He argues that:

“firms in knowledge-based industries are less concerned with traditional factors, such as land costs, labor costs, tax rates, or government incentives. Such firms report that they orient their location decisions to attract and retain talent. Places with large available talent-pools reduce the costs associated with search and recruitment of talent.” (Florida 2002b, p. 751)

Taking conventional industrial geography head on, Florida goes on to conclude that “a more efficacious approach to regional development may be to emphasize policies and programs to attract human capital, as opposed to conventional approaches that focus on the attraction of firms and the formation of industrial clusters” (Florida 2002b, p. 754). The policies he recommends are those that support the “cultural” needs of the creative class and produce spaces to make that class feel at home.

While Florida’s work is not entirely representative of the wide scope of contemporary industrial geography that tries to explain firm locations, regional clusters, and non-economic forms of comparative advantage, his research program demonstrates a strong trend in how economic geographers articulate the economic and the non-economic through the geographies of community. For Florida, this requires a host of assumptions about diversity, place-based social geographies, and social inclusion (often which appear to be inclusion in the local geographies of consumption). For others who are more aligned with economic sociologists like Granovetter (Granovetter 1983), the production of community emerges in the networks of social spaces both within and outside a firm’s boundaries (Saxenian 1994). This remains important for geographers of the economic because this allows information to flow freely through the conduits of exchange created by community. What Florida’s article represents, then, is how regional economies and industrial economic geography have begun to stress the intersection of community and economy. In other words, the location of firms has something to do with the creation

of a mode of community economy (but only for a certain group of people who display the proper talent, and therefore, the right culture and community).

*Second Moment: Diverse Economies of Community*

Immediately following Florida's article on talent and the creative class in the same issue of the *Annals* is another take on community economies. Tad Mutersbaugh's research on cooperative economic development in Oaxaca, Mexico demonstrates the intersection of community and economic practice within the familiar terrain of alternative economic development schemes at the local scale (Mutersbaugh 2002a). Mutersbaugh's contribution focuses on "cooperative spatial strategies" (Mutersbaugh 2002a, p. 756). His goal is to explain how cooperation is produced through space. What is striking about the economic geographies Mutersbaugh describes is less their existence and more his ability to take their existence for granted as economic geographies. While geographies of agrarian life have often examined various processes of economic activities that draw upon cooperation, communal benefit, and cultural form, many of these works frame the intersection of cooperation and economic practice as a primitive economy or a pre-capitalist (and therefore primarily social, not economic) structure (Escobar 2001). Cooperation is seen as a survival mechanism for those not yet incorporated into (or still on the peripheral end of) a world capitalist system. Mutersbaugh critiques development practices that fail to see cooperation as simultaneously capitalist and non-capitalist, economic and non-economic, and not something that simply exists outside of the real economic geographies of global capital. Yet Mutersbaugh does not need to spend too much time arguing the point that cooperation (and the social geographies of community that

produce and are produced by cooperation) is a mode of economic practice and a factor in economic geographies. His very ability to make inquiries about how (not if) cooperation articulates economic and social geographies and the forms of community that emerge from this process indicates that economic geographers investigating local development practices can already assume the existence of certain community economies of cooperation and heterodox economic practices.

In many respects, the trajectory that Mutersbaugh's inquiries extend have been put into place through various research programs that have sought to understand the diverse set of capitalist and non-capitalist practices that make up the economy. Such work has demonstrated that the geographies and histories reflected in economic practices complicate any single definition of the economy (Lee, Leyshon et al. 2004a). In large part, this work has helped produce the cultural turn as a response to the limits of a more orthodox Marxian political economy that had been dominating economic geographical inquiry since the mid-1970s. This body of research primarily critically reevaluates five interrelated concepts within the tradition of economic geography: capitalism, class, labor, money, and value.

Capitalism had been the primary object of study within economic geography (and in large part maintains this dominant position) and the discipline's main taken-for-granted. The work of David Harvey and others (including Richard Walker, Richard Peet, Allen Scott, and Ray Hudson) offered intricate interpretations of capitalism's role in the production (and destruction) of space (Harvey 1989; Harvey 1999; Hudson 2001; Peet 1991; Scott 1998; Scott 2001; Walker 1989; Walker 1990). These Marxian economic geographies explore the specific (if sometimes abstracted)

dialectical geographies of capitalism in order to then develop alternative, non-capitalist geographies (Merrifield 2002). Yet the second component of their project has been often left unrealized. Their research sets out to fill the empty boxes of Marxian political economy's critique of capital more so than render non-capitalist practices visible in the landscape. While such work highlights the contradictions within capitalism, the contradictions within their own work to pursue non-capitalist geographies becomes apparent: the deeper the analysis of capitalism's singular political economy, the more starkly black-boxed capitalism becomes as the set of governing practices that shape economic geographies. Even when seemingly non-capitalist or non-economic topics have been addressed (like cultural consumption in the city), such topics are examined through the paradigm of critical political economy to underscore the commodity form, labor practices, and uneven development structures implicit within them (Peet 1997; Scott 2000; Smith 1996; Zukin 1982).

As the analysis of capitalism began to cloud the ability to examine a diverse set of economic forms, several economic geographers turned to new approaches to be able to see both capitalist and non-capitalist geographies. Contributions from Roger Lee, Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson (individually and jointly as J.K. Gibson-Graham), Ash Amin, Trevor Barnes, Nigel Thrift and others looked beyond an orthodox Marxian framework to critically question the hegemony of Marxian political economy in the discipline and the way in which economic geographers had been taking capitalism for granted (Amin, Cameron et al. 2002; Barnes 2002b; Gibson-Graham 1996; Lee 2002; Leyshon, Lee et al. 2003). This movement paralleled (and intersected) similar developments within anthropology, cultural studies, and

sociology that looked increasingly to the role of discourse, representation, and the micropolitics of power relations to explain economic forms (Barnes and Curry 1992; Gibson 2001; Gibson-Graham 2002; Mitchell 1998).

Most directly, J.K. Gibson-Graham's landmark book *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It)* provided a strong critique of "capitalocentrism" (Gibson-Graham 1996). She argues that debates about economic development remain bound to an "economism" which ties social, political, and cultural life to economic processes.<sup>3</sup> Economism is a discourse that functions through a binary dividing what is "economic" and what is "non-economic." The economic is valued as the dominant signifier and provides the non-economic with meaning. In a classic deconstructive move, J.K. Gibson-Graham points to the ways in which "economic" and "non-economic" are not pure terms with essential meanings, but empty points along a chain of signification that are filled with socially constructed meanings. In doing so, she notes how the economic and the non-economic are mutually constitutive terms that structure a specific way of seeing. This way of seeing—economism—has become dominant through the contemporary social formation and its technologies of power: the rise of capitalism, scientism and quantification, knowledge production and expertise, and binary, "phallogentric" logics. Furthermore, this economism has veiled the significance of place and community in shaping the relations that underpin any social formation, including economic practices.

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<sup>3</sup> While the terms "capitalocentrism" and "economism" are not necessarily synonymous, in much of Gibson-Graham's work there is a tendency to conflate the two terms.

In deconstructing this economism, J.K. Gibson-Graham advocates for political economic studies of what has been rendered “non-economic”: cooperative businesses, feudal relations, and non-market exchanges such as gift-giving. This is precisely what Mutersbaugh provides. These economic forms are not only differently economic, but also potentially materialize a different economic geography through a more explicit relationship with place and community. By making this move, J.K. Gibson-Graham pursues a political economy that accounts for the diverse economies in social life as its political strategy rather than simply clamor for the destruction of capitalism in favor of socialism. But J.K. Gibson-Graham is not alone in her pursuits. Indeed, her work is often situated as one aspect of the “new” economic geography.<sup>4</sup> This “new” economic geography emerged in the mid-1990s with growing dissatisfaction towards the explanatory power of both positivistic and Marxian economic-geographical theory (Barnes and Sheppard 2000). While this “new” economic geography is still concerned with production, circulation, and exchange (Lee 1997), the sub-field has turned attention to the importance of place in economies, cultural aspects of economics, the multiplicity of capitalisms in transition, and has allowed qualitative methods to be used to conduct economic geography research (Amin and Thrift 2000; Lee 2002; The Community Economics Collective 2001; Thrift and Olds 1996). In part, this “new” economic geography is necessitated by the shifts in state regulation of economic activity and the growing concern over the

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<sup>4</sup> Another (and at times antagonistic) form of the “new” economic geography is the recent disciplinary marriage of economics and geography through the work of Paul Krugman, Gordon Clark, and others. At times, this work offers a revival of location analysis and the mathematical models of Christaller. Other trends that are less driven by economists discovering geography to explain industrial clustering can be found in the interdisciplinary journal *Journal of Economic Geography* (recently founded as an alternative to the journal *Economic Geography*)

informal sector as an important site of social reproduction and point of intervention in economic development by both policy makers and community development proponents (Pastor, Dreier et al. 2000; Seyfang 2002). Moreover, changes in the organization of capitalism in the “post-Fordist” era have made the complexity and diversity within capitalist processes evident and have revealed the ways in which capitalist processes rely on both “cultural” and “non-economic” forces, even those thought to be directly in conflict with the expansion of capital relations (Amin 1994; Pacione 1998; Zukin 1997).<sup>5</sup>

What this line of research has opened up, then, is a way to address the diverse set of economic (and social) geographies that produce and get produced through the circulation of capital as more than just those of capitalism. In some respects, Gibson-Graham takes capitalism out of its abstract political economy framework and identifies capitalism in a pure state of practice; capitalism is the specific intersection of wage-labor relations and the private distribution of goods and services through privately-controlled markets that puts the allocation of surplus value under individual control in a specific historico-geographic social formation. She argues, for example, that a state intervention in economic practices is neither clearly categorized as capitalist nor socialist, but some other form of state-managed economic practice that must be understood in its specific context, in direct contrast to the abstract political

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<sup>5</sup> An example of this in the United States with direct bearing on the community development field is Putnam’s reworking of social capital theory (Putnam 1993; Putnam 2000). Social capital theory, in brief, argues that economic development is necessarily preceded by social development. This social development is the creation and bolstering of social bonds (made of trust and common values) within and external to a social group’s network of relations. This has been taken up by many community development practitioners to focus development activities on community building. Social capital is considered as important—if not more so—than financial capital, because social capital is the collective set of knowledge that allows individuals to access financial capital (or, as some in the LETS business posit, allows people to live without financial capital in dollar-scarce areas).



economy of regulation theory (Gibson-Graham 2006). Furthermore, the variety of ways that firms can be organized, labor value extracted, markets managed, goods and services distributed, and surplus value collected and reallocated demonstrates that capitalism morphs into various forms. Single location, family-owned firms extract capital from labor and redistribute the surplus value differently than publicly owned multinational firms do. Each uses a different combination of economic and non-economic practices to achieve those processes. What helps underscore (and allows us to understand) the difference is how such economic practices are inscribed into social geographies of place (Gibson-Graham 2003b; Harcourt, Escobar et al. 2001).

By pursuing a more humble theory of capital and capitalism (and one that is less abstracted from the discursive practices of everyday life than the C-M-C' models of Marxian political economy), Gibson-Graham offers an alternative way to understand the relations of power within economic relations. Class has been the primary category used to codify these relations within political economic analysis. But Gibson-Graham and others have argued that class needs the same deconstructive treatment that they have subjected to capitalism (Gibson-Graham, Resnick et al. 2001). Indeed, if capitalism cannot be defined outside of the particular historical and geographical specificity that Gibson-Graham posit, then class relations lose their objective form. Class analysis, therefore, requires a specific (and often thick) description of the particular and diverse set of economic practices that a group of economic actors may experience in everyday life. Classes are produced through economic practices, but the production of classes are contingent, performative, and temporary. In simple terms, an individual is not classed through one's position vis-à-

vis the ownership of capital or because one has value extracted through one's labor. Rather, an individual moves through different (and relatively unstable) class positions through everyday experiences and can simultaneously exist in multiple classes at once (Gibson 2001). The binding force of class is not the common experience of having one's labor value controlled by another as in more orthodox political economic explanations. What ties different class positions together is the specific way in which labor is exploited (Gibson-Graham 1996). In this way, the extraction of value through waged work, volunteer work, and self-employment are quite different and lead to a diverse range of class positions. Furthermore, an individual can move through these practices of exploitation throughout one's everyday life.

In positing class in this way, the intersection between community and economy is further strengthened. In part, the form of this articulation takes on greater significance because class positions and relations are not limited to the work place but cover a wider set of social relations. Certain geographies outside the firm or factory floor that had often been ignored by conventional class analysis within economic geography become key sites of class production, such as the household or public spaces (Cravey 1997; Domosh 1996; Massey, Allen et al. 1999; McDowell 1997). As geographies of class move outside workplaces (and work itself is understood as something that has a diverse set of locations and spatial configurations) class geographies blend with community geographies (Bondi 1998; Rose 1990; Ruddick 1996). The production of community is therefore in part a production of class (and vice-versa). One cannot understand these dynamics with the abstract models of political economy that assume particular classes battling for control over capital.

Rather, one needs a detailed analysis of the specificity of class relations to understand both the production of class and the production of community and the relations of power that circulate through these positionalities .

Mutersbaugh's work offers such an analysis and treats the power relations within the cooperative sector in contemporary Oaxaca as a system of social relations that has been produced as area residents work out who controls the built environment and the circulation of social surplus that built environment helps facilitate. Rather than see the set of power relations in a fixed structure of those who have power and those who do not according to objective relations vis-à-vis the ownership of capital, he examines the discursive and material activities that allow for the production of power by various actors. Power in this reading is not an objective set of relations and the associated control over strategic resources (like capital), but a relational force that can crystallize or modify the system of social relations. In Mutersbaugh's economic geography of the cooperative firm, class is a complex nexus of relations that both joins people together and pushes people apart through discourses of cooperation and competition (Mutersbaugh 2002b). There is no clear dominant class, only class performatives that are possible because of the dynamics between community and economic geographies in that place.

Opening up both capital and class also requires a revision of how labor is defined, particularly as labor is the hinge upon which economic geographies come to be created and populated. There remains a strong tradition within economic geography that investigates the labor processes of industrial relations, shifting geographies of production, and changes in state welfare structures towards workfare

programs that have significant ramifications upon how certain forms of labor get remunerated and how the underemployed are interpellated into neoliberalist governance strategies as the reserve army of labor for privatized services (Herod 2001; Mitchell 1996; Peck 1996). Increasingly, however, the definitions of labor and how social surplus is derived from labor power are coming to be revised. In part, these developments extend feminist geographies that underscore the relationship between the feminization of poverty, household production, social reproduction, the growth of women in the workforce, and gender performatives within work. Such geographies complicate an easy division between work and home (or work and community) and precise identification of where work takes place and where the social reproduction of labor takes place. Both processes occur within and without definitive workplaces (Gibson-Graham 1996). Furthermore, the recognition that informal economic practices supplement household incomes—especially for those on the fringes of the formal economy—points to the variety of geographies that intersect labor processes. Additionally, the growing attention to immaterial labor practices across a variety of types of work highlight the social relations that produce and are produced by labor (Hardt and Negri 2004) (ranging from the discursive work done by leaders of a producer co-op in Oaxaca to convince members and non-members of the value of cooperative production to the personality training required of customer service workers in IT firms in Bangalore, India who field phone calls from U.S customers and must be able to perform a generic “American” identity). Geographers and others have paid much more care in how work is defined and that has lead to

more diverse labor processes being recognized as part of the production of economic geographies (Lee 1997; Smith 2002).

Part of this theoretical expansion draws upon research into geographies of consumption (Zukin 1990). Labor relations have conventionally been treated within a productivist framework—the production side of the economic geographies have been stressed. But production is just one moment within a circuit that also includes consumption (as some of the research with global commodity chains demonstrates quite clearly (Gereffi 1994)). Research that takes the diversity of capital and class seriously also treats production and consumption as intersecting ways to define and organize labor. Mutersbaugh's work on production cooperatives extends this lesson into an empirical case study as he investigates the way in which the labor done within the cooperative structure intersects social and economic geographies within and beyond a discrete workplace (and how that challenges class relations):

“This ‘co-op class’ is distinct, as we shall see, from existing class positions of villager or householder and from state-mediated *caciquista* (patronage networks) in that it requires its members to work, make use of village resources, engage village social space, and participate in extralocal networks that are quite distinct.”  
(Mutersbaugh 2002a, p. 759)

Labor is still considered to be a source of capital, but a diverse range of labor practices are considered in relation in the creation of a diverse range of capital forms. Different types of labor contribute to the creation of cultural capital, financial capital, social capital, or symbolic capital and each of these intersecting processes emerges within a range of geographic forms. As noted above, some of these developments stem from conceptual advancements that broaden the geographical imaginary of labor processes. But this expansion in thought has always followed the material changes in labor relations and the growth of new global commodity chains, international

divisions of labor, international labor organizing, and the multiple ways in which economic geographies of labor intersect place. By drawing attention to both the openness of labor processes themselves as well as the context-specific ways in which social and economic geographies articulate to produce what can be considered community economies, a growing number of economic geographies highlight the diverse ways labor must be treated to gain a full understanding of how labor contributes to the economy (Amin, Cameron et al. 2002; Gibson 2001; Gibson-Graham 2006; Williams, Aldridge et al. 2001). While some have expressed concern over this perspective (and argue that such a diversity weakens our conceptual tools to understand and critique the exploitation of laborers (Harvey 1996; Watts 2003a; Watts 2003b)), those working through these open conceptions of labor have been able to render a diverse set of labor geographies that could not be seen when labor is limited to the discrete spaces of capitalist workplaces.

Related to the projects to rethink capital, class, and labor within economic geographies are the efforts to expand the concept of money. Conventionally, money has been considered a universalizing signifier of value that allows for the wide spatial flow of capital and contributes to the mobility of capitalist relations and the attendant uneven developments in the landscape (Leyshon 1995). David Harvey's work that connected urban development and the spatialized fixes to capitalism's inherent crises and contradictions to the role of money in facilitating capitalism served for many years as the main contribution of the economic geographies of money (Harvey 1999; Leyshon 2004). Much of this work draws attention to the role of money as an alienating force because of its power of abstraction and its ability to universalize

value (Marx 1990; Simmel 2004; Wiseley 1977; Zelizer 1994). But such a theoretical position does little to explain the multiple ways in which people use money or the ways in which money fails to produce a universal system of value across smooth economic spaces (Boyle 1999; Greco 2001; Hutchinson, Mello et al. 2002; Leyshon 1997; Lietaer 2001; Zelizer 1994). Within the last decade, the same movements within the discipline that allow Mutersbaugh to engage with cooperativist processes as economic geographies began to address the multiple ways in which money produced economic geographies. Following the growing interest in the intersection of economic and non-economic forces in the creation of economic geographies, research on the geography of money has taken several directions (Leyshon 1995; Leyshon 1996b; Leyshon 1998). In part, these developments were driven by the need to explain the intersection of finance capital with international information networks that circulated wealth and produced urban space in particular ways (Corbridge, Thrift et al. 1994; Graham and Marvin 2001; Leyshon and Thrift 1997). Such a response recognizes the new monies being produced through futures markets, the deregulation of international currency exchanges, derivatives and the new spaces of commerce needed to make such money function.

Leyshon, Thrift, and Tickell served as pioneers in the study of these new geographies of money and the creation of international money spaces (Leyshon 1996a; Leyshon, Thrift et al. 1998; Leyshon and Tickell 1994; Tickell 1996). Their work variously shows the ways in which social networks facilitate the creation and circulation of money by drawing attention to the role of trust in both economic relations and money itself (Thrift 2000b). Money can only work as a currency if

people believe in its value. Work must be done in order to produce and sustain the belief in money and the ways in which trust gets built can have dramatic impact on both the success or failure of money and the social landscapes within which that money circulates. Studies on the financial sector in the City of London have demonstrated this relationship between the production of space and the production of trust through money (Tickell 2001; Tickell 2002). Related work has clarified how the spatial fixes of capital are not only productions of economic space, but constitutive of specific social geographies as well (McDowell 1994).

Other geographies of money have drawn attention to the historical and geographical specificity in which national currency systems emerged to investigate geographies of money at the sub-national and trans-national scales. Gilbert's research on the production of Canadian money focuses on money's role in creating an imaginary national community because of its ability to move across space (Gilbert 1999). The implementation and stabilization of a national currency not only enrolled new spaces into the nation (and contributed to producing new forms of community) but also required people to stop using (or believing in the value) of other, non-national currencies and systems of exchange. Some of the politics to manufacture a cooperative economic system that flow through Mutersbaugh's case study tie into the ways in which contemporary forms of non-national currencies systems offer alternative economic and geographic logics to the articulation of identity, meaning, and space that are contained both discursively and materially within national currencies (Williams, Aldridge et al. 2003). Some non-national currencies, like the Euro, offer a post-national geography of transnational solidarity that creates larger



spaces of trade relations and symbolic community (Verdun 1999). Other non-national currencies, like the PLENTY, attempt to localize a portion of the economic geographies of a place and use the exchange of a local money to support a system of social relations within a particular place (while simultaneously seeking to shift the form of the extralocal geographies that produce that place) (Lepofsky and Bates 2005; Raddon 2002; Swann and Witt 1995; Thorne 1996; Williams 1997).

Informing the research on the diversity of money is the argument that money can represent a diverse set of values (Lietaer 2001). Traditionally, value within economic geographies has been treated as a phenomenon with a singular characteristic: the abstract value of commodity form that can be translated across space and time through the universalizing logic of capital. Increasingly research is demonstrating that this is but one way in which money and economic relations function to express value (Gibson-Graham 2003b). Indeed, Mutersbaugh's research points to the various ways in which cooperatively produced goods and services maintain a different social and economic value within the Oaxacan village than competitively produced ones.

Of course, there is a diverse range of theories as to how economic value is derived. Money is more and more recognized as an empty signifier that can be filled with a variety of meanings and can be used to express multiple values. Indeed, much of the international complementary currency movement has pursued various types of money that represent value in ways other than what national currencies provide. One example is the Time Dollars system (Boyle 1999; Cahn 2001). Invented in the early 1980s by a lawyer in Washington, D.C., Time Dollars function as a mutual credit

system in which participants can gain credits or debits by providing services to other participants. The value of the credits, or Time Dollars, is derived from the time and labor of the participants. In order to have a system of social equity and high levels of economic inclusion (in large part to attract those at the margins of the formal economy), participants coordinate Time Dollars schemes in a way that values the services of all participants equally regardless of the type of service provided. Units of Time Dollars are measured in hours, so a doctor's hour is worth the same as a housekeeper's hour. The economic value is not set by market forces of supply and demand, but rather from a collective agreement regarding the value of time spent providing service in general.

In both the work described by Mutersbaugh and in aspects of the international complementary currencies movement, stress is placed in the intersection of social value and economic value in the production and maintenance of economic geographies (Lee 1996; Lee, Leyshon et al. 2004a). Much of this is done purposefully as a way to reject the totalizing discourse of value within "neoliberal" ideologies that privilege a certain form of market relations and economistic logic. Value in this case refers both to the economic value of goods and services (as determined by labor power or market conditions) but also the ways in which economic values come to be defined in relation to a dynamic set of values pursued by a group of people. Geographers have investigated the ways in which local currencies like LETS programs in the UK can be considered "moral money" and a framework to introduce alternative expressions of value across economic and social relations (Lee 1996; North 2004; North 2007; North and Bruegel 2001). While many of the

researchers remain skeptical of the impact of these different expressions of value (in part due to the limited scope of the initiatives), such work and associated research like Mutersbaugh's reveals that economic geographies are striated with multiple and contradictory expressions of value—not a single totalizing logic—something that is evident within the PLENTY community economy. Indeed, what is becoming clear is that all money and all forms of economic practices express and attempt to stabilize normative values through space and are therefore types of “moral money” (Thrift and Leyshon 1999). Current research, including this dissertation, is now questioning how the rhetorical assertions of value within these experiments relate to a new set of ethical and community relations within the community economy (Gibson-Graham 2006).

Mutersbaugh's article points to the significant growth of research on community economies within the burgeoning literature on diverse economies. The body of research associated with his research program rethinks the key concepts of capital, class, labor, money, and value within economic geographies in order to understand how these concepts come to be rearticulated through geographies of community economies. But neither this work nor the industrial geographies that Florida's research speaks to directly address the expression of community within community economies. The exploration into diverse economic forms helps question the organization of community that can be articulated with economic geographies, but much of this work suffers from a weak analysis of community and is focused simply on the raw production of community within the economy, not necessarily on what form that production actually takes. In part, this conceptual flaw is related to the

ways in which community remains taken for granted as an organization of social relations that binds people to one another. But community itself is coming under scrutiny from geographers and others, especially within the various works on community economies. The final of the three *Annals* pieces speaks to this set of debates and the tensions that have emerged over the organization of community within community economies.

*Third Moment: Communities within Community Economies*

Li et al's article "Chinese-American Banking and Community Development in Los Angeles County" (Li, Dymski et al. 2002) follows Mutersbaugh's study of co-ops in Oaxaca and represents a third way to render community economies, one that is more directly focused on the production of community through economic relations. This article presents findings on the ethnic Chinese banking industry in L.A. and how ethnic banks shape the residential and community geographies of those who use their services. The banks act as an economic device to help constitute a particular community form. In the case of this particular study, the community is organized through the social relations of language and ethnicity in a large urban area and is produced in the form of multiple ethnic enclaves.

While the tradition of research on ethnic enclaves within urban areas is strong both within and outside of geography, this wide ranging body of literature suffers from two significant limitations that are just now being addressed. The first limitation is the ways in which the social geographies of community had been articulated, if at all, to the economic geographies within which those communities take place. Much work has explored the development of racial ghettos and ethnic

enclaves as communities within the city and the importance of these enclaves in structuring labor market conditions for recent migrants and for development an “ethnic queue” into the broader urban labor market (Lin 1995; Massey and Denton 1993; Waldinger 1996; Wilson 1987). Most of these analyses have read the community geographies as reacting to external (mainly economic) geographies and have provided limited knowledge of the dynamic interface between the community geographies of ethnic enclaves and the economic geographies that make those enclaves always already trans-local. Part of this limitation stems from the traditions within U.S. urban anthropology, sociology, urban geography and the community development field to render community both as a collection of individuals having in common *a priori* a tie of blood or belonging and as the dense intersection of these community ties in a discrete place (Allen, Massey et al. 1999; Dear and Dishman 2001). Classic studies on Italian-American neighborhoods, Jewish enclaves, African-American areas, and Chinatowns highlight the boundedness of these ethnic ties as a priori community ties as well as their finite location in the city (Anderson, E. 1990; Gans 1982; Kwong 1996; Levine and Harmon 1992; Medoff and Sklar 1994). But these areas emerged only through a set of transnational geographies that intensified the movement and location of particular people from one place to another. All ethnic enclaves are always already translocal (Smith, M. P. 2001). This is becoming more clearly appreciated in urban research as the structure of ethnic enclaves extends into suburbs and becomes polycentric (Dear and Dishman 2001). Li et al point to these directions in their study of Los Angeles and the way in which they use the flows of capital to map the geographies of community offers one way to visualize the multiple

geographies within any given ethnic enclave. Others have pursued research on transnational urbanism through translocal ethnographies that follow the movements of people across space and through community (Burawoy, Blum et al. 2000; Fink 2003).

The geography of networks that structure such enclaves are not only unraveling within our growing knowledge of community geographies. The very articulation of community as a social structure has been reconsidered throughout the tradition of Anglophonic cultural studies and is now getting greater attention as a concept that needs reconsideration. Without disregarding its nationalistic and ethnocentric expressions in politics, community is less evident as an essentially binding force that relates people to one another (Bell 1999). Rather, community is more clearly understood as a temporary ordering of social relationships across space that gain and loose intensity within particular contexts (Amin and Thrift 2002; Lepofsky 2003; Massey, Allen et al. 1999; Sandercock 1998).

Community is not an unproblematic term, and geographers have contributed to the debates stemming from cultural studies and philosophy about how community becomes a form of power in various ways (Herbert 2006; Martin 2000; Rose 1990; Rose 1997). Community can variously become the networks of trust and social support that social capital proponents hope for (Williamson, Imbroscio et al. 2002) as well as a technique of exclusion and conservative politics (Joseph 2002). The notion of a stable community that can be easily identified and attributed to social groups based on common demographic measures or points of interest has been in question for some time (Lepofsky and Fraser 2003) but recent debates have struggled to

articulate how community is rendered in the contemporary conjuncture (Agamben 1993; Bauman 2001; Corlett 1989; Hardt and Negri 2001; Irigaray 2001; Lingis 1994; The Miami Theory Collective 1991). Though much debate is still unfolding over how to conceptualize contemporary community, many contributors agree that the classic distinction between “society” and “community” (the former as the changing, abstract relations of the alienating, capitalist economy and the latter as the lasting, intimate relations of traditional, essential identities) does not appear to make sense (Brint 2001).

Jean-Luc Nancy remains a key figure in debates about community (though rarely engaged with by geographers). While a philosopher, Nancy’s work has tapped into the research trends across the humanities and social sciences which seek to understand how community takes place within a world that has intensifying transnational networks, transcultural identities, and moral geographies that do not depend on proximity as the key organizing factor. In a series of writings that cut across deconstructive literary analysis and Marxian materialism, Nancy directs attention to how community is worked to structure social life. By drawing attention to the work that occurs when a community forms and stabilizes, Nancy not only provides a crucial non-essentialist reading of community that can incorporate the fragile balance between fixity and flow in how many people experience identity and relations to place, but also focuses on how community is a purposeful act. By reckoning community a verb more so than a noun (though also keeping in mind the significant ways in which community works as a noun in social life as either a fact or value), Nancy points out how any organization of community is an act of power.

This is not necessarily destructive power—indeed, Nancy draws from the Foucauldian tradition of reading power as a productive force (with varying “positive” or “negative” outcomes for the subjects of this force) that produces subjects.

Nancy does not simply deconstruct nor does he provide a genealogy of community. Rather, his central goal is to understand how community takes place. In examining this question, he uncovers the work (and the value) of community—what he terms the operative community. Against this work of community (which Nancy sees at the root of Nazi Germany’s holocaust, the genocides of contemporary Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, and the rise of nationalist politics across the world)<sup>6</sup> he advocates for “inoperative community”—community that remains an unfinished work of subjectivation and open to the shifts in how people encounter social life (Nancy 1991). By looking for a space of community that emerges somewhere else that through the logics of communitarianism or liberalism, Nancy uses various metaphors to address his imaginary of community: compearance, co-ipseity, *mélee* (Nancy 1991; Nancy 2000). Nancy’s work—and the associated literature addressing this need to rethink community in more “open” ways—allows one to critically examine such explicit community-building initiatives such as the PLENTY and engage these efforts (and the people within them) as works in progress that need to delicately define meanings, carefully enact operationalizations of community, and strategically produce community subjects.

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<sup>6</sup> “In Nancy’s terms, people like Milosevic seek to put community ‘to work’” (Norris 2000, p. 257).



Nancy's work and the debates surrounding his contributions have asked more questions than they have answered. Though few geographers or others working within community development or on community economies have yet to deal directly with his work, the influence of similar themes is apparent in recent critical renditions of space and place. Massey's interventions to render the city as a temporary "meeting place" (Massey, Allen et al. 1999) or as a system of social relations (Massey 1999) offers one example of how community is coming to be understood in nuanced ways that do not simply locate the phenomenon as an actually existing event that pre-exists history and geography. Others have attempted to bring non-essentialist readings of social spaces into urban and regional studies and reckon community, place, and the city as temporary works that need critical attention (Amin and Thrift 2002; Donald 1999; Healey 2002). This study on the PLENTY contributes to this growing body of literature while providing greater depth to the analysis than some of what has been put forth to date (see especially Amin and Thrift 2002; Gibson-Graham 2003b).

While the bulk of urban and regional restructuring appears to take place outside of these debates about the meaning and operations of the economy and community (for example, Chaskin, Brown et al. 2001; Joseph and Ogletree 1996; Kubisch, Auspos et al. 2002), some have attempted to intervene in this theory and practice with entreaties about the need for more "open" conceptions of community to parallel changes in how one can imagine economics and politics (Allen, Massey et al. 1998; Fraser and Lepofsky 2004; Lepofsky and Fraser 2003; North and Bruegel 2001; Smith 2004). At the very least, attention has been drawn to the limitations to relying heavily on an elementary understanding of community (McCann 2001; Talen 2000).

Efforts to map community have proven limited and disingenuous to the social relations these efforts hope to represent (see Chaskin 1995; HUD 1997) and practitioners have struggled with appropriate ways to engage community without relying on an essential conception (Meegan and Mitchell 2001). Part of this difficulty stems from articulations that bind community to a limited rendering of the local scale (Smith, M. P. 2001). More work is needed to address this perceived gap between theory and practice, something that the “new” economic geographies of complementary currencies, informal economic practices, and alternative development have sought to do (Esteva and Prakash 1998; Gibson-Graham 2003a).

The second limitation, as Li et al point out, is that the community economy (in their terms, as an ethnic economy) has had limited research performed to explain how it functions as an economy that intersects multiple geographies across space.

Katharyne Mitchell’s work points to some ways in which this particular community economy can be explained through the transnational capital flows between mainland China and Vancouver’s Chinatown via the geographies of Chinese entrepreneurs (Mitchell 1995). Others have explored the movement of capital through remittances that allow for a transnational economic geography to emerge that is structured very differently than the global economy that moves financial information between New York, London, and Tokyo or even New York and West Africa (Hernandez-Cross 2005; Stoller 2002). As Li et al and these other studies show, tracing the economic networks that are linked through the social geographies of community is a powerful way to map the complex geographies of a community economy.

*Reimagining the Region through Community Economies*

This dissertation draws from these lessons to explore how community and economic geographies are co-produced through a localized complementary currency system in central North Carolina. In order to analyze the PLENTY currency and its associated community economy, it is necessary to explain the production of the regional space that remains a condition of possibility for the PLENTY to emerge. This regional space—commonly known as the Triangle—was initially planned as particular regional, industrial economy to locate the research and design branches of multi-locational, capitalist firms. But even from the very beginning of the production of this capitalist space, a certain community economy was being produced. The PLENTY community economy that has developed 50 years after the initial plans for the Triangle intersect with the Triangle’s community economy in various ways that will be explored in the following chapters. The ways in which place, region, economy, and community are discursively and materially constructed through the circulation of PLENTY notes (as well as what already existing diverse economic practices the PLENTY highlights) are directly informed by the regional growth and coherence of the Triangle. The next three chapters will lay out the basic mechanics of the PLENTY after exploring how the Triangle developed into a particular community economy (with its own specific forms of creative destruction that render certain community and economic geographies visible and others invisible) to which the PLENTY is a path-dependent response. This study is necessary in order to then understand why the PLENTY community economy emerged as it did, with the structure that it has, and with its discursive practices of community economy in place, which is the topic of the remaining chapters.

### **CHAPTER THREE: CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY: THE BIRTH OF THE TRIANGLE**

#### *Surveying the Land*

At 11 a.m. March 20, 1958, the Board of Directors of the Pinelands Company, Inc. met at the posh Carolina Inn in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (The Pinelands Company 1958). The Pinelands Company had recently been incorporated as the developing agent for 4,000 acres of land in central North Carolina (Link 1995). Serving as the president of the company was Romeo H. Guest, the man who had been working for years—some say since the early 1950s, some say even since the 1930s—to bring these men together to direct their land investments into what would become Research Triangle Park (Guest c. 1957; Larrabee 1991; Link 2002). By the time these men gathered at the Carolina Inn, Guest had already convinced academic leaders and scientists from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, Duke University in Durham, North Carolina State College in Raleigh, area business leaders, and even the Governor that a research park was a necessary addition to North Carolina's landscape. Only through the construction of such a place, Guest argued, could North Carolina regain its prominence in the nation's industrial geography<sup>7</sup> (Guest 1955).

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<sup>7</sup> While the following analysis hinges upon Romeo Guest's early involvement in the Research Triangle Park development, this is in no way meant to construct a hagiography of Guest nor reduce the significant role that others played in the development of RTP. The focus on Guest has been deliberately chosen to highlight one of his major contributions to this collective idea: the geographical imaginary of a regional form that connected Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh into a geometric smooth space (a "Triangle"). Guest was the first to use this language and his influence on

Guest and others had been working hard envisioning this research park between Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh well before this March 1958 meeting. Maps had been drawn, capital raised, and land purchased. Pinelands was formed to keep the momentum going and consolidate all of the efforts of the state, the private sector, and the universities under the leadership of Guest and Karl Robbins, both wealthy businessmen who had made their money as mill owners during central North Carolina's heyday as one of the leading textile and apparel production locations in the United States. Robbins, by that time living in New York City, had already purchased the first tract of land on September 10, 1957 causing a buzz in the local and national media (New York Times 1957). Promotional materials had already been circulated to 100 of the nation's largest businesses that might have research and design branches that could relocate to North Carolina. By the time the March meeting of the Pinelands Board started many people had heard of a new place in central North Carolina: the Research Triangle.

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seeing/mapping regional development in this way cannot be underestimated. This historical research draws upon the personal papers of Romeo Guest (housed at Duke University's Special Collections), minutes of meetings and land-use maps generated by stakeholders in planning Research Triangle Park (housed at Duke University's Special Collections as well as the University of North Carolina's Southern Historical Collection and its North Carolina Collection), local and national media coverage of the Park and its impact on the surrounding region, and secondary histories of the creation of Research Triangle Park and regional development in the post-WWII U.S. South, which was geared toward attracting industrial firms from the northeast through an interplay of anti-unionism (such as right-to-work laws), promotion of cheap land and cheap labor, a willingness by the state to build necessary infrastructure, tax incentives to offset the cost of relocation, and a cultural shift in southern identity that continued to be underpinned by racial segregation but which was rearticulated as a place "to busy to hate" (Cobb 1999; Schulman 1991; Smith 1988; Stone 1989). These trends, which increased significantly after WWII with the creation of the South as the "sunbelt," are an intensification of the post-Civil War turn towards the "New South" (Cobb 1984; Hall, Korstad et al. 1986; Woodward 1951). This archive enrolls businesspeople, like Guest, politicians, urban planners, journalists, university officials and professors in the production and maintenance of RTP as a regional space within the sunbelt south.

Each of the members of the Pinelands Company Board that attended the meeting at the Carolina Inn received a spiral bound report with updates about previous activities to create the research park as well as the promotional brochure from a research park in New Jersey. Included among these papers were two maps of Pinelands' land holdings. The two maps look very similar. Both are hand drawn sketches of the property tracts owned or desired by the Pinelands Company that extend along a north-south axis between the Southern Railroad line on the east and the Durham & Southern line on the west. Besides the tracts, the map is nearly barren of any identifying marks of local natural or social landscape, but for small insets at the top of both pages showing the location of the Pinelands' tracts in between the triangle of roads that connect Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh.

As most histories of Research Triangle Park indicate, before the Park, this area was barren, save for some pine forest and Highway 54 that connected Chapel Hill with Raleigh and the Raleigh-Durham Airport further to the east (Havlick and Kirsch 2004; Jones 1978; Link 1995).<sup>8</sup> The first map, drawn in December 1957, shows the then current holdings of Pinelands (see Figure 1); the second map, drawn a month before the gathering of the Pinelands Board in March, has more of the blank spaces filled in with parcels of land that are labeled "very desirable" to the north, south, east, and west of the then current holdings (see Figure 2). One of the main

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<sup>8</sup> While Havlick and Kirsch do recognize that the land was not devoid of social relations nor empty space, their article relies too heavily upon Link's own reliance of the Research Triangle Institute's own archive of the history of the Park in the sense that they repeat what Link had previously noted: the use of the land for turkey hunting by area residents. Their analysis stops at that point, without detailing the townships surrounding the land that would become the Park as I attempt below. Additionally, using this as evidence that the land was filled with social relations has the potential to reinforce the idea that it was a wilderness in which area residents could hunt, rather than see it more fully connected, economically and socially, to a system of social relations in place.

purposes of that March meeting was to figure out how to make all that desirable land part of Pinelands' assets and then join together a solidified set of acreage for a research park.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> One of the concerns of the Pinelands Board was to make these land purchases without making it obvious to the sellers that it was a single developer buying all the adjacent land. The Board was very concerned that too much attention to Pinelands (and the Research Park idea) would cause competitive land speculation and an increase in prices for the parcels making it difficult to obtain all the adjacent land.

FIGURE 1

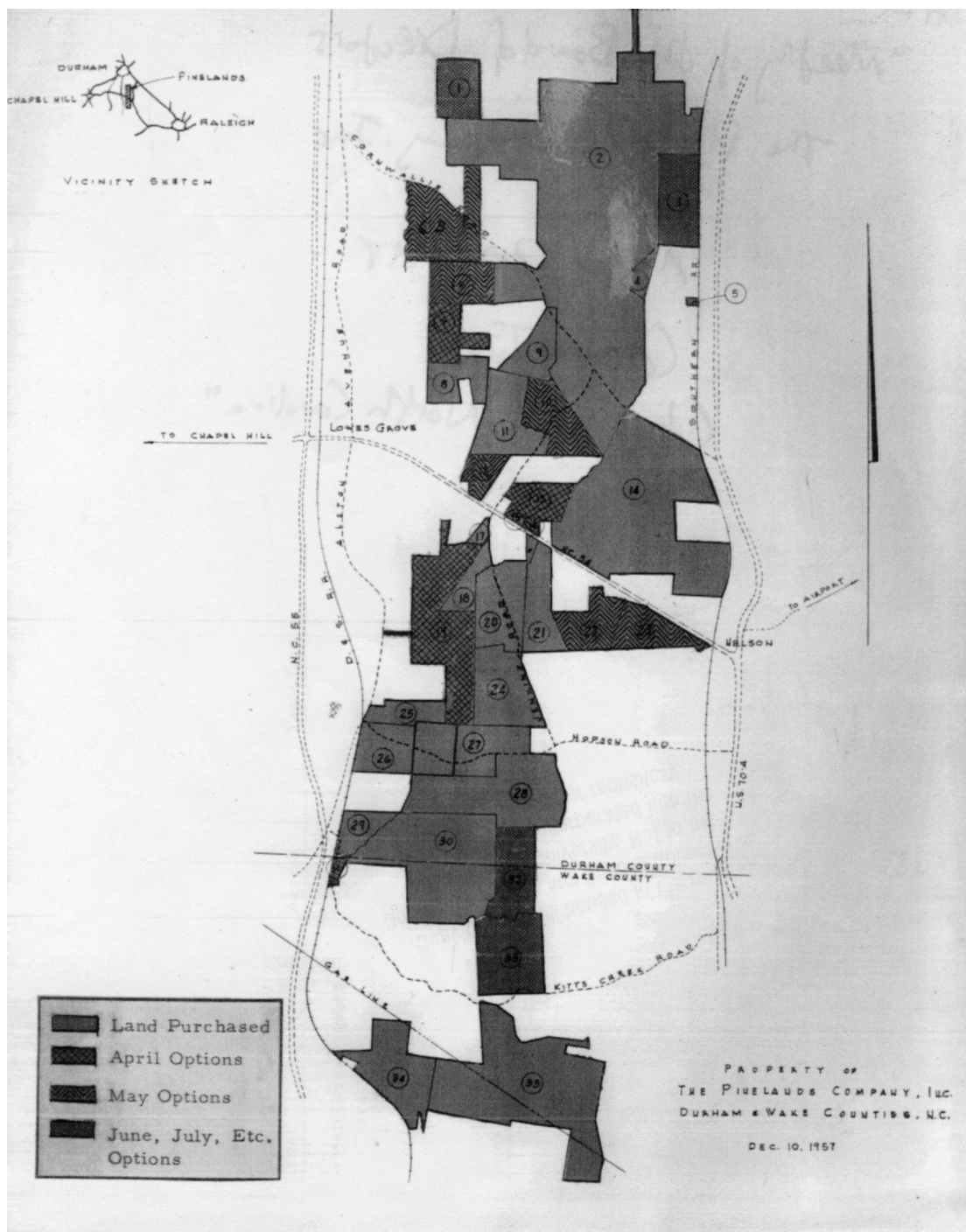
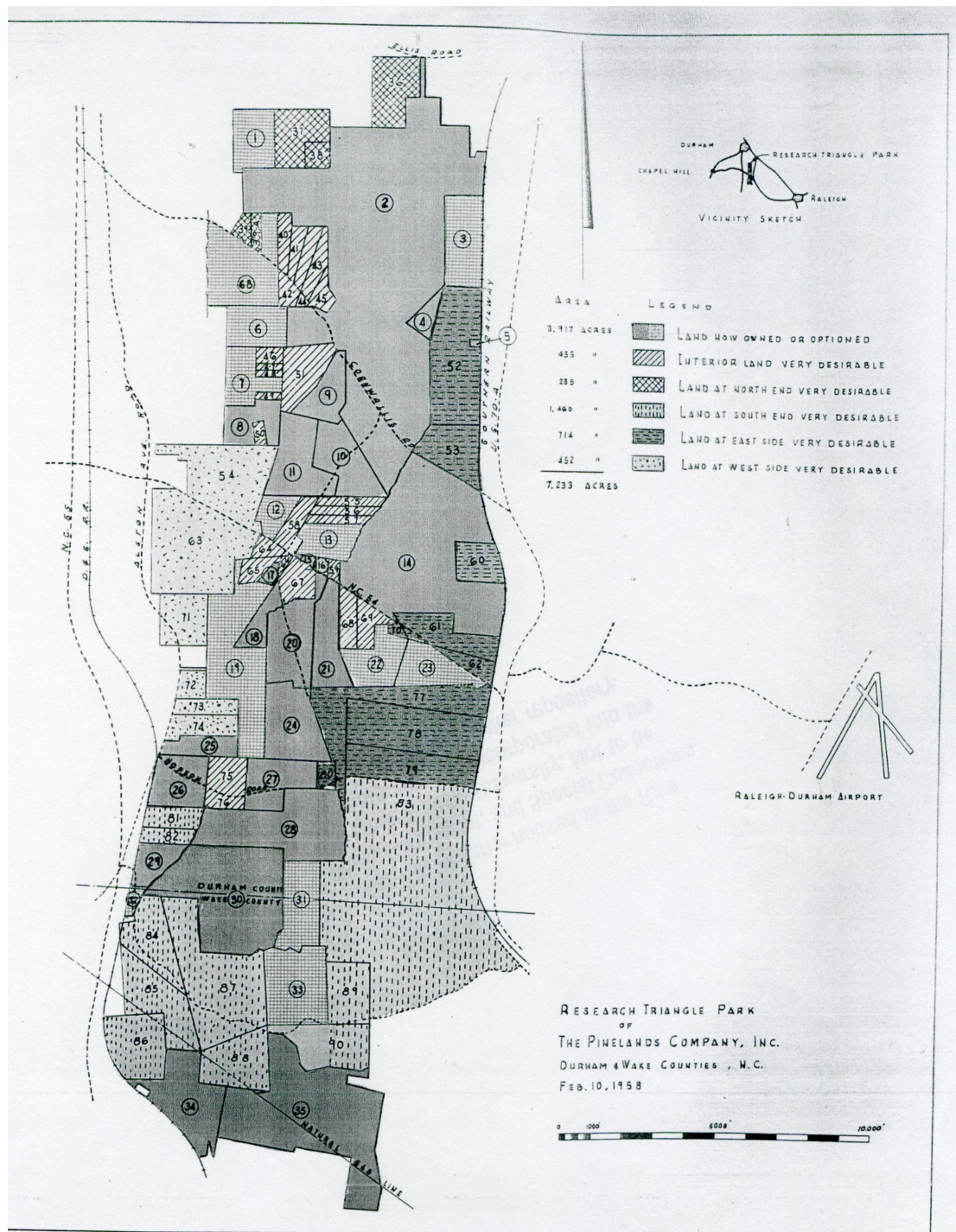




FIGURE 2



One small but significant difference between the first map and the second map is the identification of two names: Lowe's Grove and Nelson. Both names appear at either side of the park-to-be's borders, at intersections with North Carolina Highway 54, on the earlier map. But the names disappear on the second map as their locations are covered by the shadings that indicate "LAND AT EAST SIDE VERY DESIRABLE" and "LAND AT WEST SIDE VERY DESIRABLE." While these two place names vanish between the two maps in favor of the Research Triangle's tri-city moniker, area papers had already written about the coming "Lowes Grove research park" (Durham Sun 1957). This would be some of the last times that Lowe's Grove and Nelson appear on maps of Durham County as the two townships would come to be integrated into Durham's city limits and part of the Triangle's urbanized landscape.

Yet Lowe's Grove and Nelson stand out because they represent an alternative geo-history of the area than what is evident from most mappings of the Triangle since the creation of RTP. While the birth of the Triangle's regional coherence can be attributed to the ability of the Pinelands Company to identify and purchase parcels of land that its stockholders considered to be empty, the formation of the Park didn't take place in previously void space. Lowe's Grove was founded in the late 1800's as a small farming township in southeast Durham County. Though small, it is notable in the area's economic geography in at least two ways. First, Lowe's Grove was the site of the state's first farm aid school in 1891, an educational facility that was authorized and funded by the state to educate the children of farmers in "domestic science and agriculture" in the hopes that such education would translate into higher farm yields,

greater sales at market, and an overall increase in the quality of life for the farming people of the area (though it was white's only) (Anderson, J. B. 1990; Historical Preservation Society of Durham 2004). The farm school was part of a series of attempts by the North Carolina legislature to sustain an agrarian economy through modernization at the turn of the 20th Century. While North Carolina had developed a significant industrial economy through textile, tobacco production, and furniture manufacture immediately following the end of the Civil War, it's industries were concentrated in rapidly urbanized areas (like Durham) or in isolated company towns (like Morgantown in the west). Much of the state's jobs remained in farming. But just as North Carolina's Industrial Revolution brought changes in what North Carolina's farmers produced (moving increasingly away from food stuffs for local consumption and towards growing cotton and tobacco for international markets), the growth of a industrial economy altered how farmers should produce, with greater stress placed on modernization, science, and technology by state agents (Cobb 1984; North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies 1951).

Second, Lowe's Grove was the location for the south's first farmer's credit union, the Lowe's Grove Credit Union, founded on December 9, 1915 (Anderson, J. B. 1990; Maley 2004). The Credit Union emerged out of John Sprunt Hill's efforts to promote alternative finance systems for farmers who were being crippled by debt and who were paying nearly 40% more for the cost of supplies when interest to private creditors was taken into account. Hill had been pushing for credit reform across the U.S. and was struck by the success of cooperative financial systems on an investigative visit through Italy, Hungary, Austria, Germany, France and Ireland

(Henderson 1937). Upon his return from his European travels he helped author the North Carolina Credit Union Act (which passed in 1915) and then helped start the Lowe's Grove Credit Union as a model for such arrangements. The Credit Union was not only a way to ease debt for farmers and support the state's agrarian economy. The Lowe's Grove Credit Union marked a challenge to conventional banking systems and control over money at a time when the national banking system was just getting formulated and the ownership of money was being consolidated into the hands of the Federal Reserve and its network of banking institutions. The Credit Union offered a way for farmers to gain access to wealth in a different form than what the state offered through the farm aid school and other promotions of modernization.

Hill's efforts, and Lowe's Grove's history, presents an alternative future for who should control capital and how capital should flow through North Carolina. The creation of local control and circulation of low-interest money was very different than what was taking place a few miles away. In downtown Durham's textile and tobacco mills, money capital was moving from the farms within the Cotton and Textile Belts of central North Carolina to corporate offices in New York City, and the managerial branch of the firms were reinvesting that capital into new production infrastructure back in North Carolina but also in England, continental Europe, and the Middle East (Boyd 1925; Janiewski 1985). The Lowe's Grove experiment helped launch the national credit union movement that continues today, but its significance in the context of this dissertation is both in the production of a "complementary" economy

(based on localized social relations) that was in direct opposition to, and attempting to create an alternative version of, the region's relationality with other places.<sup>10</sup>

Nelson has a less notable history but nonetheless represents a life hidden by the Pinelands maps. Nelson was originally the Cedar Forks Township—a name that remains on the historically whites-only Cedar Forks Baptist Church and its adjacent cemetery—a portion of Wake County that joined Durham County when Durham's current southeastern border was drawn (Anderson, J. B. 1990). The name Nelson derived from the railroad station that was built there in the late 1880s as part of the North Carolina Railroad. In addition to the railway stop and the church, Nelson also had a post office (originally the Cedar Forks Post Office and then the Llewellyn Post Office). Counter to the geographical imaginaries of Guest and others hoping to develop a research park in an “empty” portion of Durham County, a map 1958 map of Durham published by the North Carolina Highway Commission shows Nelson with Cedar Forks Baptist Church, several farms, and concentrations of housing near the church (North Carolina State Highway Commission 1958). The same map shows Lowe's Grove twice: once at the intersection of Highway 54 and Alston Avenue and again in an enlarged inset on the right-hand side of the map to show the township in more detail. Even though by 1958 Pinelands already owned many tracts of land between Lowe's Grove and Nelson, the state's Highway Commission map of that year reveals no trace of any research park in the area—just Lowe's Grove, Nelson, and a scattering of farms and houses along Highway 54 between the two townships.

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<sup>10</sup> The historical significance of Lowe's Grove has just recently been memorialized by an official historical marker in what was once the crossroads of the township at the corner of NC 54 and Alston Avenue (Wise 2006).

The disappearance of Lowe's Grove and Nelson in between the two Pinelands Company maps represents two key events in the history of the central North Carolina's regional geography. First, Lowe's Grove and Nelson were primarily farming townships. This is not surprising since the 1950 U.S. Census shows that roughly one third of North Carolina's residents lived in rural, farming areas (another third lived in what was categorized as "rural non-farm" locales). Alongside and because of North Carolina's industrial growth after the Civil War much of the state's landscape was connected with farming. Farms were necessary to produce the cotton and tobacco to feed the new machines in small mill towns and bustling factories in places like Durham and Burlington (as well as feed the industrial workforce that was moving off of farmland into the cities). Indeed, according to a 1951 report from the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, North Carolina had the largest farm population of any of the 48 continental states (North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies 1951). But this largely rural farming population was also largely unconnected to urban infrastructure like electricity and plumbing, undereducated, and poorer compared to others in the nation. That meant that North Carolina as a whole lagged behind other states in indicators of economic development and quality of life. That was what Guest and others hoped to change with the creation of Research Triangle Park: using the Park to shift the overall economic geography of the state from farming and secondary sector industry towards the tertiary and quaternary sectors to bring more capital into the state, keep it circulating among its residents, and improving the standing of the state for continued investment. Erasing places like Lowe's Grove and Nelson from the map of Durham not only cleared land

for the park, it represented a symbolic shift in what North Carolina's economic geography would look like and who would populate such a geography.

Second, the vanishing of Lowe's Grove and Nelson indicated that new spaces could be and would be created to accommodate the new economic geography of the state. These new spaces would eventually be consolidated into a regional formation. But the spaces themselves had to be imagined and produced first. Guest and others spent nearly a decade before they were able to see their geographical imaginaries get imprinted on the landscape, but their work opened up the opportunity to construct new maps of North Carolina. Guest's business experience was as a textile factory manager and a developer (including serving as the President and Director of Sandhurst Mills in Rockingham, NC). He had long been a booster for industry in the state. North Carolina had emerged as a major industrial production site while maintaining its agrarian landscape and population, in part because smaller textile mills and timber mills could function outside of the classic urban-industrial cities, in part because the farms were necessary to create the supplies for the mills, and in part because that is how politicians, business leaders, and investors created the way in which North Carolina would be integrated into the national textile industry as well as a global market for fabrics, clothing, cigarettes, and furniture. He and others knew that North Carolina's ability to attract new industry was limited by these economic-geographical conditions because such conditions didn't provide the same capacity for industrial growth that the Boston-Washington corridor did. By the time the research park idea was gaining support among business leaders and politicians in North Carolina, Guest and his business associates had started to see the beginning of the end

of the post-World War II industrial expansion in the south. He wanted to change the way the state was connected to the nation's industrial geography in order to create new conditions for growth. As he wrote to then Governor Luther Hodge on December 28, 1954:

"The reason it is so necessary to hatch our own industries at home is that the pace of migration of industries from other areas to the South has greatly slowed down and is about complete." (Guest 1954a)

The creation of the park was about creating new geographies, not simply continuing the same strategy of luring industry on promise of abundant, local supplies, cheap land, and a docile workforce. The park was to change radically the economic geography of the area and the way in which North Carolina would be incorporated into economic geographies at other scales. In a letter to Hodges a month earlier, Guest wrote:

"...we expect to hatch our new industries rather than steal them...We should all bear in mind that we are not selling a factory site. We are selling available engineering brains, physical research facilities and cultural living conditions." (Guest 1954a)

Perhaps it is no coincidence that Pinelands was the chosen name for the company that would bring the land holdings together to accommodate Research Triangle Park. Pine lands was what Guest and his associates saw when looking out on North Carolina's landscape—space empty of social relations that had the potential to become filled with activity—not a landscape that was already occupied by the people of Lowe's Grove or Nelson and their intersecting social and economic geographies (despite an advertisement published by Guest's development company, C.M. Guest & Sons, that showed a bucolic farm landscape ready for industrial investment—see Figure 3). Rather, the pine lands were representative of a space outside the economic geography of Durham and its mills where North Carolina's



economy could be started anew. But it would require a new place, a new regional formation, in order to achieve that goal. That place would become North Carolina's Triangle, what Guest had been the first to refer to as the Research Triangle.

### *The Production of Regional Space*

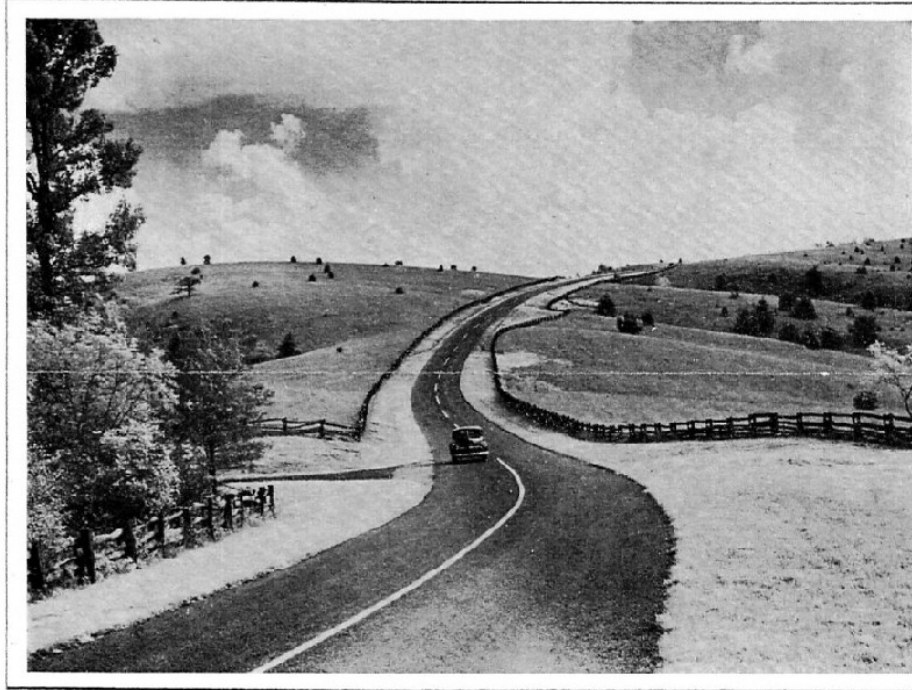
The region has a long and contentious history within the discipline of geography. Once the cornerstone of geographical inquiry then banished to obscurity by the move towards spatial science and generalizability, the region is once again at the forefront of geographical study. But regions are no longer considered static spatial forms as they were when Carl Sauer dominated U.S. academic geography. Current research on regions takes several forms,<sup>11</sup> but all draw upon lessons from Henri Lefebvre and the critical turn in geography during the 1970s: that regions, like all spaces, are produced (Lefebvre 1991). The production of regions, like the production of space, does not mean that the space is not real. Indeed, the production of space requires the transformation of territory into new forms and into new relational linkages with other spaces. Recognizing the production of space means that one understands the ways in which spaces get produced out of a set of social relations and that spatial forms are dynamic, contested, and contingent, not pre-given entities in which social action is contained (Massey 1994).

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<sup>11</sup> Two examples that show the range of inquiry include Allen Scott's and Michael Storper's study of regional agglomeration of firms in a post-industrial economic geography that finds clusters as its core organizing principle (Scott 2000) and Dasai's more constructivist approach to categorizing regional form.

**FIGURE 3**

As Advertised in  
**AMERICA'S TEXTILE REPORTER**  
August 5, 1954



**INDUSTRIAL AREA** (North Carolina Version)

Not a smokestack in sight . . . Happy people going to work . . . Just around the bend is a new neighbor . . . A prosperous new industry.

Look South to Guest to find the spot along the road to greater success where these energetic North Carolinians are eager to produce for you.

**C. M. GUEST & SONS**  
CONSTRUCTION IN THE SOUTH



Research into contemporary global economic integration has revealed the various ways regions as places are important spatial forms to organize and direct the movement and valuation of people, capital, goods, and ideas (MacLeod and Goodwin 1999; Sassen 1994; Scott 2001; van der Wusten 1995). The way in which regions have reemerged into geographical inquiry is primarily through economic geography. This broad insight indicates that understanding the location of economic relations is fundamental to understanding economic relations themselves and allows one to understand the success of a place like Research Triangle Park and the regional development surrounding it. But location is one factor among many that reveals the significance of geography in economic form and why regions are important. Location stems from social processes and geographers have long noted the constructedness of place and regions (Allen, Massey et al. 1998; Murphy 1991; Pudup 1988). Place-based and regional analysis has a complex history within the discipline, yet few geographers would posit that places or regions are naturally occurring phenomena removed from an ever-changing environmental and social context. What geographers do debate is how places and regions get constructed and what impacts those constructions have. These debates often center on the significance of economic forces in driving regional construction and restructuring, particularly on the role of “global” economic circuits that shape regions from the outside (MacLeod and Jones 2001; Massey 1994; Scott 1998). Many posit that regions change in response to changes in the broader economy.

What these debates demonstrate is that regional analysis can end up reifying the region in consideration by counterpoising spatial vectors, forces, and dynamics as

either “inside” or “outside” of a region (Allen, Massey et al. 1998). But if regions are constructed, then any line between what is within a region and what is outside is an artificial line with its own history and geography. Therefore, any regional boundaries, and regional geography, must be understood as temporary, porous, and contestable (Thrift 1990; Thrift 1991; Thrift 1993). If regions can be analyzed as constructed places in this manner, then the relationship between regional development, the production of space, and economic geographies needs closer examination.

In turning to the economic basis of regional structure, geographers and others assume a wide spatial scope for an already existing economy that both determines and transverses regional boundaries. This theoretical reliance on the economy—what some have termed economism—is being challenged as research demonstrates how the construction (and restructuring) of regions gets articulated with events in the economic sphere in highly contingent ways (Gibson 2001; Graham and Marvin 2001). Such research shows that an uncritical reliance on economism within regional analysis hides a wider spectrum of factors that overdetermine regional development and misses how regional coherence emerges out of articulations between the cultural, the economic, the political, and the social spheres. This line of inquiry allows one to understand the structure of regions and the economy as a set of relations crystallized within a place in part by the relations that already exist in that place. In the case of the Triangle, the regional development became part of a set of constructed economic relations that increased the global integration of certain networks after its regional coherence started to take shape. But this economic geography also depended on the

construction and location of certain social geographies. The history of this region is not merely a trajectory of increasing economic-geographic scope but rather a history of how a regional object was created and articulated with a system of social relations across cultural, economic, and political arenas.

### *Imagining the Triangle*

On January 3, 1955, Romeo Guest wrote to nearly 100 of the largest manufacturing companies in the U.S., including Gulf, U.S. Steel, DuPont, and Reynolds Metal. His letters inquired about the possibility of the companies relocating their research and design branches to central North Carolina. In his letters, he wrote about central North Carolina: “There is in the making here...what promises to be a ‘golden triangle’ of research” (Guest 1954b). He wrote to these companies as an industrial recruiter hoping to lure industry southward. Guest was fully aware of the opportunities for industry provided by North Carolina. He was the head of a construction firm, C.M. Guest & Sons, that had built its reputation building factories across the Carolinas, particularly paper and textile mills. He grew up in Anderson, South Carolina, in a family that had made a good living from the industrial growth of the U.S. south through factory construction (Jones 1978). But he also knew that the future of industry was not in the production of goods, but in the research and design that allowed for the production of goods.

Guest attributes this insight to his experiences in Massachusetts where he was able to see first hand the connection between industrial research and industry (Guest 1982b). After graduating from Exeter Academy (he only attended in the latter part of his high school career after his initial applications to college were rejected on the

basis of his lack of a preparatory education) he attended the Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT). It was while at MIT that he learned of “Research Row”—the cluster of the research branches of companies like DuPont along the Charles River in Cambridge, MA—that was facilitated by the science departments at MIT, Harvard and other Boston universities. But the lesson he learned was that Research Row was not an isolated group of firms that provided forward linkages for research at the schools; rather, by the time Guest had started pursuing his own dreams of a research area, Research Row was integrated into an entire regional agglomeration economy along the Route 128 highway that stretched around Boston. Through this development, Guest posits, he learned the importance research activities could have to a regional economy and how the Route 128 region was providing an overall buffer to the decline of New England’s textile and paper manufacturing.<sup>12</sup>

A celebratory story about Guest that ran in the Durham Morning Herald on April 17, 1983 was titled “Father of RTP: Romeo Guest Recalls His Vision ‘To Replace Old Cotton Mill’.” Drawing upon his experiences in Massachusetts and his knowledge of North Carolina’s industry, that is precisely what his goal was in setting forth the idea of a research park in central North Carolina. From notes he made to himself (and then typed and circulated to others he promoted the idea to), Guest stated three “obligations” for the park he would help develop:

“1. To strengthen the economy of the State of N.C....2. To promote through research the establishment of new industries in North Carolina...3. To raise the standard of

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, similar to what would happen in North Carolina with the creation of Research Triangle Park, the buffer provided by Route 128 helped a certain portion of the population, not necessarily everyone who lost a job when the mills would close. Statistically, Massachusetts was stabilized by the growth of Route 128 firms, but the mill workers along the Merrimack River didn’t necessarily see the same benefits as did the engineers of Boston’s western suburbs (Saxenian 1994).

living in the State...By providing more and better jobs where our hourly workers can be upgraded.” (Guest 1955)

Though Guest wanted to transform the economic base of North Carolina’s industry, he was keenly aware of the state’s strengths and sought to tie his vision with some of the already existing economic geographies. Before Guest pronounced Research Triangle and articulated its associated regional vision, Guest sought to attract textile-based research to the area in order to diversify the industrial form of the area. He claims that the initial “inkling” for this idea came when he worked as a consultant on factory location and design for Merck & Company between 1939 and 1942. He helped Merck build a factory in Virginia, but picked up the desire by company officials to have better ways to connect the knowledge being produced by contracted researchers and the goods being produced by the factory floor workers. This thought remained in his mind while he continued working as an industrial developer through the 1940s in Greensboro, NC.

Then on June 8, 1953, Guest wrote to Dr. William A. Burney, the Vice President of E.R. Squibbs & Sons in an attempt to recruit Squibbs to central North Carolina (Guest 1953a). According to a mimeo written at the end of August, 1977 about the creation of Research Triangle Park:

“This letter does not say ‘research triangle’ but clearly Guest had in mind the Chapel Hill area, as it refers to a woolen mill which Guest had located in ‘this general area.’ This has to be Pacific Mills at Carrboro adjacent to Chapel Hill.” (Anonymous 1977, p. 15)

This letter is significant for two reasons. First, Guest articulated the relationship between research and manufacture in regards to a textile mill (one that was at the heart of Carrboro and is now the site of Carr Mill Mall and Weaver Street Market, a cooperative grocery store that will become significant in

understanding the circulation of PLENTYs and contemporary community and economic geographies of the area). His goal wasn't simply to get any research and design firms. Guest tried to attract research and design that could be integrated into the large textile production sites that connected Alamance, Burlington, Carrboro, Durham, Pittsboro, and Saxapahaw through a circuit of capital flows and investments (as many of the mill owners in these places invested into each others' production sites, such as Carr and Erwin (Boyd 1925)). But he also saw a connection between textile manufacturing and research on new textiles at North Carolina State University (then North Carolina State College). While mill owners were fully aware that new fabrics and blends between cotton, wool, and artificial fibers like nylon were the future of the textile industry and State College provided a valuable resource in the creation of these new fabrics, Guest seemed to understand that the location of a private firm dedicated to textiles research could better link the college laboratories and the factory floors. At first, the future of North Carolina's economy wasn't to replace the cotton mill, it was to update the mill and connect it to a new set of business partners, circuit of capital, and economic geographies. Though this would change.

Second, this early letter reveals the evolution of Guest's regional imaginary. He did not immediately see the regional formation he would come to promote for the rest of his life. His initial vision was fragmented in the same way other political and business leaders' had been—one research unit of a major firm connected to one mill that could draw upon the expertise of State College. Guest must have realized himself that he drew the connection between State College in Raleigh and the mill in



Carrboro rather than directing Squibbs' attention to the University of North Carolina (UNC) in less than 2 miles away in Chapel Hill. As Guest notes in his papers, it wasn't until a little bit later than he was looking at a map of the area and had an alleged epiphany: that the three major area universities—UNC in Chapel Hill, Duke University in Durham, and State College in Raleigh—formed a triangle. Furthermore, all had thriving research programs in their science departments that could be relevant to the manufacturing sector (like UNC's Chemistry Department and State's concentration on textiles). On Saturday, October 10, 1953 Guest listed his schedule in his daily calendar. Item 6 was a conversation about the Research Triangle (Guest 1953b).

The notion of a Triangle in central North Carolina has more of a history than just Guest's inspired moment of cartographic reasoning. In the 1920s, the Greensboro-High Point-Winston Salem area was promoted by industrial recruiters as North Carolina's Industrial Triangle. These cities, in large part led by the cigarette production in Winston-Salem's R.J. Reynolds' plants, were a major site of manufacture and North Carolina's industrial revolution since the end of the Civil War. That area is now known as the Triad, as the Triangle is currently associated with the conurbation that joins Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh (though an undated Greensboro Daily News clipping circa 1955 from Guest's personal papers declares "Future Needs of Triangle Outlined" in reference to Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem). But even that particular association predates Guest: since at least 1950, the "Carolina Triangle" had been used by officials to describe the collegiate networks formed by Duke, NCSU, and UNC (Link 1995).

Regardless of these previous identifications, Guest himself sought a geometric moniker for his development from near the beginning of his vision. While he didn't immediately see the triangle of the three schools and the three places, he regularly noted to researchers, the media, and in his own memos that he had been particularly struck with the geometric associations of other landmarks. For Guest, these included his model of Research Row in Cambridge as well as public spaces like Columbus Circle in New York City and Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia. He felt as if the geometry provided a sense of import, meaning, identity, and visibility. He wanted his research park to have the same notoriety and clear sense of identification and was pleased to discover the geometry of the Triangle already in place.

Though the points of Guest's Triangle already existed in the landscape (with some of the borders from the roads connecting the three places), the Triangle itself had yet to be imagined and conceived. In order to do this, Guest would coordinate business leaders, university officials, legislators, developers and others to believe that the area not only could become the Research Triangle, but already was. He would eventually succeed and the Triangle would take shape without his input, but it took years and significant work to create this new space.

Since 1953, Guest had been promoting the idea of what he called the Research Triangle (what he would write in his memos and notes as "Research  $\Delta$ "). He collected information about the changing shape of U.S. industry and subscribed to newsletters like the Kiplinger Washington Letter (a brief of business indicators and legislative updates "Circulated privately to businessmen"). He drew upon his business networks and political contacts to get the ear of the governor, the President

of the UNC system, and the Director of the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development (an agency that directed the state's economic development planning). He used his alumni status at Exeter and M.I.T. to get the attention of industry leaders in the northeast, some of whom were his old classmates. He made cold calls, sending letters to businesses as well as the Chambers of Commerce across North Carolina to ask if they could recommend people to contact within local businesses about the Research Triangle idea. And he made promotional literature.

His promotional literature was particularly interesting for its geographical imagination. He titled one early brochure, published in late 1953 or early 1954 by C.M. Guest & Sons, "Conditioned for Research" and enclosed it in many of his letters to businesses and politicians. In this four page outline, he posited that, "[n]ew frontiers—many born of research itself—have risen in North Carolina with its phenomenal industrial growth of the past two decades" (C.M. Guest & Sons c1953). His claims in these early efforts were threefold: to position research as an industrial activity itself; to celebrate the research activities of the three area schools; and, to argue that research was already becoming the main industrial activity of the nation and that North Carolina needed to shift its industrial base to stay afoot of these changes. Guest provided the readers of "Conditioned for Research" with many details about the benefits of both scientific research and research in North Carolina. Each of the three schools was highlighted for its research activities: UNC's Chemistry Department and library system, State College's newly constructed nuclear reactor and nuclear physics program, and Duke's numerous science offerings. One

section of the brochure posits that “Research fits North Carolina like a glove” with a map of the state morphed into the shape of a hand with a glove covering it (the wrist at the western mountains and the fingers stretching into the eastern shoreline of the Outer Banks), reinforcing the statewide scale of his imagination.

Throughout the document, Guest refers to the Research Triangle as an actually existing place populated by the future industrial researchers of the nation, rather than a diverse mix of farmers, students, mill workers, homemakers and others, often divided along racial and class lines and by urban/rural boundaries. On the second page, the brochure tells of “Cultural Living”:

“We call it ‘Cultural Living’ because here are found well-educated, traveled and highly cultured people who share their enjoyment of the fine arts in a refined atmosphere.” (C.M. Guest & Sons c1953)

The visual and verbal descriptions of the area in “Conditioned for Research” and other promotional information draws attention to particular aspects of the area’s cultural, social, and consumerist outlets in order to portray the area as just as cosmopolitan as Boston or New York but with trees and suburban tracts of single-family detached homes instead of smog, traffic, overcrowded stretches of concrete, and class conflict. As he wrote in the brochure:

“The Research Triangle of North Carolina today offers most unusual and favorable conditions for the location and operation of industrial research facilities. Far from crowded cities, limited equipment, and pressing personnel problems [in other words, labor unions], industry will find in North Carolina a combination of living and working conditions—facilities and technical assistance—scientific experience and cooperation that creates an atmosphere...Conditioned for Research.” (C.M. Guest & Sons c1953)

Such descriptions indicate both Guest and other’s focus on a particular set of people to populate this new economic geography (not the farmers of Lowe’s Grove or Nelson or class-conscious factory hands), but also point to the importance the

Triangle's planners placed on a notion of community for both the economic activities of RTP's firms and the social lives outside the Park's boundaries.

In addition to Guest's particular rendering of the area itself, Guest (and others who later joined his efforts) pursued the goal of a Research Triangle in large part because of how they understood the economic geography of wealth circulation within the state as a whole. As noted above, the Research Triangle idea was conceived as a way to help the entire state of North Carolina, not just the regional formation of the Research Triangle. Guest always assumed that any economic benefits experienced in the piedmont would spill across the mountains, the sandhills, and the coastal areas (though primarily to his own pockets, as "Conditioned for Research" indicates that Guest & Sons would be the developer of the research park). Such a belief is best summarized in the words of then Governor Luther H. Hodges at a luncheon for business leaders at the Charlotte City Club on July 16, 1958: "In my opinion, the boundaries of the Research Triangle will reach across North Carolina, across the nation, and across the world" (Hodges 1958).

### *Making it Happen*

While Guest conducted his early efforts primarily through his development company, he was also working very closely with others. On March 3, 1954, Guest met with Brandon Hodges (then the Treasurer of North Carolina—no relation to Luther Hodges) and Robert M. Hanes, the president of Wachovia Bank and Trust Company. The three gathered to discuss industry in North Carolina and the conversation turned toward a research park, according to his diary, at Guest's urging. Guest had already pitched the idea to Hodges who was sold on it. Through Hodges,

Guest was able to schedule a meeting with then Governor William B. Umstead, but before the meeting took place, Umstead died from an illness. Instead of meeting with Umstead, Guest rescheduled his meeting about the Research Triangle with Luther Hodges—Umstead’s Lieutenant Governor—who became governor when Umstead passed away (Link 1995).

Guest wrote several letters to Luther Hodges in preparation for their meeting. In his letters, he clearly stated his case that North Carolina needed to “hatch its own industries” and set a new course for industrial development that didn’t depend on luring northern companies with the promise of cheap, docile labor and law-makers who were friendly to factories. While some historians of RTP, such as Albert Link, debate how seriously Hodges took Guest on their first meeting, the governor quickly adapted the ideas into his own commitment to industrial economic growth for the state (Link 1995). The Governor started a task force to look into the idea of a research park in the piedmont as a way to marry his own ideas about industrial development and Guest’s prodding about the Research Triangle. After Guest’s continued urging, Governor Hodges invited the presidents of UNC and Duke, among others, to the governor’s mansion in a meeting that would lead to the creation of a official committee to explore the research development ideas. The first organization formed by the Governor was the Research Triangle Development Council, headed by Robert Hanes, and included Guest, Brandon Hodges, as well as Malcolm Campbell (Dean of Textiles at State College) and William Newell (Director of State College’s Textile Research Center), both supporters of Guest’s ideas.

The Council struggled at first because the universities were cautious about their collective role vis-à-vis industry. The three schools remained comfortable with the idea that research firms could draw upon their research resources (and encouraged such linkages) but were less interested in having research programs be directed by the needs of private corporations. According to Link (1995), neither Guest nor Governor Hodges fully understood this wariness by the schools. While the Council worked to find the common ground between the desires of the industrialists, the politicians, and each of the three schools, the exact relationship between the universities' research activities and private firms remained a contested issue. As UNC's William Carmichael said to Guest: "Let me see, Romeo, if I really understand what it is we are talking about here, you want the professors here and all of us to be the prostitutes and you're going to be the pimp" (quoted in Link 1995, p. 29).

On the recommendation of then in-coming UNC president William Friday, Governor Hodges appointed George Simpson, Jr. as the Executive Secretary of the Research Triangle Development Council. Simpson was a sociologist at UNC, had worked with Howard Odum and had a strong knowledge about the economic conditions of the state.<sup>13</sup> The Program and Plans Subcommittee of the Development Council suggested that the name be changed to the Research Triangle Committee, Inc. and on September 25, 1956 that Committee was officially incorporated at a meeting in Raleigh. The Research Triangle Committee (and most prominently, Simpson) was to act as a non-profit corporation and draw investment from business

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<sup>13</sup> Odum had pursued his own vision of a research center in the area, though his goal was less tied to economic development and more to the advancement of scientific knowledge about the U.S. south.

leaders across the state. This non-profit gave Guest and others a state-sanctioned organizational structure within which to work and clarified the roles of the various stakeholders. It also elucidated the mission of the type of industrial development to be pursued. The articles of incorporation state:

“...The objectives and purposes for which the corporation is formed are to encourage and promote the establishment of industrial research laboratories and other facilities in North Carolina primarily in, but not limited to, that geographical area or triangle formed by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State College of Agriculture and Engineering, and Duke University at Durham...and thereby attract industrial research laboratories and other facilities to the State.” (quoted in Link 1995, p. 34)

While the articles of incorporation indicate that the area that was slowly coming to be known as the Triangle would not necessarily be the definitive location for research-associated development, the Triangle remained at the forefront of the discourse about industrial development in the state. The Research Triangle Committee, as the focus of the Governor’s attention, solidified the logic that investing in the Triangle meant investing in the state as a whole. Simpson took this message across the state in his fundraising efforts. He focused his pleas for money on three simple and interrelated points: North Carolina was losing its comparative advantage in industry, North Carolina needed to switch its industrial activities to research-affiliated industry, and that the comparative advantages offered by the piedmont’s triangularly-related institutions was the best place to do it. In a speech to the UNC Faculty Club, Simpson noted:

“North Carolina has not kept pace with the general economic developments of the nation since World War II...North Carolina has two outstanding resources for economic development. One resource is the great number of people, especially the extremely large farm population. The other resource is what is referred to as the Research Triangle, this relatively unique concentration of scientific personnel and facilities.” (Simpson Jr. 1957, pp. 1-2).



In another mimeo circulated to potential investors, Simpson expanded on the need to develop the Research Triangle, claiming that the “Research Triangle, at the present time, is the most important industrial resource in North Carolina” (Simpson 1958, p. 1). Yet the farmers that drew his attention in his speech to the Faculty Club disappear when he continues to describe the advantages of the area in favor of a direct focus on the area’s scientific and industrial resources. The same manuscript finds Simpson stating: “The name ‘Research Triangle,’ therefore, crystallizes the past growth and present excellence of these three institutions that have grown up so close together” (Simpson 1958, p. 4). The Research Triangle was indeed becoming crystallized as a new economic and social space for North Carolina’s industrial growth and movement away from agrarianism.

Though Simpson took a leave of absence from his professorial duties to head the Research Triangle Committee and became the primary official voice of the development, Guest and others continued to promote the idea. Having the Committee gave investors something tangible to which to attach their money. The members of the Committee drew upon their business networks to sell the idea to potential investors and hosted meetings around the state to obtain pledges of support. Included in these outreach efforts were the efforts of Guest who seemed to work both within and outside the directives of the Committee. But the attention was on raising money and soon the Committee was able to get pledges from prominent business leaders in the area, including Durham’s George Watts Hill as well as John Sprunt Hill (though they failed to get a commitment from John Morehead, one of the state’s most generous philanthropists and a major benefactor of UNC). As the idea gained support

beyond the Committee and money began rolling in, the Governor and Simpson realized the need to use that money to obtain land.

Before Pinelands was organized as the land-purchasing wing of the effort to build a research park facility, Governor Hodges pursued investment specifically for real estate. Early efforts by the governor were unsuccessful (Link 1995). At the suggestion of William Saunders—head of the Department of Conservation and Development—Hodges contacted Karl Robbins. Robbins had made his fortune in the textile mills of North Carolina, both as an early investor in Burlington Mills (once the leading hosiery manufacturer in the country) and also as main interest in Robbins Mills in Pinehurst. Robbins had moved to New York City after accruing his fortune. Robbins also knew Guest; he had hired Guest to construct some of his textile factories and expand his holdings. As someone deeply invested in the textile industry in the state, Robbins was keenly aware of the need to salvage what was a declining industry and was immediately sympathetic to the idea of research-driven industrialization as a way to reinject investment into North Carolina. As he wrote to Governor Hodges:

“So I am tremendously interested in the Research Triangle because through research you look ahead and create out of man’s mind wonderful things for his future...The standard of earnings will rise with the industrial production of things created in the Research Triangle, produced in miniature in nearby pilot plants, and mass produced by North Carolinians in vast factories throughout Tarheelia.” (Robbins 1957)

Robbins’ geographical vision that connected the Research Triangle to statewide investments and industrial growth mirrored those put forth by Guest since the early days of the Research Triangle idea. In addition to his enthusiasm, Robbins contributed enough financial resources to purchase the first 4000 acres of land of what would become Research Triangle Park. Guest and Simpson directed attention to the land between Chapel Hill and Raleigh along Highway 54, land that they saw as

attractive because of the railroad access and because, from their perspective, it was empty and available (Link 1995). Guest coordinated with Simpson and an associate to use Robbins' money to purchase land "near Nelson" a location that had been decided upon in June 1957. Since June, Guest's associate William Maughan had quietly optioned land in and between Lowe's Grove and Nelson from over 50 landowners for what was then known as the Evergreen Farms Company, an entity set up by Guest separate from the Research Triangle Committee (though Guest arranged to have Robbins' investment channeled through Evergreen). With the investment from Robbins, Guest and Simpson were able to realize these land options and the first 998.97 acres for \$104,000 from the Rigsbee family on July 17, 1957.

At first, Pinelands was another name used by Guest and Robbins in order to acquire land (so to make it less apparent that a single group of investors was buying the adjacent tracts). Soon, however, Pinelands incorporated as joint effort between Guest and Robbins. Pinelands officially incorporated as a private firm on September 25, 1957 and Guest was elected president and treasurer at the first meeting that October. The second meeting took place in New York on November 20, 1957 and Robbins made himself chairman. The third meeting occurred December 19 in Durham and slightly reorganized the company, though Robbins remained the chairman and Guest president (Jones 1978; Larrabee 1991; Link 1995).

While Robbins was happy to pledge his money and get Pinelands incorporated, he hedged slightly when he realized that he was the main investor and primary source of income for the effort to start the research park. In the winter of 1957, when Pinelands was still getting organized, many of the land options were due

but Pinelands didn't have enough money to purchase the tracts. Robbins had pledged \$1 million but had only provided a portion thus far. He was averse to committing the rest without investments from others. He wanted North Carolinians to own 49% of Pinelands but, up until this point, remained the primary stock owner. With time running out on the options, Saunders made a personal loan to Pinelands in order to purchase the tracts. Robbins then told the other members of Pinelands' Board that he would provide the rest of his pledge in a matching grant (though only up to a total investment of \$500,000—half of his original pledge). Pinelands got more land but was still far from having a steady stream of investment or a large enough tract to start the research park. Even so, the area was increasingly being transformed from the location of Lowe's Grove and Nelson into the site of the Research Triangle. Enough had been established that Pinelands could look ahead to accumulating more land and begin drawing maps of the Research Triangle that showed the location of the Research Triangle Park.

### *More than Just the Park*

The Research Triangle was never simply the Park or the tracts of land that Pinelands purchased (that eventually came to owned by the non-profit Research Triangle Foundation after Pinelands continued to suffer from financial woes). The Research Triangle was a regional vision that joined Chapel Hill, Durham and Raleigh together into a new geographical space. The Pinelands tracts were a necessary investment to locate the Park and materialize the vision. The land holdings were also necessary to create the new economic geographies between firms, the state, and the three universities. But the area's social geographies still needed changing (more so

than clearing the Pinelands tracts for construction). In order to complete the project to develop the Research Triangle and give rise to the Triangle as a regional space, particular social geographies had to provide the infrastructure to absorb the capital investments.

Part of the vision for new social geographies in the region had already been glimpsed in the “Conditioned for Research” brochure. Through the promotion of “cultural living” Guest indicated that the residents of the Triangle were to be of a different sort than those who resided in Lowe’s Grove, Nelson, or who worked in the factories in downtown Durham and Carrboro. But it wasn’t just the type of labor (scientists rather than mill workers or farmers) and higher wages that distinguished Research Triangle residents from those who were being disappeared from the area’s maps by Pinelands. Those that were to populate the Triangle were to have a different set of community geographies and foster a different relationship between community and economic activities than what Guest and others saw among the current residents of the area. As Governor Hodges posited, scientists wanted a community of other scientists as their neighbors (Hodges 1958). The creation of the Triangle could not simply a space for economic relations to crystallizes. The production of the Triangle would require new social spaces of community and particular discursive productions of community.

“Conditioned for Research” was the first in a line of promotional materials printed to sell the Triangle idea to investors and firms. Each of these brochures, mailings, and advertisements provided a description of who populated the Triangle with a focus on the cultural amenities and public schools of Chapel Hill, Durham, and

Raleigh. Two main characteristics of the burgeoning Research Triangle were highlighted. First, that the area coming to be known as the Research Triangle was not a planned region. The area grew out of the coordination of area leaders to connect three already existing places into a new geographical form. This was promoted as advantageous for several reasons. Because the three cities were being joined together, the new Research Triangle already had the urban infrastructure that firms, their workers, and their workers' families would require. The area already had streets, sewer lines, an airport, educational and cultural facilities, sports teams, restaurants, shopping centers, and housing in place (even if much of this infrastructure would still need to be connected to the as of yet unbuilt Research Triangle Park campus). But the promotional material also represented the Research Triangle as a simultaneously integrated and disjointed space that was still in the making. While maps showed the geometry of the Triangle (often by highlighting the road connections between Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh) the written descriptions treated each point on the Triangle as a relatively independent location in space that had its own, unique, local flavor (associated most directly with one of the universities). The people who would come to populate the Triangle could choose to live near Chapel Hill's quaint shops, Durham's Duke Gardens and urban villages, or Raleigh's modern shopping malls. But they could easily move between these spaces because they would share the same regional structure of feeling from living in the Triangle, as the following chapters will argue. That regional structure of feeling would allow the capital drawn into the area by the Triangle's new firms to circulate within the region and the state through the social and cultural geographies of those

that would come to live and work in the area. The structure of feeling would be guided by a regional sense of place in which residents of Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh would be members of the same Triangle community.

The second characteristic of the area that would reinforce this structure of feeling was a constructed suburban geography. While most maps of Durham, Orange, and Wake Counties in the mid-1950s show a striated landscape with concentrations of urban residential geographies and housing clustered around rural townships (with farm land in between), the promotional literature provided images of suburbia to represent the Triangle. Words and pictures of single detached family housing units nestled among pine and oak trees dominate the imagery and are supplemented with descriptive explanations that repeat particular words, including: quiet, clean, safe, low-density, and family-oriented. Much of these verbal and visual markers are juxtaposed to descriptions of the congested miles of pavement in the northeastern cities of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia (even though such portraits of the industrial northeast could easily describe downtown Durham at the time). The farming and industrial landscape is removed and the few suburban developments that had been built (such as Raleigh's Cameron Village) are used to represent the area. Of course, there is no mention of race and the continued segregation of public and private services between blacks and whites that upheld the community economy that the Triangle's growth would be built upon.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Part of which is evident in the exclusion of the historically African-American college now known as North Carolina Central University from being seen as a major university of significance.

Both the unplanned basis and the suburban feel of the region were upheld as reasons for firms to choose the Research Triangle because those planning the area's transformation believed that economic geographies were deeply connected to social geographies. As an advertisement in the industry journal *Industrial Development* declares in bold typeface and a large map of the state, North Carolina offers, "Dispersal PLUS Mass Markets" (Anonymous 1956). This relationship was highlighted by the articulation of a certain sense of community to be found within the Triangle that would be different from the structures of community of those places that would discursively cease to exist in the area. That the area would have a bucolic "park" as the focus of its new industrial activities would become more and more part of the promoted comparative advantage of the Triangle. But as the Triangle would gain its coherence and actually become populated by suburban scientists, their families, and others associated with the growth of Research Triangle Park, the area would struggle to maintain this image as pollution and traffic, rapid population growth, increased disparity of wealth and residential segregation, continued deindustrialization and the increasing interdependence between the Triangle, multinational firms and a globalizing economy would reveal the fragility of this idealized discursive construction of a community economy.

Such developments will be explored in the next chapter and would come to show the naïveté of the Triangle's planners in imagining how the construction of the Triangle would lead to economic development for all in "Tarheelia." One comic from an area paper predicted in tongue-and-cheek terms how the Triangle would impact the area's actual residents, like those in Lowe's Grove or Nelson when the



plans for the research park were officially made public by the Governor's office in September 1957. In one panel a farmer is sitting behind a table, relaxed, selling lemonade and watermelons with a large, satisfied grin. Next to his stand is a handwritten sign that reads, "WELLCOME [sic] TO RESEARCH PARK." He is ready to cash in on the benefits of the Triangle. His wife stands over him with the newspaper and declares, "But Pa, It Ain't Gonna Be THAT Kind of Park" (see Figure 4). Indeed, the community realized by the creation of the Triangle's social and economic geographies would be more like community than the initial visionaries perhaps desired: a temporary crystallization of relations replete with boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and expressions of power through uneven distributions of capital, resources, and access to participation in the production of space. It would be into these striations of relationality that the PLENTY would come to momentarily attempt to intervene, but end up reinscribing in the region.

FIGURE 4



## CHAPTER FOUR: TERRITORIALIZING THE TRIANGLE

### *Introduction*

In 1982, the Triangle J Council of Governments—a regional agency that brings together county and municipal governments in central North Carolina—posited that “[i]n the next 20 years there will be a fusing of the communities of Raleigh, Garner, Cary, Morrisville, Apex, Durham, Chapel Hill and Carrboro” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1982, p. 15). Such a statement is remarkable because it would have been impossible to make even as early as 1959 when construction began on Research Triangle Park. The development of the Park and the development of the region took place along parallel geographical and historical trajectories. The development of the region, however, has always been an incomplete and uneven process. Yet even within that partiality, the regional coherence of central North Carolina around Research Triangle Park has been the dominant way of seeing the area since the 1950s. Before Research Triangle Park, there was little to no regional coherence to the configuration that is so easily recognizable through maps, statistics, and discourse today (or was visible even by 1982). The regionality that has grown alongside Research Triangle Park—known simply as the Triangle—has come out of purposeful planning as well as the attractive force of the Park as a growth pole. As the area around the Park has changed in the past 50 years, so too has the regional imaginary and its material configuration. Yet the birth of the Research Triangle Park also gave birth to a now taken-for-granted idea: that this area functions as a region

with some form of regional coherence, even if that regional territorialization has been splintered by uneven development and inequitable power geometries. This chapter will trace the history of this regionality and show how the regional form has grown along a particular trajectory, producing a particular regionality (and regional subject). As such, this chapter will provide the basis for understanding what the PLENTY is a potential alternative to as an alternative regional imaginary and an alternative set of regional histories and geographies.

### *Beginnings*

The central North Carolina piedmont has long been a space of human geography and a meeting place through which people and place produce translocal trajectories. The earliest human inhabitants used the area's array of rivers to establish a link of trading paths. The most significant of these was the Trading Path connecting modern day Richmond with modern day central South Carolina. This Trading Path is visible in the route of Interstate 85 which cuts through Durham, North Carolina and provides the main transportation artery for what is known as the Urban Crescent of the state (from Durham to Charlotte). The first Europeans and Africans to encounter the piedmont came as conquistadors and missionaries under the Spanish flag in the mid-1500s, though they considered much of the Piedmont inaccessible for permanent settlement due to the headwaters above the Fall Line of the many rivers in the area which limited access to the sea.

The area remained settled by Native Americans and a trading linkage between indigenous peoples and Europeans until the first permanent settlement by Europeans began in the early 1700s. These settlers, primarily English but also Scotch-Irish,

Welsh and German, arrived from Virginia and from the coast as settlement began in earnest past the Falls Line. In 1728, English explorers set out to establish a clear boundary between Virginia's territory and the Carolinas by starting from the coastline and moving west. This push westward allowed Europeans greater access to the piedmont above the Falls Line and pushed settlements further into native people's lands. Population pressures along the Chesapeake Bay in the 1740s that caused a rise in land prices and the order by colonial governments in 1748 to enlist all able-bodied men north of the North Carolina border into the army to fight the French and the Native Americans pushed more English and Scotch-Irish settlers to North Carolina, especially Scotch-Irish. At this time, the colony's population doubled with increasing settlement in the central piedmont area. Of the mostly farmer (white and black) and slave population (slaves constituted 26% of North Carolina's population at the time of the first census in 1790) in North Carolina, nearly 50% lived in the piedmont area. Yet there was no evidence of a regional coherence.

Human geographies circulated between farms and a few central places, such as Hillsborough in the piedmont, where farmers could market surplus, procure supplies, trade, pay taxes, petition the government, and learn about the happenings of the day from travelers in taverns. Hillsborough became an important site for class-based resistance amongst the farmers against the landowning, political elite before the American Revolution with the growth of the Regulator Movement, but other than movement to and from farms from such central places, most lives revolved around the geographical space delimited by horse-drawn transport along trading paths. While some of these networks of movement connected places within the piedmont, little

sense of regional coherence bound the early settlements that remain today in Hillsborough, Pittsboro, Smithfield, Chapel Hill, and Raleigh. However, the piedmont as a whole continued to be a center of population growth in and around these distinct places.

Before the Civil War began, North Carolina's population had grown to 992,622 residents, with 47% living the piedmont area. Farming remained the primary vocation of North Carolinians though in the 1800s agriculture shifted its form, as the mix between subsistence farming and cash crop moved away from a reliance on cotton and tobacco towards peanuts, corn, and peaches (as cotton, and the slaves that cultivated it, moved to the deep south following the efforts of President Andrew Johnson to push Native Americans out of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi and the possibility to make a profit from short-staple cotton which could be grown inland and processed by cotton gins) (Rodgers 1999).<sup>15</sup> In the years during and after the Civil War, the piedmont remained a growing area. In 1900, the state's population hit 1.8 million people with 45% of those living in the piedmont. The years following the Civil War were particularly significant in how the south, North Carolina, and the piedmont began a post-war transition towards an industrial economy. The railroad boom in the post-war south gave rise to new industrial centers such as Carrboro and Durham. While only 1.4% of the country's manufacturing took place in North

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<sup>15</sup> That is not to say that slavery dissipated in North Carolina or the piedmont area. While North Carolina ranked 5<sup>th</sup> of the states in 1790 for number of slaves (behind South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and Maryland), by 1860 that figure had shifted to 7<sup>th</sup>. Indeed, the percentage of the total state population that was enslaved had grown in the 1800s (from 26% to around 33%), yet this growth was surpassed by the use of slaves in places like South Carolina—with 57% of its population enslaved—and Mississippi—with 55% of its population enslaved—by 1860.

Carolina by 1900, half of that manufacturing occurred in the Piedmont in places like Durham.

Newly connected to national and international markets, textile, timber and tobacco manufacture gave a different geographical form to the piedmont. Yet this transition failed to give a clear regional coherence to the area and produced a geography in which Durham (and Burlington to the west) dominated the area's social and economic trajectories. While the circulation of capital did produce a set of linkages which connected Durham and other localities to each other and to investors and consumers in the northeast and Europe, much of the area's growth centered on Durham's prominence in tobacco manufacture. The area did experience the development of a tobacco belt which extended into the coastal plain to feed the cigarette rolling machines in Durham's factories (growing bright-leaf tobacco and helping North Carolina become the nation's largest tobacco producing state). Additionally, Durham's textile production was tied to tobacco, as Julian S. Carr's (for whom Carrboro is named) mills produced cotton bags used by James Buchanan Duke's tobacco factories (and even while Carr and Duke acted as competitors, both invested in each others' mills). Yet Durham's growth as a tobacco center remained primarily focused within Durham. Part of this is because the post-Civil War industrialization of North Carolina took place around textile production, an industry that became very spatially dispersed across the state (even with major centers like Burlington).

While North Carolina led the nation in textile production by 1900 and many locales across the state became closely linked with investors and markets in the

northeast and Europe, the fragmentation of textile production and the rise of smaller mill towns across the state limited the development of regional coherence in the piedmont, but for what emerged loosely between Burlington, Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem in the western edge of the piedmont. Indeed, according to James C. Cobb, “North Carolina led the South in manufacturing employment in 1900, but its population remained more than 90% rural” (Cobb 1984, p. 25). This geographical situation would change dramatically after World War II, the development of Research Triangle Park, and the next major transition that central North Carolina’s piedmont would experience. With the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, the regional coherence of the area began to take form and the community economies of the area became intimately linked to a new geographical object: the Triangle.

#### *Planning for the Triangle: 1950s-1964*

As stressed in the previous chapter, the originators of Research Triangle Park had to grapple with the production of a regional imaginary in addition to the development of a site for research-based industrial geography, even while celebrating how the Triangle was an unplanned space. “This Triangle, it must be emphasized, was not organized as a single entity. It was, and is, three cities...three nationally recognized universities...three counties...three organizations” (McLain 1965, pp. 8-9). Some have even argued that this lack of regional coherence is what made the idea so difficult to realize in its early stages. According to the Duke professor William Hamilton’s recollection about promoting the Park in 1956: “It has long been apparent that it was difficult to sell as a center for research a nebulous, unplanned area of three counties, with no physical embodiment” (Hamilton 1966). While most of the



attention in the early days of its development focused on the Park itself, the initial mappings conducted by the Research Triangle Committee and its successor, the Research Triangle Foundation of North Carolina, did show a glimpse of a regional imaginary (at least in terms of the infrastructure needs for the Park as well as the purported effects declared to potential funders of the project). Much of this regional imaginary tapped into a general ideology regarding the type of space that the Park would need to be located in. As McLain recognized in 1965:

A research and development organization must be able to attract and then hold engineers and scientists...many firms have discovered that it can be done by providing nice, comfortable surroundings—a quiet office, a blackboard, a tree outside the window, perhaps even a squirrel in the tree. (McLain 1965, p. 3)

Yet even while attention was directed at carving out this idyllic space between Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh, the government of North Carolina realized that the potential transformation generated by the Park would be magnificent and would possibly alter the urban configuration of the three cities. Before Research Triangle Park became a clear success (and a stable part of the landscape) in 1965, the state began what would become regional planning and in doing so launched an overall notion of regionality within North Carolina's piedmont. This regional form continues to this day and went through several periods of modification. While the regional configuration has grown (and its power geometries and modes of uneven development have crystallized) over time, the fundamental vision put forth in the early days of the Park remains.

The first Regional Planning Commission for central North Carolina and the first regional planning effort in the state began operations on January 2, 1960. This commission, titled the Research Triangle Regional Planning Commission (RTRPC)

was founded with two goals: first, to “make the Triangle a good place to have the Research Triangle Park”; and, second, to help local governments solve regional problems (Maltbie 1981, p. 33). Planning was understood by state officials as well as some of the business leaders involved in the Park as key to developing the Park in a positive way. In starting the regional planning process with the hope to, as Maltbie notes, “make the area surrounding Research Triangle Park a pleasant and well-planned environment” (Maltbie 1981, p. 33), the attention was now more explicitly cast upon the need for a “pleasant environment” for scientists outside the Park’s boundaries as well as within. The General Assembly of North Carolina first authorized the RTRPC in 1959 but did so without an appropriation of funds. Rather, the localities with the RTRPC’s region would have to provide the money to fund the agency. The localities considered part of the region were Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh as well as the counties of Orange, Durham, and Wake. In addition to the provision of money, the localities would constitute the commission through its elected officials. The RTRPC consisted of the Mayors of the three cities as well as the Chairs of the three County Commissions. Additionally, each County Commission appointed a citizen and the Governor appointed a citizen from each county to the RTRPC.

The first major efforts of the RTRPC were directed towards the infrastructure of the region explicitly related to anticipated urban growth within the localities due to relocations in the Park. Water supply and wastewater issues took precedent as planners and RTRPC officials concerned themselves with the impact of population growth on water resources in the area. While water remained a primary concern, the early days of this regional planning saw the RTRPC produce a number of studies

which covered a wide range of regional needs. Examinations from this regional perspective included: land-use surveys of already existing development, population and economic surveys with projected growth figures, housing surveys, community facility studies, long range capital improvement needs, development alternatives as certain patterns started to emerge in the mid-1960s, transportation, and of course, water and wastewater.

While it was not until 1964 that the RTRPC published its first major report under the leadership of UNC Department of City and Regional Planning graduate Pearson Stewart, the regional planning efforts had been well underway. In 1959, Stewart, an employee of the Research Triangle Foundation (and someone who Romeo Guest would later accuse in letters to associates of trying to oust him from the RTP project (Guest 1982a)), had developed the Park's initial zoning provisions and restrictive covenants with their careful attention to maintaining a clean, quiet, and bucolic landscape. His focus in 1959, and his goal throughout his leadership of the RTRPC, was to help the Park be a "good neighbor" to the region as a whole, just as he hoped the firms within the Park would act with neighborliness to one another. Stewart helped coordinate the first water line between the Park and Durham, constructed between 1959 and 1960, marking a landmark in the provision of new infrastructure for the Park and Durham's expansion of such lines to the outer portions of the county (especially because the City of Durham still remained undecided as of 1958 as to whether or not to commit to water provisions for the Park).

In 1959, the state allocated \$100,000 for construction and improvement of three access roads to the Park, directing money to improve Cornwallis Road,

construct Davis Drive, and construct Hill Road (currently superseded by NC 147, the Durham Freeway). Such an allocation, however, was less remarkable than the water line because the state had maintained a liberal set of policies regarding road improvements linked to economic development. Indeed, it was routine for the state to provide such monies. However, the allocation did indicate what Stewart and other Research Triangle Foundation staff were hoping for: a more regionalized set of transportation linkages that would not only connect the Park to the three cities, but would connect the three cities more easily to each other. RTF staff wanted to see Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh connected through a system of highways and promoted a spur off of I-85 from Durham to Raleigh to the State Highway Commission.

Despite these commitments, and the fact that the Park had actually been built by 1959, the first half of the 1960s proved to be difficult in both developing the Park and cultivating a regional imaginary, let alone territorializing a new regional form. While the remarkable effort by Archie Davis to raise \$1.4 million in 70 days in 1958 in order to buyout Pinelands from Robbins (and his repeated work to raise another \$900,000 by early 1959 to buy water from Durham) indicated much interest in the Park, the Park itself struggled to attract the tenants it had been promoted to obtain and to ring in the statewide transformation from an agricultural and low-wage industrial economy to a revitalized one for all North Carolinians. The first tenant of the Park was the Research Triangle Institute (RTI), a research-based organization that allowed scientists a new meeting space outside the universities to conduct applied research. The first division to open was the Statistical Research Division, funded by John

Sprunt Hill (whose son, George Watts Hill, remained a key player in the Research Triangle Foundation) to conduct social science research and advanced statistical analysis. The next division, opened soon thereafter, was a center for polymer research, funded by the Camille and Henry Dreyfus Foundation, to further applied chemistry research. In 1962, the Research Triangle Foundation donated 26 acres of land within the Park to the U.S. government in order to locate an approved Forestry Sciences Lab. The lab was constructed, taking advantage of the advanced forestry studies available at North Carolina State College and Duke University. But by 1964, only two more sales of land in the Park occurred: one to the American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists and the other to the State of North Carolina for the construction of the North Carolina Science and Technology Center (a center which, some speculate, would have been built by the state regardless of the existence of the Park (Maltbie 1981)). The regional transformation was yet to come.

But the area was changing, slowly, but noticeably in regards to RTP. One of the most remarkable ways was in the wealth that was coming into the area and how that wealth would come to solidify regional disparities among residents. Between 1959 and 1964, total personal disposable income in Durham, Orange, and Wake Counties increased by \$61.4 million over what trends from 1948-58 indicated (a 9% increase)—a growth attributed to the jobs that RTP was able to attract. Such a rise in this one measure of prosperity was 3% higher than the state overall, showing a particular concentration of wealth in the region in the period. Similarly, per capita incomes increased sharply due to the higher paid employees of RTP and retail sales in

the tri-county area increased \$26 million by 1964 over what they would have been without the Park (McLain 1965).

Even with limited evidence of actual regional transformation (the area had seen minimal population growth), Stewart and the RTRPC plugged away at regional planning and their continued belief in the need for a regional coherence to the area. This despite the fact that only the cities of Durham and Raleigh had paid staff planners and the RTRPC had the challenge of coordinating planning among the three counties and the three cities which had little history of integrated or state-assisted planning (though some townships in Wake County coordinated through the North Carolina Division of Community Assistance to a limited degree). Nonetheless, in 1964, the RTRPC published its “1980 General Development Plan” (partially funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) which included an urban land-use map of 1963 data that divided the three counties into 35 sections with detailed survey information of each of these sections. Additionally, this plan provided a series of maps with land-use changes due to projected regional growth by 1980 (based on expectations on the success of Research Triangle Park). Notable of this plan is how Stewart and the RTRPC staff envisioned a regional coherence to the area and presented in striking visual form, that the region was not three counties and three cities, but a single integrated unit of these spatial components. The plan included “existing development, land required by the population projected for 1980, development alternatives, farm land tax assessment, reservation of good sites for industrial development, open space recommendations, proposals of several major highways and discussion of each of the 35 sections of the region” (Maltbie 1981, p.

35). On September 10, 1964, the members of the RTRPC agreed that this plan should be pursued and recommended following its vision for regional urban development.<sup>16</sup>

### *Realizing the Triangle: 1965-1980*

In 1960, fewer than a quarter of North Carolina State University's science and engineering graduates stayed in North Carolina after matriculating. By 1977, over half stayed. Part of the reason for that shift took place in 1965 when Research Triangle Park emerged as a successful way to attract jobs and people to the state. Indeed, it was in the period after 1965 that RTP became solidified as a prominent location for industrial research and it is after this point that the region began to take shape as a territorialized reality on the ground. In 1965, four major announcements occurred to boost the Park from its doldrums and give the region its first taste of interurban growth.

In 1964, the future of RTP was uncertain. But in 1965, after continued heavy recruiting by the Research Triangle Foundation, major commitments shifted the fate of the Park and the region. That year, the U.S. government announced that it would locate its National Institute of Environmental Health, the computing behemoth International Business Machines (IBM) announced it would locate a research division in the Park, and Technitrol, Inc., and Beaunit Fibers made similar announcements. Additionally, the three major universities announced the planned construction of a

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<sup>16</sup> When reviewing this planning at the RTRPC meeting, James E. Briggs, an appointed member of the Committee representing Wake county, noted that the maps included in Pearson's presentation represented "the first time we have had our land use map complete for the entire three-county region" (Research Triangle Regional Planning Commission 1964, p. 3). The minutes from this meeting reveal that the members of the Committee were clearly committed to the regional development efforts and that the RTRPC's maps gave them a clear perspective on how to view and understand the region as a cohesive geographic space.

National Science Foundation-funded Triangle Universities Computation Center in the Park to coordinate computer technology among Duke, UNC, and NCSU as well as the Park firms. Furthermore, the Research Triangle Foundation spawned the Triangle Services Center as a tax paying company in charge of leasing temporary buildings within the Park. The Triangle Services Center opened up the opportunity for commercial activity to take place in the Park for the first time (requiring a revision of the zoning regulations that allowed only research and limited manufacturing). The Teer Corporation—a hospitality firm—took advantage of this new development and leased space for the Governor’s Inn, making it easier for multilocal firms to exchange ideas between the researchers in the Park and other employees in other divisions in other locales. By 1967, the Park had 14 firms and laboratories (Link 2002; Maltbie 1981).

The growth of the Park occurred at the same time that a “silent revolution” was taking place across the U.S. south. Much less visible than the civil rights revolution was the shift in state involvement in planning and land-use development, what was coming to be known as “state growth management” (Godschalk, Knopf et al. 1978). This “silent revolution” not only saw more state involvement in planning, but also a growing acceptance by planners, citizens, government officials, and business leaders that the state should take a lead in planning. Furthermore, the 1960s saw an expansion of planning opportunities for the state in which the regulation of environmental quality, resource management, economic development, urban revitalization, energy conservation, low and moderate housing provisions, agricultural preservation, transportation, and coastal management all fell well within the



legitimate purview of the state's reach. While southern states still preferred to implement state-based planning through municipalities, in North Carolina, municipal governments had been given an "especially broad slate of traditional planning and development regulation powers plus some innovative powers" by the state (Godschalk, Knopf et al. 1978, p. 157). Such a movement for government-led planning and trend towards planning in general underpinning the efforts by the RTRPC to organize and control the foreshadowed growth in the region and convince municipal and counties leaders to buy in to a regional vision for development—tying all their fates together. This regionalism, however, was also encouraged by the federal government, which had devised several programs that required inter-jurisdictional coordination as an eligibility condition. Recognizing that such mandates led to haphazard regional planning efforts,<sup>17</sup> the federal government enacted the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act in 1968. Included in this legislation was "a mandate requiring federal agencies to recognize multicounty regions when established officially and uniformly by the States" (Lee 1980, p. 2).<sup>18</sup>

The list of announced developments for RTP in 1965—especially the acquisition of IBM and an anticipated workforce of 2000—gave additional reason for

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<sup>17</sup> Howard Lee notes in his report on North Carolina's regionalism that these mandates "led to a proliferation of administrative units whose geographic boundaries were selected with little or no consideration for other program alignments. In North Carolina, there were seven local development districts, eleven Comprehensive Health Planning agencies, nineteen Comprehensive Manpower Planning districts, twenty-one law enforcement planning units, two regional planning agencies and four councils of governments. In addition, State agencies had divided the State in more than 70 different ways for various administrative purposes" (Lee 1980, p. 2).

<sup>18</sup> Such legislation follows up on previous pieces of federal law passed by Congress to encourage regional management. A major piece of regional legislation that was extended in 1968 is the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1954, which provided financial aid for regional comprehensive planning in response to growing suburbanization outside municipal jurisdictions.

public and private leaders in the area to think regionally, even if the regionality had yet to become an everyday experience for most residents. Though the maps reviewed by the RTRPC in 1964 showed a clear expression of urban sprawl,<sup>19</sup> for most residents life outside the city boundaries in the emergent suburban sub-divisions was simply that: life outside (and in relationship to) a particular urban area, be it Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Durham, or Raleigh. But that started to change in 1965 due in large part to changes within Research Triangle Park and the associated suburban development around the Park. Between 1959 and 1965, RTP's total payroll went from \$461,740 among a small group of employees to \$8.2 million among 3,350 employees. This expansion—much taking place over 1965—meant that nearly \$12 million had been injected into the area's income stream (taking into account jobs lost due to sector shifts and agricultural land going out of production) with an estimated multiplier effect between \$39.5 million to \$65.8 million. This growth of money in the area not only represented a growth of population but also the circulation of money into housing construction (and retail sales both in the city centers and in new suburban shopping centers). Between 1965 and 1972, almost 56,000 new housing starts added new units to the existing housing stock of the region (Triangle J Council of Governments 1974). While not all of this growth occurred outside the city centers (Raleigh in particular had been experiencing major apartment complex development since 1964), much of this growth followed the patterns of suburbanization occurring

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<sup>19</sup> At the same meeting, Briggs declared: "I think as we drive around the region—as we drive back and forth to the airport or between Chapel Hill and Raleigh or between Durham and Raleigh—we're apt not to realize just how much residential development there is in the countryside. It really is tremendous. The city planners like to talk about urban sprawl and urban dispersal; I'm not sure what these words mean. But, the fact is that a great many people in our region do live out in the countryside" (Research Triangle Regional Planning Commission 1964, p. 3).

across the U.S. after World War II. But more significantly, in this region, the growth helped create a regional conurbation within and between the three major urban centers and solidifying the location of the Triangle as a clear region where people lived.

With the rapid growth and emergent regionality at hand, planners within the RTRPC continued to push a coherent and orderly regional development scheme to manage the growth associated with the Park. In 1969, the RTRPC published a massive follow up to the General Plan of 1964 replete with color maps of Chatham, Durham, Orange, and Wake Counties divided into 39 sections. The spatial imaginary of these planners had expanded since 1964, as the base map incorporates more land outside Durham, Orange and Wake Counties and outlines a plan for the anticipated 1,140,000 people that were anticipated to reside in the region by 2020. Each map shows in rich detail water and sewer lines, open spaces, residential housing, industrial and commercial land uses, watersheds, utility lines, roads, railways, and farmland. It is a complete land use inventory of the area and shows an expansion of residential and non-agricultural land uses (as well as the associated infrastructure) between the three urban areas (as well as outside them). In short the maps, especially when compared to the maps generated in 1964, show the urban areas growing into each other into an urban region. For the RTRPC planners, this gave rise to several concerns as the growth was often occurring in a less-than-ideal managed fashion. Their goals in showing these maps was to produce a development guide that would still encourage growth (and the type of growth associated with RTP and its higher-income residents) as well as stave off the problems associated with that growth such

as a lack of affordable housing, pollution, and loss of open spaces. As the authors of the Guide note:

“There is much in the quality of the urban areas of the Research Triangle Region that is good. There is much that is in urgent need of improvement. The quality of the areas of forthcoming development is unknown; perhaps these areas will demonstrate the great pride the Region has itself, perhaps not. The Research Triangle Regional Planning Commission holds that there is much that local government and private developers acting together can do to build the new and rebuild the old in order to achieve the living environment that all the people in Region require. The Commission holds that there is much that can be done that does not require revolution, much that can be done immediately with the use of energy, initiative, and cooperative action...basically, the Research Triangle Regional Planning Commission recommends that the Region adopt the principle of a good fusion of town and country as basic in the development and redevelopment of its urban areas.”  
(Research Triangle Regional Planning Commission 1969)

While the planners of the RTRPC stressed the careful management of water and sewer needs through “cooperative water resource planning” and a vision of an “open space network” in the region, they also pushed recommendations to alleviate the growing the crystallization of class (and race) divisions which RTP was (rhetorically, at least) meant to resolve. Such recommendations encouraged housing provisions for those most in need—recognizing that more and more people, especially the rural residents, were being priced out of the housing market. Above all, however, the RTRPC planners pushed a regional urban vision by suggesting that most residential development should take place as low-density housing out of urban areas divided by “natural area strips” and connected by a regional system of utilities, highways and roads. While the recommendations for housing may have been a way to avoid alienating local authorities (especially in Durham and Wake Counties) enjoying the increased tax revenues from wealthier RTP employees wanting single-family detached housing away from urban centers, the planners did raise “critical” housing issues impacting the poorer residents of the area: the dilapidated conditions of the current housing stock (both urban and rural), septic tank problems related to

soil conditions, and a spatial mismatch between low-income residents, quality affordable housing, jobs, and transportation. While there were limited solutions put forth, the RTRPC staff couched these issues as regional ones. Additionally, the planners envisioned a regional “water structure” and linkages between open spaces to underpin their regional vision and regional problem solving strategies.

Much of this regional imaginary was necessitated by what was actually taking place on the ground in the area. Between 1958 and 1965, 10% of the land in the area was urbanized (doubled from before 1958) and there was a 30% reduction in cropland (even though the agricultural productivity of the area grew due to technological advancements). Between 1960 and 1970, Durham, Orange and Wake Counties gained 95,207 residents and its growth was outpacing North Carolina and the southeast as a whole (and the growth in the 1960s was 1.7 times the rate of growth for the United States). The majority of the growth was taking place in Wake County—55% of new housing units added between 1965 and 1972 occurred there—but Carrboro experienced a rapid and noticeable increase in its urban density with an influx of new residents (after a period of some population decline following the closing of the textile mills after World War II into the mid-1960s). Carrboro’s population increased 153% between 1960 and 1970 and the town had the most intense housing development of the region between 1965 and 1972 (claiming 31% of Orange County’s new housing starts—in part because it remained cheaper than Chapel Hill and Durham). While Wake County had the most growth, it also had some of the lowest density of its growth, even though 56% of Raleigh’s new units were apartments. Similarly, Durham County started to experience increased urban

sprawl and low-density development and its municipal borders started to expand outward to catch all the new development. By 1972, Durham City had 80% of the County's new dwelling units even though many of these were being built further and further from the city center (Triangle J Council of Governments 1974).

The 1970s experienced an even greater increase in population, wealth, disparity, and regional form. Part of this process of creating an even more coherent regional form is evidenced by the ways in which the region came to be studied and managed following the efforts of the RTRPC. In 1969, the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) passed legislation to create multi-county planning regions in order to give the type of integrated coherence called for by the 1968 federal law. In 1970, the official boundaries of the regions were declared in an Executive Order by the Governor after the state's Department of Administration developed a statewide regional map from a year of study and coordination with local officials. The Order deemed 17 regions in the state (it would become 18 in 1978 after one region split into two) and the Research Triangle Region of the Research Triangle Regional Planning Commission became the Triangle J Region. Reflecting the urban growth that had occurred around RTP, the official boundaries of the region included not only the original three counties of Durham, Orange and Wake, but also the adjacent counties of Chatham, Johnston, and Lee (indicating that the region would grow in southern and easterly directions). The following year, the NCGA authorized the creation of Regional Councils of Government to help coordinate regional activity and the RTRPC was merged into the Triangle J Council of Governments (TJCOG) (Lee 1980). The regions themselves were deemed coherent due to the "existence of

linkages and interdependencies between the urban areas and surrounding areas...[and] the presence of psychological ties between the people in the counties” (Crouse 1971, p. 29).

Indeed, both physical and mental links to this regional form took root throughout the 1970s. TJCOG continued the work of RTRPC by publishing reports and surveys of the region, providing the public as well as government officials a clear way to view the area as regional and with a regional perspective for problem-solving. In the early 1970s, TJCOG published a series of reports to aid in comprehensive regional planning and capture the regional patterns of development and movement within the area. Some of these reports focused on specific dimensions of the regional housing market (such as the 1973 report on mobile home use showing a 700% increase in mobile home use in the region in the 1960s, housing a portion of the upper portion of the lower-middle class population (Triangle J Council of Governments 1973)). Others provided a more survey view of the region, such as the 1973 Land Classification Plan adopted by Chatham County. Such reports reveal a region that was growing quickly with remarkable wealth but also leaving many behind. In 1974, the TJCOG published a report on new residential housing construction with the express purpose of increasing the housing supply, especially for “those who need it most, families of limited income” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1974, p. iv).

Part of the growing concern among the officials involved with TJCOG in the 1970s was the realization of the effects of the regional urbanization on the rural residents. By 1980, “Rural non-farm development in North Carolina ha[d] been increasing since 1950 at the same time rural farm populations ha[d] substantially

decreased. This trend is visible in Region J as scattered subdivisions and large –lot developments [grew] within commuting distances of employment clusters,” most notably, Research Triangle Park (Triangle J Council of Governments 1980a, p. 14). By 1980, RTP employed 17,000 people and Raleigh and Durham combined to provide over 50% of the region’s jobs (due to the state capital in Raleigh and the expansion of the Duke University medical complex throughout the 1970s, as well as the location of RTP). Furthermore, the region followed the nation in a transitional shift in formal economic activities: “in the urban areas, transition from labor intensive to capital intensive industrial and toward a more service-based economy” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1980a, p. 3) with a subsequent impact on the surrounding rural areas. Around RTP, that meant that rural counties started to shift from textile and apparel manufacture towards electronics manufacture related to the research conducted at RTP (the region experienced a 243% increase in electronics manufacture between 1960 and 1980). Even so, the rural areas of the region shifted at a different pace than the urbanized counties of Durham, Orange, and Wake and a clearer division began to be seen in the 1970s between the wealth of RTP its associated subdivisions in the surrounding counties, and those generational residents who lived in the rural areas and worked outside of the Park’s research and development firms. As planners within TJCOG noticed with concern, “there is an employment dependence in Region J on slow growth manufacturing sectors—tobacco, textiles, and apparel” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1980a, p. 5). Even so, by 1980 it was clear that “[b]y conventional measures, Region J is experiencing vigorous economic growth—high job and population growth, low



unemployment, and income approaching the national average. Approximately half the employment growth is due to regional comparative advantage,” much of it related to Research Triangle Park (Triangle J Council of Governments 1980a, p. 11).

Indeed, between 1960 and 1978, the region experienced a 42.3% increase in population, a rate of increase that was double North Carolina’s growth overall and 1.5 times that of the rapidly expanding sunbelt states.<sup>20</sup> Nearly half of the growth was due to net in-migration—by comparison, only 8.5% of North Carolina’s overall growth came from in-migration and the sunbelt states grew only 28% in such a way. The geography of this growth remained suburban as the rural population growth rate shifted from being one-sixth the growth rate of the cities to one-half.<sup>21</sup> Much of this took place east of the Park, and officials noted that “the Raleigh-Cary area has become the foremost residential area for employees of the Park” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1980a, p. 35). But growth spread out in all directions to fill in the regional map with sprawl, incorporating new places into the regional form and giving the regional territorialization of the Triangle a wider scope (and a less triangular shape). As planners within TJCOG stated: “Durham, Wake and Orange County growth patterns are, to a marked degree, tied to the growth of the Research Triangle

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<sup>20</sup> These states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

<sup>21</sup> Part of the suburban growth was underwritten by the state through the decentralized highway policies of North Carolina which uniformly maintained rural roads and urban roads, so the areas outside of cities across the state and in the region had quality access. Such growth was also underwritten by the provision of water and sewer lines, as by 1980 Morrisville in Wake County was the only incorporated area without public water. Sewer lines were less available—and a major concern to regional planners who feared the use of septic systems in a region without proper soils (Triangle J Council of Governments 1980b)—as Goldston, Broadway, Holly Springs, Morrisville, Rolesville, Four Oaks, Micro, and Pine Level lacked public sewer connections by 1980. Even so, by the 1980s, most of the region was linked by a common system of water and sewer lines.

Park as is the trend in northeast Chatham County, since pressure for development in Chapel Hill is now finding a substantial part of its release to northeast Chatham” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1980a, p. 31).

This growth was quickly changing the regional demographics, as new residents brought new wealth from the new jobs created across the region in association with the expansion of RTP. In the 1970s, the new jobs outpaced new people, 87,500 to 85,400, and the region experienced a 50% growth rate in the job market (so much so, that new residents had to be continually attracted to the area to meet the demand). The growth was particular to the region according to demographers and economists with the Triangle J Council of Governments who calculated that 93% of the total change in the manufacturing sectors was tied to regional advantage and that 50% of total growth in the 1970s was related to an expanded regional share of national markets, especially in chemicals, metals, and machinery manufacture. While the chemical industry (tied directly to firms in RTP) was rapidly rising in the area since the eventual success of Research Triangle Park, the region saw a decline in lumber processing and wood-related manufacture even compared to national rates that showed decline. Similarly, while there was a national decline in tobacco and textile production throughout the 1970s, the region saw a more significant drop (especially noticeable in a region that once led the nation in textile and apparel output). According to the regional economic survey published by TJCOG in 1980: “White collar and service workers account for a much higher percentage of regional employment when compared to the state. Consequently, the blue collar categories of craft workers, operators, and laborers play a relatively

smaller role in providing jobs in the regional economy” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1980a, p.69). Interestingly enough, the region experienced an increase in textile plants during the 1970s (but for Orange County, which had a 22% decrease) and North Carolina was second to Georgia for having the highest concentration of such firms in the country in 1980. Yet these factories employed less people due to technological innovations and industry restructuring.

Such a transformation is visible in the regional income data and shows the disparity of wealth that is as much a part of the regional form as the success of Research Triangle Park. In 1970, the per capita income gap was \$621 below the U.S. average for the sunbelt states as a whole, \$693 below for North Carolina, and \$365 for the six-county region of Region J. By 1978, the sunbelt states were \$860 below the U.S., North Carolinians were \$1,200 behind overall, and the residents of the Triangle were \$401 below the national average. Yet Wake County alone was near parity with the U.S. average per capita income and the more urban counties—Durham, Orange and Wake—had a much smaller income gap than the more rural counties of the region.

Indeed, while the region as a whole could be seen as a more urbanized, more wealthy, and more populous coherent geographic space than it was before 1965, that coherence had its own internal fractures. As an urban area, Wake County alone constituted the U.S. Census Bureau’s Statistical Metropolitan Area between 1950 and 1970, but in 1973 a revision of these designations changed the name of the area to the Raleigh-Durham SMSA and included Durham, Orange and Wake Counties. The planners and policy-makers of the 1970s began to discuss the differences between the

SMSA counties (Durham, Orange and Wake) and the non-SMSA counties (Chatham, Lee, and Moore). When compared to other sunbelt metropolitan areas, the SMSA counties, the Raleigh-Durham SMSA remained above average in population, employment, and per capita income growth. Yet including the rural, non-SMSA counties greatly diminished the region's standings. Such a disparity (as well as the disparity between suburban Durham and central-city Durham) was noted in TJCOG's 1980 survey in which researchers estimated that of the 250,000 housing units in the region, 10% were substandard and the majority of these were located in the non-SMSA counties. This substandard housing stock was linked to a tight housing market that saw a 2-3% annual expansion rate, a 20% annual increase in home prices, and race-related inequities and economic discrimination by realtors and lenders. By 1980, one out of every eight households spent more than they could afford on housing in the region and the most significant negative impacts of the changing region economy were felt by longtime residents of the area, residents who lived in the locale well before it was the Triangle.

But increasingly, these residents were less and less a part of the Triangle and the image of who populated the region. While some planners and officials with a regional perspective saw that the prosperous region with the lowest unemployment rate in North Carolina also had greater than 25% of its households in poverty by the end of the 1970s (with the heaviest concentration in the rural Johnston County), others were celebrating the new regional identity through such media as Triangle Magazine, started in 1972 (from what was called Raleigh Magazine) with human interest stories, advertisements for high-end real estate in rural sub-divisions, food

and wine reviews, and updates on research conducted in Research Triangle Park. While the editors of Triangle Magazine posited that the publication could “serve the family of communities in the entire Research Triangle Area” because the “cities and towns which make up the Triangle Area have so much in common” (Triangle Magazine 1972, p. 2), others saw less cohesion even within the regional coherence: “although Region J compares well with other North Carolina regions in terms of most economic indicators, it does not measure up to national averages, and that, consequently, many families are inadequately housed, access to health facilities is often poor and many families must rely on public assistance programs for the basic necessities of life” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1978, p. VII-3). Nor did such distinctions make their way into a 1977 article in *Forbes* magazine about the region replete with images of scientists at work in idyllic landscapes and maps of RTP and university linkages (unknown 1977). Rather, the region became taken-for-granted as the Triangle—a rapidly growing area with a booming economy and a population of suburban scientists and their financially stable families.

#### *Managing the Triangle: 1980-1995*

Over the next 15 years, the region experienced a continued boom and its regionality as the Triangle became solidified as a taken-for-granted concept. The local press started to refer to the area as “Silicon Valley East” as early as 1980 but computing and electronics-related industries were only a part of what gave the region the lowest unemployment rate in the nation at a time when the country was experiencing a major recession after the stagflation of the 1970s. As the regional identity and coherence became further territorialized, citizens, planners, and

politicians turned attention to managing the region and containing the rapid growth that had taken place since the mid-1960s. At its heart it was a struggle to balance the continued expansion and success of the region for those who were seeing its benefits with a desire to protect the remaining open spaces which had been so attractive to the new research-based firms in the first place, as well as a hope to spread the region's wealth more evenly.

Pollution had been a major concern throughout the 1970s with the expanded growth of the area. Not only was there the potential for industrial pollution associated with the chemical production industries spun off from RTP (concern over industrial pollution had a long history in the area, especially in Durham, with the linkages between the textile and tobacco factories and air and water pollution), but air pollution due to automobile emissions came to the top of many people's environmental concerns in the region as across the country. As early as 1978, the Environmental Protection Agency declared Durham a non-attainment area for achieving reductions in smog and carbon monoxide levels, pollution directly linked to automobiles. While the 1970s saw a general increase in environmental consciousness in the U.S., in the Triangle region people's attention was on traffic as a pollutant to both the environment and the economy. The growth of the non-urban areas in the region and the continuation of low-density urbanization led to more and more traffic. This traffic was seen as a blight on the image of the Triangle as a bucolic space and increasingly understood as a detriment to continued growth as well as a limitation on the quality of life available to those already living in the area.

Connected to traffic was the issue of urban sprawl. The issue of sprawl showed what would become an ambivalent pattern in dealing with the Triangle as a regional space: on the one hand, celebrations of the Triangle as an area with the amenities of city life but without the grime of cities (an element of the area that Guest heavily promoted to northern businesses) and on the other hand a recognition that the pattern of urbanization was beginning to choke itself. In general, however, the region continued to be led by pro-growth politics and expand in the same way, even with greater calls for its management. In 1980, James Rouse (the developer of Boston's Faneuil Hall and Baltimore's Inner Harbor) led a workshop for regional leaders on the problems of urban sprawl. While Rouse (whose development company would build the Streets at Southpoint shopping center 20 years later outside of any of the region's city centers) projected continued and rapid growth for the area, warning of sprawl, "Rouse praised North Carolina for being the 10th largest state in terms of population while having no city larger than 300,000" and he called the state a model of low-density urbanism (Campbell 1980).

This strange articulation follows the general state policies on urban growth in North Carolina, especially the policies of "Balanced Growth" that appeared in the early 1970s and became cornerstone policy efforts by Governor James Hunt in the early 1980s. Such policies fell in line with the dispersed urbanism that had characterized North Carolina from its beginnings and led to what Stuart notes as "[o]ne of the most striking things about [North Carolina] is its peculiar geographical dispersal of population and development" (Stuart 1979, p. 9). North Carolina remained a "rural" state into the 1980s even with the urbanization of the Triangle and

the continued growth of the entire urban Piedmont Crescent between Raleigh and Charlotte throughout the 20th Century, meaning that over 50% of the residents lived in rural areas. Interestingly enough, this has not meant a lack of industry or urban economies—indeed, in 1970, North Carolina led the nation in percentage of workers in factories—it is that North Carolina has maintained a long history of deconcentrated urban growth and non-agglomerated urban economies (even with the expansion of RTP). The challenge that many grappled with in the Triangle at a regional scale was whether or not to maintain that pattern of growth. Indeed, the Triangle J Council of Governments’ regional planning efforts can be understood as an explicit statement against such dispersed urbanism.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the early 1980s, the public and policy makers debated urban growth, sprawl and the emerging traffic congestion on major thoroughfares in the press. In 1984, the *Raleigh News and Observer* ran a series of articles expressing business leaders’ concern that a lack of coordinated regional planning had led to sprawl, intense traffic, and increased limitations on the Triangle’s capacity to maintain its position as a successful region. In March of that year, officials from Duke University expressed similar sentiments about the region, noting that the region’s overall quality of life was at stake (Hill 1984b). Similarly, the Governor weighed in, and pushed for increased powers for regional bodies like the TJCOG to implement comprehensive regional plans in order to alleviate such quality of life issues like sprawl and traffic congestion (Hill 1984a).

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<sup>22</sup> Such a notion comes directly from Jonathan Howes, former Chair of the TJCOG and Director of UNC’s Center for Urban and Regional Studies (Stuart 1979).



Such concerns are interesting in terms of territorializing the region because they reveal that the region's identity was well grounded enough discursively and materially that it could now be damaged or even lost entirely. The Triangle as a region, and as an economically successful region filled with wealthy suburbanites of the post-industrial economy shaped by Research Triangle Park, could now be taken for granted. Similarly, transportation and related issues of air pollution and urban sprawl were clearly understood as regional problems needing regional solutions. While planners within TJCOG had discussed and designed regional transit systems since the beginning of the organization (leading planning efforts in the 1970s for public regional transit that are still yet to be realized), such ideas entered into the public discourse strongly in the 1980s after the growth of the 1970s solidified the place as a region. Articles and opinions pieces such as the *News and Observer's* September 7, 1986 opinion piece demanding regional transportation planning became common across the area (Bonk 1986). Even with such pleas, many were careful not to challenge the underpinning urbanism of the area that had contributed to its rapid expansion. As the guest author wrote: "We can have single-family neighborhoods that are livable and provide transportation alternatives as well as attractive multi-family projects that contribute to neighborhood character." Similarly, the editors of the *News and Observer* critiqued the ways in which Interstate 40 provided the Triangle with its proper image of too much concrete and too many cars moving too slowly, the call was for more coordinated planning around the I-40 corridor, rather

than a radical revisioning of how the Triangle could be an urban space (News and Observer 1986b).<sup>23</sup>

While some planners by the end of the 1980s referred to the region as one with a transportation crisis—eventually leading the Department of Transportation to create a regional transit authority—the basis of the crisis was the ways in which a lack of regional transit options diminished the regional coherence of an area that was understood to be a single geographic space. “Although the Region functions as a single economic unit in many ways, there is no dependable public transit system operating on a frequent schedule and at convenient times to connect the Region’s communities” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1987). Disparity within the region—especially between the urban and non-SMSA counties—were increasingly understood as regional problems tied to the regional form rather than evidence that the region was less coherent than many imagined it being. The disparities were less problems in and of themselves of specific historical trajectories that were more durable than the type of regional development which took place and more outcomes of unmanaged regional growth that directed properly, could still indeed help those not seeing the same economic boon as the scientists in RTP. Proposals for a regional telephone system, a World Trade Center to connect local exporters to foreign markets, new roads, and greater regional planning that considered local plans

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<sup>23</sup> As the authors of a report on planning for the year 2000 in the early 1980s note: “...left to itself, growth becomes a harsh master...But when thoughtful minds bend themselves to the task...growth becomes the servant and we its master” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1982, p. 3).

components of a more general urban plan became the primary regional solutions to issues of intra-regional disparities of wealth.<sup>24</sup>

Part of the reason for this regional imaginary is tied to the expanded success of RTP and the increased numbers of people moving into the area that were benefiting from the Park's boom. In the 1980s, the six Region J counties gained almost 200,000 more residents and by 1993, the Raleigh-Durham Metropolitan Statistical Area of Durham, Franklin, Orange, and Wake Counties became the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill MSA and Chatham and Johnston Counties were added to the list. This continued population growth was spurred by concerted efforts to expand business in the Triangle through RTP among both public and private interests. At the beginning of the 1980s, then-Governor Hunt focused attention on the growth potential of the microelectronics industry in the Park, an industry that would provide both higher-paying tertiary sector jobs and industrial production jobs and which was the fastest sector of the electronics industry at the time (Raleigh-Durham picked for growth 1981; Triangle J Council of Governments 1981; Whittington 1981).<sup>25</sup> Through the Governor's efforts, the Microelectronics Center of North Carolina was founded to aid the recruitment of industry firms to the state. While the local plant closings revealed the industrial shift in clear terms as textile and apparel factories moved out of North Carolina and the nation entered a major recession, the firms in

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<sup>24</sup> And with minimal regional discussion about racial disparities—such concerns were left to the local politics, such as in Durham and its politics of urban renewal—even when such racialized politics allowed for regional connectivity (like the construction of the Durham Freeway connecting Interstates 85 and 40) and in the process destroyed the historically black Hayti neighborhood (Anderson, J. B. 1990).

<sup>25</sup> It was also the basis for the celebrated successes of Silicon Valley in California and its rival research park connected to Stanford University.

RTP flourished and more capital came into the region. In addition to capital investments from within the United States, foreign direct investment (FDI) started to arrive in the region and push North Carolina towards a high ranking of U.S. states receiving FDI. Before the 1980s, only Burroughs Wellcome represented major FDI in the region, as a U.S. subsidiary of a British held company. Due to major public and private recruiting efforts (including trips abroad by Governor Hunt himself) German and Japanese FDI starting flowing into the region. In 1983, when the nation was at the peak of a recession, Governor Hunt declared that more U.S.-owned and foreign owned companies announced new plants in North Carolina than any other state. The *Boston Globe* ran a special Sunday story on the Triangle with a focus on Research Triangle Park and its low-density growth, calling the area a “fantasy land” and noting that: “[w]hile much of the state and the rest of the nation continue to suffer from record unemployment levels, these are the best of times for the Triangle” (Schneider 1983). While North Carolina’s unemployment rate hovered over 10%, the Triangle region had the lowest unemployment rate in the nation. 1983 marked the biggest year yet for RTP in terms of investments, employees, and new growth. Additionally, the region’s economy continued to diversify, attracting pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms to the area, in part, through state expenditures (such as the North Carolina Biotechnology Center).

However, despite the laudatory remarks of the region, within the area, disparity remained, tearing at the coherence of the region. Even with such stellar statistical measures, the unemployment rate among African-Americans in the region was three times that of whites. And despite a building boom in RTP that started in

the early 1980s—led by significant FDI—and the creation of the Research Triangle Foreign Trade Zone to further facilitate regional economic development, the rural residents outside of amenity-filled sub-divisions and the urban poor failed to experience this boom the same way. Rather, those on the fringes of the Triangle’s regionality experienced greater isolation and poverty with the introduction of crack in the mid-1980s, plant closures, low-wages in many of the production spin-offs, reduced agriculture, and cut-backs in governmental aid (from both the state and the federal levels) (Abram 2005; Anderson, J. B. 1990). As early as 1983, Romeo Guest even noted in his diaries his concern that the region had gotten out of control. On March 20 of that year, Guest noted his worry that family farmers in the region would be pushed out by the continued expansion of the Triangle and that the emergent national farm crisis would be felt hard in the area. As the *News and Observer* quipped: “[i]t takes no more than a drive through the narrow back streets of Southeast Raleigh to see that the Research Triangle’s prosperity is a hoax for many residents” (News and Observer 1986a).

#### *The Global Triangle: 1995 to today*

In 1990, the Triangle J Council of Governments published a report from its study of the regional image. With particular attention to the link between regional image and economic development in terms of attractive investment in an international political economy of place, the authors state that “there is no question that the aesthetic character of our Region and its communities has attracted industry, good jobs and quality housing” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1990, p. 3). In conducting this study, TJCOG wanted to encourage area residents to consider what

made the region visually a region and what made the region visually appealing as a region. With responses ranging from old mill architecture to interstate highways, the authors urged that the future of the region required a modern vision—linked to Guest’s original imagery—which simultaneously gave a visual harmony to the area and a regional sense of place. “But the character of the Region as a whole is a contemporary one, focused on high technology architecture, laboratories, classrooms, planned residential and commercial centers all nestled in a forested setting” (Triangle J Council of Governments 1990, p. 45). By the start of the 1990s, the region had achieved a coherent, even if a fractured one. In the 1990s, especially in the middle of the decade, to the current moment, that territorialized space has been located in relationship to new geographical processes, many understood by regional leaders to be global or international in scope. On the one hand, such a globalization of the region has come about through the region’s intersection with transnational lives, primarily moving people between central North Carolina and South Asia as well as Middle America. On the other hand, the globalization of the region has come through continued FDI, the further expansion of the tertiary sectors through RTP, and a growing sense of competition with other regions around the world, not just the northeastern U.S. or California.

South Asian migration to North Carolina was well underway in the 1970s following a trend across the nation that saw more immigrants from the Global South into the U.S. after revisions of immigration law in the 1960s. However, a significant and steady stream of South Asians started to arrive in the 1990s with an associated growth of firms in the knowledge sectors of the economy and more and more in-

migration became targeted towards the Triangle region. Similarly, the area universities saw a growth of South Asian students. In addition to a professional class of financially stable immigrants, working class South Asians started arriving to the area to provide goods and services associated with an ethnic niche market (South Asian foods, imports, and media). South Asians rank as the fourth largest racial/ethnic group behind whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics in the region and further complicating the traditional racial politics of the area (South Asian Voices 2002). Such new residents have diversified the area ethnically, even if many South Asian residents have clustered in places like Cary and Chapel Hill. While these new immigrants often struggle with how they fit into the region's supposed cohesiveness and challenge the sense that there is a single community economy that has been forged through the regional territorialization around Research Triangle Park, such residents also indicate one of the many ways in which the region is appearing on a global map of international flows as a region.

In addition to South Asian immigrants, the region has seen a major in-flow of Spanish-speaking immigrants from the U.S. southwest, Mexico, and Central American countries of origin. This trend has followed the trajectory of the U.S. and the U.S. south in the past decade, but the connection between central North Carolina and Mexico in particular has strengthened with the passing of the North American Free Trade Agreement and linkages created through the textile industries and agricultural sectors (including industrial sectors of agriculture, such as poultry processing). Carrboro alone experienced an over 900% increase in its Hispanic population between 1990 and 2000 and the region's Hispanic population continues to

grow. While many of these new residents have come to permanently locate in the region, many are also producing a dynamic transnational and translocal space between the region and other places through migrant labor patterns, remittances, and seasonal residential patterns. Such shifts in the region's demographics have given rise to reactionary politics which seek to purify the region from these "invaders" (understood to be taking jobs from "local" residents), but generally the region has been a welcoming space and has prospered with the addition of these in-migrants. What is clear is that the influx of Hispanics to the area has meant that the region is not simply part of a global network of people, goods and capital, but rather a node in a complex and dynamic translocal geography.<sup>26</sup>

Along with the transformation of the area's demographics through immigration, the region has also entered a competitive, globalized political economy of place as a region even more intensely since the mid-1990s. While the area has always been connected to translocal processes and international events (i.e. the Regulators' impact on Revolutionary fervor; the cotton purchases by factories in Birmingham, England to underpin King Cotton and make the Confederate States of America the 4th largest economy of its day; Durham's reliance on international tobacco markets since the late 1880s; munitions productions in piedmont mills during both World Wars; the restructuring of the textile sector during post-war deindustrialization and after the passing of NAFTA), North Carolina became

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<sup>26</sup> It is also important to note the significant rise in immigration from sub-Saharan Africa to the region, though most of this has been focused towards Greensboro to the west and the coastal plain cities. Part of this is because federal relocation assistance programs for refugees have identified these areas as acceptable areas of relocation (following similar decisions made by immigration officials with Vietnamese and Hmong refugees).



increasingly linked to global markets and competition for FDI and multinational firm relocations since the mid-1990s. The diversification of the regional economy continued into the 1990s and brought both new FDI and new markets to local exporters. Between 1995 and 2000, North Carolina as a whole increased its international exports with a significant share coming from the Triangle through textile, computer, and electronics products (though led by the chemicals sector). By 1999, North Carolina ranked third in the nation for FDI (mostly from Europe) and in 2003 6.3% of North Carolina's private investment came from FDI (above the U.S. average of 4.7% amongst the 50 states). North Carolina ranked 10th among states with foreign-controlled company employment, dominated by firms headquartered in the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, France and Japan. Again in 2003, 13.8% of North Carolina's manufacturing employment was from foreign companies with much of this FDI centered in the Triangle region. In 2005, North Carolina was the 14th largest exporter of U.S. states, seeing a \$2.1 billion increase in the value of exports between 2001-2005 (26% of those exports went to Canada). Such growth reflects changes in where the state and the region exports to: China and Honduras saw significant growth as a location for exports between 2001-2005. India saw the largest growth with a 189% increase since 2001 (Atkinson 2002; Dennison 2006; Office of Trade and Industry Information 2006).

Currently, regional economic development strategies are intimately linked a global imaginary and regional boosters celebrate the region's place with a global economy (especially within the pharmaceutical, biotechnology, computing, nanotechnology, informatics, and auto parts manufacturing sectors). This globalized

understanding of the region—building on the efforts to produce a regional sense of place—is led both by public entities such as TJCOG, as well as private organizations, such as the Research Triangle Regional Partnership (RTRP). The RTRP was originally founded in 1990 as the Raleigh-Durham Association to coordinate the marketing of Durham, Orange and Wake counties to national and international firms. By 1993, the group reorganized into the Raleigh-Durham Regional Association and expanded to the newly formed Raleigh-Durham Metropolitan Statistical Area. In 1994, the North Carolina General Assembly authorized the creation of seven economic regions to coordinate such place marketing through the state’s Department of Commerce. The Raleigh-Durham Regional Association became the Research Triangle Regional Partnership and expanded to 13 counties: Chatham, Durham, Franklin, Granville, Harnett, Johnston, Lee, Moore, Orange, Person, Vance, Wake and Warren Counties. RTRP has pushed for greater regional coordination and recently sponsored a major regional economic analysis by Michael Porter. Porter’s analysis—in which he urged regional leaders to “broaden the economy by integrating with a wider geographic region” (Porter 2001)—expanded the territoriality of the region to an 18 county Economic Area, justified by the need for greater regional coherence in a global economy. Porter’s research has shown that the region is in good economic health but that its continued well-being requires an even more coherent regionalism. He quotes an area education leader: “There are too many governments—twenty plus municipalities for only 1 million leads to a lack of regional cooperation and planning. They don’t go to the state with one voice” (Porter 2001). Porter’s work has led the RTRP to institute a 5 year, \$5 million plan to create

100,000 jobs in the region's 13 counties, titling its agenda "Staying on Top: Winning the Job Wars of the Future" and locating the region—as a region—firmly in a global competition for investment. Some of these efforts have already been actualized. Between 2004-2005, the region added 43,000 new jobs (recovering from a recession in 2002 linked to the bursting of the information technologies bubble), had a 40% increase in venture capital streams, saw average wages rise in all 13 counties, and had office space vacancies drop. In 2005 and again in 2006, the RTRP sponsored a legislative agenda to lobby the NCGA from a regional space in order to advance regional economic development for the 13 county area. This represents a geographical imaginary well beyond what Guest had in mind when he looked at a map and saw a Triangle.

### *Conclusion*

In 2005, the region's population hit over 1.7 million people. That is the regional population of the 13 counties of the Research Triangle Regional Partnership's region. The region has grown in both material and discursive form since its emergence in the 1950s and has expanded both internally—becoming a cohesive and relatively integrated regional conurbation—as well as externally—hardening its links to other places and becoming newly translocal as a region. Yet it is a region that is comprised of 63 separate cities and towns (not to mention unincorporated areas) despite an annexation binge since the turn of the century. Of these 63 places, 47 have populations below 10,000 (many with populations below 1,000). While the region's unemployment rate stands at 3.7% as of March 2006 (down from a recent high of 6.1% during the 2002 recession), there is still significant

disparity and difference with the region in terms of how the region is experienced as a coherent place of wealth and economic success. Whether in the ghettoized areas of central Durham city or the rural farms of Johnston County, the experiences of the region vary, even if the area can be understood through statistics and particular people's sense of place as a single entity. The region has received numerous accolades in the local, national, and international media for becoming a successful region in such a short period of time. Yet the geography of the area is always much more than the Triangle as it is celebrated.

The PLENTY is in part a response both to the fractured regional coherence of the Triangle and the production of the Triangle as a global space. The relative invisibility of the recent changes in who resides in the Triangle and the residual historical disparities which continue to complicate the regional coherence are some of what the PLENTY hopes to bring into clearer view. But, as will be shown in the following chapters, the PLENTY seems to reify the region as monolithically the Triangle without entirely giving room to the complex web of geographical relations that both fracture the region's territorialization and make it hard to distinguish between the local, the regional, and the global. Indeed, even those within the "global" space of Research Triangle Park can purchase "local" produce at the Park's own weekly Farmers' Market (even from a registered PLENTY participant). If there is one lesson that the development of the Triangle provides, it is about the ways in which spaces are produced and constantly require work to hold together. The production of the Triangle as a region has been a fast process and a seemingly complete one, yet just as with any region, the space leaks. For regional business

leaders, that leakiness requires major regional planning and significant efforts to chase FDI to plug. But for others, such as the planners of the PLENTY project with a different view of the region and the regional economy—one perhaps less visible in the standard measures of economic standing or geographic coherence—something else is needed to produce and reproduce the region, especially if it is to be specifically produced as a regional community economy. After all, that is what Romeo Guest imagined and what his colleague Pearson Stewart rearticulated in 1969 in the Research Triangle Regional Planning Commission’s detailed development guide: that the region should develop with a “maximum opportunity for neighborliness” (Research Triangle Regional Planning Commission 1969, p. 79).

## **CHAPTER FIVE: “OUR ECONOMY, OUR COMMUNITY, OUR MONEY”: THE MECHANICS OF A COMPLEMENTARY CURRENCY**

### *Introduction*

As seen in the previous chapters, central North Carolina became a nodal point in a particular set of global economic and social relations based upon changes in the regional geography put into place over the past 50 years. The birth of Research Triangle Park rearticulated the region as “the Triangle” and gave a dominant identity towards which much future development is to be directed. This dominant regional identity is based on models of economic development which identify capital circulation through the private, market-driven, formal economy as the primary driver of growth and which push for the spatial expansion of capital in order to facilitate that growth. Yet this model of growth has not benefited all residents, nor has given full recognition to the diverse economic geographies that exist in the region or the ways in which non-capitalist processes link up with (and in some cases, uphold) capitalist ones to allow for such economic growth to actually occur. This sense of invisibility to social and economic relations that are not completely captured by the discourse of conventional regional growth has given rise to a desire to shed light on these relations, in large part to support them further and make sure that they do not erode from the movement of capital circulation. In the case of the PLENTY, as will be highlighted below, there is a thriving set of diverse economic practices, which some involved in the project hoped could be further integrated through the circulation of the currency because of how they understood the spatiality of money and its potential

to produce community, as articulated by the contemporary complementary currency movement. Additionally, organizers and participants hoped to build off of the already existent community economy in order to build new community economic relations and rearticulate the region as more than just “the Triangle.”

Within the last 15 years people and institutions around the world have started to create new forms of complementary currency systems. The overwhelming majority of these initiatives have been taking place in the Anglophonic world (Lietaer 2001). Yet recent estimates indicate that complementary currencies exist on every continent (but for Antarctica) and number over 4000. Each of these systems use money to achieve a variety of goals related to social and economic issues. Some endeavors, like the Argentine systems, emerged out of major financial crisis in which the national currency lost significant value (Leyshon 2005; North 2007). Other initiatives, like a LETS in Japan, connect retirees with young volunteers in order to overcome the social isolation many elderly experience as well as deliver much needed health services to a population that has overwhelmed the national pension system (Lietaer 2004). What each of these thousands of complementary currency systems share is the production of a new space of encounter made possible by the nexus of exchanges inherent in both money and community (Raddon 2002).

The PLENTY operates as a localized complementary currency system in which the value of the currency is delimited to a “local” monetary space. While the PLENTY has been designed with some economic development goals in mind, according to promotional literature published by NCPlenty, Inc.: “Perhaps most importantly, the PLENTY fosters community.” This stress on community is

fundamental to the generation and maintenance of the PLENTY; printing and distributing money is primarily a mechanism whereby NCPlenty, Inc. can facilitate community development and intervene in the politics of community. This chapter will detail the implementation of the PLENTY as well as explain how the PLENTY is supposed to work and how it actually has unfolded as a space of encounter.

### *Complementary Currencies in the United States*

For many within the Anglophonic realm of the international complementary currencies movement, complementary currencies are tools to integrate community and economic development. Often, these initiatives are designed to operate within particular places and are therefore assigned specific geographical contours. The spatial scope of these geographies range quite widely, but in the United States most complementary currencies have been designated as local in some way (Collom 2003). As such, complementary currency advocates and practitioners argue that these systems function as community and economic development initiatives that generate benefits within a particular space. These arguments are based on the belief that conventional strategies to foster community and economic development have focused on attracting “outside” investment into places with high degrees of social and economic exclusion with limited long-term success. Furthermore, the need for development to generate benefits within a designated area is often expressed as directly counter to the apparent spatiality of economic globalization, whereby privately-controlled firms expand their spatial scope, create generic landscapes, move capital out of places, and crystallize patterns of uneven development (Boyle 1999; DeFilippis 2003; Swann and Witt 1995; Williamson, Imbroscio et al. 2002).



Local currencies function like national currencies such as the U.S. dollar, but only have value within a discrete geographic area and are backed by the localized network of social relations and local resources (Greco 2001; Raddon 2002; Seyfang 2002). As economic development tools, local currencies are privately-printed money that can be produced by people regardless of their ability to access dollars and with greater flexibility than what is offered by the system that currently regulates the distribution of dollars into the public realm. This alternative cash can trap the financial capital the currencies represent within that locale because the money only retains exchange value within the local economy (Lee, Leyshon et al. 2004b; Williams, Aldridge et al. 2003). This feature of localized complementary currency systems makes them particularly attractive for advocates and practitioners to promote the role of complementary currencies can play in poverty alleviation, especially in areas with concentrated and endemic poverty (Cahn 2001). A leading factor in the continuation of concentrated poverty is the scarcity of money (Cooke 1999; Minigione 1996; Wilson 1987). This scarcity of money has created conditions in which there exists a continued lack of wealth and sustainable wealth-generating activities. The scarcity of money has a variety of underlying causes such as deindustrialization without a significant amount of job creation in other sectors of the economy (Wilson 1996), a spatial mismatch between areas of new job creation and areas of high unemployment (Waldinger 1996), discriminatory lending practices by banks and other institutions of credit (Holloway and Wyly 2001), and historical wealth disparities between population groups reinforced by residential segregation and racial or ethnic difference (Massey and Denton 1993).

While the exact causes of such distress are points of significant debate among experts and policy-makers, most agree on what the effects such distress has: the unraveling of social bonds and networks of trust that underpin community form, the continued exodus of capital and investment from devalorized areas, and the degradation of the built and the natural environments (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan et al. 1997; Ferguson and Dickens 1999; Medoff and Sklar 1994). For decades, citizens, non-profit organizations, business leaders, and policy-makers have attempted to curb these effects and stem the continuation of distress either by attracting external capital investment into areas in need or through provisions of basic resources via entitlement programs (Vidal 1997). Such strategies have met with limited success on their own as investment patterns change, targeted capital follows traditional lines of flight out of areas in need, or political will shifts in favor of other social issues (GAO 2004; Judd and Swanstrom 1994). More recently, attention has focused on improving the quality of partnership between citizens, the private sector, and state agencies in order to allow greater “community” control over interventions as well as stimulate alternatives to conventional strategies of wealth-generation to circumvent the overall scarcity of money (Abdul-Salaam 2000; Chaskin and Garg 1997; Dickens 1999; Duffy and Hutchinson 1997; Watson 1995).

Much of the research examining contemporary, alternative strategies of wealth generation in the U.S. has focused on two forms of community economic development: assets-based community development (the ABCD model) (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Kubisch, Brown et al. 1997; Page-Adams and Sherraden 1997) and microcredit lending (Howells 2000; Servon 1998). Both of these models

demonstrate the importance of social capital development, the need for inexpensive or free forms of credit, and the significance of empowering beneficiaries through the decision-making and implementation processes in order to execute successful community and economic development initiatives. Such programs indicate that wealth-generation activities must be sustainable and overcome the risks of boom-and-bust cycles of market dynamics by which incentives-driven development remains limited by. Supporters of these alternative strategies argue that sustainability in wealth-generation requires greater localization of the sources of wealth (i.e. local production, local labor, local resources, local distribution, and local consumption) and that such localization can be achieved through strengthening local social networks (Pierson and Smith 2001; Vidal 1996).

Local currencies extend these ideas and adapt them into programmatic efforts to maintain trust within local social relations, restore confidence in the local economy, and create new opportunities for people in distressed places to access wealth that can then circulate among the local community economy (Pacione 1998; Raddon 2002). The wide distribution of a local complementary currency could potentially inject much-needed capital into an area in need and provide the basis for strengthening all the facets of a local economy. In short, local currencies strategically replace the scarcity of money in the form of a national currency with an abundance of money in the form of a locally-circulating currency. Doing so can create an impetus to localize of the sources of wealth (giving area residents control over capital) as well as solidify local social networks. As such, local currencies combine asset-based community development with microcredit lending schemes.

In the United States, there are two primary models for complementary currencies: Time Dollars and HOURS. While these models differ in detail, they share common goals and strategies. The Time Dollar model was initiated in Washington, D.C. by lawyer Edgar Cahn (Boyle 1999; Cahn 2001). In this version of a complementary currency, residents of a designated area agree to exchange goods and services from one another as needed. A comprehensive list of goods and services offered and goods and services needed is maintained by a managing agent as is a list of participants who are given accounts with starting balances of zero. Participants consult the list and acquire goods and services at a price that is equivalent to the number of labor-hours required to produce the good or service, regardless of type of good or service. The number of labor-hours, or Time Dollars, is credited to the producer's account by the managing agent and the same number of Time Dollars is debited from the consumer's account. The producer then can redeem these credits with any other participant who wishes to reduce his/her "debt." No physical bills exchange hands. The Time Dollar money only has value among the participants and allows participants to create wealth through forms of production that already exist in the community (even if these forms of production are not highly valued or generative of wealth in the U.S. dollar-based economy). In addition to giving area residents access to goods and services regardless of financial wealth as measured in U.S. dollars, the Time Dollar scheme builds social networks as people exchange with other community members, valorize the skills within the exchange community, and rely on others in the community to meet needs.

The HOURS model differs slightly from the Time Dollars model, but allows for the same ends to be met. The HOURS model began in Ithaca, New York and uses a physical currency to represent the value of the money (Jacob, Brinkerhoff et al. 2004). A similar list of goods, services, needs, and participants is maintained by a managing agent. In the HOURS model, the managing agent prints a set of legal tender bills to be used by participants to mediate the exchange of goods and services and designates a geographic area within which the bills maintain their value. The bills have a U.S. dollar equivalent, but prices are negotiated between producers and consumers when exchanges occur using HOURS. Bills are circulated to participants at a price that is lower than the U.S. dollar equivalent, or for a certain amount of volunteer labor to the managing agent, creating an inexpensive source of money that requires minimal collateral. Participants then use the bills as needed, often as a supplement to U.S. dollars (thus potentially reducing the price of goods and services in the local economy).

Because the bills only have value within the designated locale, the U.S. dollar value equivalent is trapped within that locale and recirculates there to create a potential multiplier effect more significant than what is generated by the infusion of U.S. dollars from conventional economic development and investment. As more participants join the HOURS program, the more HOURS get circulated into the local community economy. The managing agent is often responsible for monitoring the rate of circulation and taking actions to keep the currency's velocity high enough so that as many participants as possible can access the money. Furthermore, because the HOURS money is represented as physical notes exchanged between participants, the

use of HOURS requires some degree of social interaction (a process that is increasingly easily bypassed in the dollar economy replete with electronic money exchanges). Both the Time Dollar model and the HOURS model potentially provides people with an avenue to access financial as well as social capital from their own labor outside of the labor market conditions of the national (and international) U.S. dollar economy. Because the production of wealth is localized in these ways, proponents of local currencies posit that the wealth is more sustainable and jointly improves people's economic conditions and overall quality of life.

The PLENTY is based on the HOURS model. The PLENTY functions as a supplemental currency to the U.S. dollar and can be used by anyone willing to exchange it as a currency in the geographical area as determined by NCPlenty, Inc. The PLENTY currently circulates at a regional scale in four counties in central North Carolina: Alamance County, Chatham County, Durham County, and Orange County (though the actual geographical range of the participants extends into other places—see Appendix 1). According to its promotional literature, “NCPlenty, Inc. is a non-profit corporation working to promote local commerce, fair wages, environmental responsibility, self-reliance, and neighborliness through the implementation and support of a local currency, the PLENTY.” Through the PLENTY, NCPlenty, Inc. hopes to create a space of encounter within the monetary space created by the exchanges of a complementary currency.

#### *How the PLENTY Started*

The initial idea for the PLENTY emerged out of conversations between neighbors in Chapel Hill, NC. The primary instigator of these conversations was Kat,

an artist who had moved to Chapel Hill in 1999 with her husband and child.<sup>27</sup> Kat moved to the area to attend school and because her brother Philip was already living in Chapel Hill. Kat arrived in the area with an interest in “local kinds of transactions” and had personal experience in community economics as a member of various cooperatives in places she had previously resided. Additionally, she had some familiarity with the idea of complementary money systems: she had heard about Time Dollars from a National Public Radio news story and knew of a complementary currency issued by the Chamber of Commerce of a town near where she went to college in Kentucky. These encounters with complementary currencies and related activities in support of the local economy became reinforced at a concert and art show she and her husband attended in Chapel Hill. According to her husband, Sam:

“We went to a show, a band called Negative Land, that’s a, kind of a band that really, is more of a performance, I don’t know what word to describe it, basically they make music mostly from found sounds and copyrighted materials that they put together and fair use is a big part of what they’re doing. They had some handouts and it was something like some number of ways you can beat the system and print your own money was on there and it had a link to Ithaca HOURS. And that was really the first I really remembered seeing and OK, somebody else has done this. [Kat] of course was aware of it before that and it had a lot of, it had come out of many other things for her. But for me, that was the first like solid moment in time where I can remember, oh, OK, I can remember where I was, what I was doing, and I read something about local currency.”

After reading these handouts, Kat and Philip began researching local currencies via the internet, starting with the Ithaca HOURS website. From this website, they followed the links provided to other complementary currency systems in the United States as well as to websites created by supportive institutions (such as the E.F. Schumacher Foundation in Great Barrington, MA) and websites used by

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<sup>27</sup> All names used are pseudonyms. I employ pseudonyms except in cases where a person is in a public position and his/her actions or words are already in the public domain due to that public position.

complementary currency practitioners to update activities, define terms, and share tactics (such as Transaction Net, [www.transaction.net](http://www.transaction.net)). Using the information gathered from these websites, this brother and sister team began discussing the idea of starting a complementary currency system in the Chapel Hill area.

While the siblings discussed the idea amongst themselves, they both began to talk about their idea with others. One of these people was Eliza, then living next door to Kat and Sam. The two neighbors had developed a friendship both as neighbors and because their children would play together in their adjacent yards. Eliza would end up becoming a founding member of NCPlenty, Inc. and a member of its Board of Trustees, but recalls that in the beginning the PLENTY was just a loose set of ideas about supporting the local economy within conversations among friends. She notes:

“...I first got involved is only because Kat was my neighbor, and she was talking about it and I thought it sounded interesting, though, I didn’t—I really got involved I think just to help her more than I understood what it was. And maybe I’m wrong about this perception but I think none of us really understood of what it was in the beginning.”

Together and individually these three people—Kat, Philip, and Eliza—contacted others that they knew in the area that they thought would be interested as well as serve as useful resources. The idea for the local currency was still very much in its infancy. One person contacted was the coordinator of the Carrboro Barter Network, an exchange association among residents in the neighboring town of Carrboro. He became marginally involved, according to one of the PLENTY’s founders, because it seemed he wanted to focus on barter rather than monetized exchange. While the idea was still gaining coherence, this group of people (led by the initial interests of Kat and Philip) knew that they wanted to create an alternative money, not simply engage in barter or trade. The decision to create an alternative, or



complementary, money came less out of a desire to create new financial capital in purely economic terms, but stemmed from a recognition that money is the representation of a social relationship. As Eliza remembers:

“I think it started as a neat idea, let’s just try [pause] and see what happens...I guess what’s neat is to think about ways that you can [pause] everyone does have needs. They have consumer needs. So it’s neat to think about ways in which individuals can meet each others’ needs.”

As Kat reflects, she approached the endeavor as an artist who wanted to create a collective experience for people. Money seemed to her to be a form of public art that could create an experience, illuminate social relations within a given space, and make a political statement that the dollar represents only one kind of economic relationship. Furthermore, she states that for her the dollar is associated with only one geographical imaginary of economic practice—summarized for her by the term “globalization”—and the experience she wanted to produce would be an experience of difference in the economy and a proliferation of different meanings of globalization. During the planning stages of the PLENTY, she became less concerned with the details of the PLENTY as a financial instrument and just wanted “to get as much into [people’s] hands as possible” to see how people might actually use it and have a collective experience. In short, she wanted to produce a community of experience through the circulation of the complementary currency.

Conversations also took place between this group of instigators and an area lawyer who had unsuccessfully tried to initiate an HOURS-based complementary currency in the area a few years previous. His earlier attempt occurred through more formal channels. He had served as an elected official on Carrboro’s Board of Alderman. During that tenure, he promoted the idea of an HOURS-based currency to

be sponsored by the town. His idea met some interest by other Aldermen as well as some town residents, but never came to fruition. Still interested in the idea, he committed himself to supporting the development of the PLENTY, connected the original three to a larger group of interested people, and continued to be an active participant as a business owner who accepted PLENTYs for partial payment and as a legal advisor to NCPlenty, Inc.

These conversations started in the spring of 2001. As the year continued, the person-to-person networking shifted towards public meetings in order to attract a larger group of potential participants. Because Kat is an artist and had been working on several collective art projects, many artists, musicians, and performers learned of the idea and some became interested. Most of these artists learned of the idea for a complementary currency through the performance group Paperhand Puppet Intervention, a puppet theater troupe based in the county south of Chapel Hill. Paperhand is a collective of artists that performs original pieces that often have a political theme. Many of the artists involved in Paperhand are also involved in various social justice activities. A musician who regularly performs with Paperhand and who worked at a (now defunct) musical instrument store which accepted PLENTYs for partial payment recalls that in the early stages of the PLENTY, there was a “pretty big buzz” about the idea. The wife of one of the founders of Paperhand, an artist herself who would become the designer of the currency, remembers:

“Kat actually was working with my husband who is a puppeteer and through her performance she was working on some of his puppet shows performing and we just met through that out at his studio. She found out that I was an illustrator and that I was interested in local currencies. I used to lived in upstate New York where the Ithaca HOURS has a fairly large presence. So we started having conversations about that and she asked me if I would be willing to illustrate it. I said of course!”

In addition to attracting artists, the PLENTY's early planners aimed public meetings and continued conversations at farmers in the area. Much of the impetus to reach farmers came from the Kat's belief that "local food is the basis of a local economy" (a belief inspired by her own upbringing in rural Kentucky as well as her interpretations the writings of agrarian social critic Wendell Berry). She remembers that she and the others "were doing a lot of talking to farmers" in the first year and made outreach at Carrboro's bi-weekly Farmers' Market a priority. Many of the farmers approached had already incorporated a practice of localism into their production and marketing strategies and all of the farmers contacted had been independent growers who produce organic crops. Several already had their own community supported agriculture distribution system in place to realize their own vision of a local community economy and foster a space of encounter around locally-grown food.<sup>28</sup>

Public meetings were held in alternating spaces—the homes of both Kat and Philip as well as public meeting rooms in Carrboro's Town Hall. Public meetings were advertised through word-of-mouth as well as through flyers stapled to telephone polls in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, on bulletin boards of sympathetic businesses, and through public service announcements in the *Chapel Hill News*. As the conversations unfolded, more and more people joined and became regular attendees of meetings

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<sup>28</sup> Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a system whereby farmers sell directly to a group of consumers. The consumers buy shares of the CSA at the beginning of the growing season (providing the farmer with guaranteed income to purchase seeds, equipment, and labor) and the farmer pays out each of these shares with a regular delivery of produce throughout the growing season. The risk of farm production is shared by the producer and the consumer. Many CSAs have a social component for the shareholders (often called "members") including potlucks, farm tours, and volunteer days at the farm so that the farmer and the shareholders have the opportunity for social interaction.

(though the regular group of participants never reached more than 10 people at any given time). Much of the initial conversation was dedicated to defining the project, though most recall that they always worked within the framework of creating an HOURS-type complementary currency as initially envisioned by the brother-sister team. While there was debate about whether or not to use an HOURS-based system (some arguing in favor of a Time Dollars model), both Kat and Philip pushed hard for HOURS, believing that it would be important to have a tangible scrip, favoring the socially and financially lowered risk that an informal network bound by the circulation of a scrip could have, and the desiring simplified, low technological requirements for implementation and tracking of credits and debits. For some, these two may have pushed too hard, as one initial participant notes:

“I was just basing a lot of information on what Kat and Philip had come up with and working with their ideas. That’s a lot of how I did the work... I never really viewed it as an option as to doing something other than modeling off of Ithaca. And when people would come in with different concepts there was always, you know we always said no, this is how we’re doing it.”

They also favored what they saw the scrip of an HOURS model representing. According to Kat, Time Dollars systems seemed to focus too much on leisure activities, and while she and the others strained to make the same claims about valuing a scrip in a way to raise the minimum hourly wage in the way Ithaca’s HOURS appeared to, she preferred the physical reminder about difference in the economy and that the exchange of a bill could affect people’s thoughts about how constructed economic activity is (and that it could be constructed in alternative—and according to her potentially more humane—ways). Furthermore, she had had previous experience in an initiative that operated with a similar system of credits and debits to the Time Dollars model and she found it to be limited in its ability to facilitate full

participation (i.e. people would accumulate debt, a common concern within both Time Dollars and the similar LETS initiatives (Jackson 1997; Williams 1997)). Most importantly, Kat wanted to have an abundance of the complementary currency available. Her studies into the world of do-it-yourself money systems indicated to her that a major problem with national currencies is that they derive their value on scarcity. Kat's vision of what would come to be called the PLENTY was of another money that would be easy to get a hold of. In short, she envisioned a complementary currency that would be plentiful for residents in the region.

These early days of planning were driven by a small but busy group of organizers who were trying to learn what exactly a complementary currency is, how to start one, and how to convince others to join their efforts. As Eliza remembers the early days, she recalls a significant time commitment, but one that she was willing to make because she enjoyed trying to figure out what the PLENTY would become:

"I really enjoyed learning about how it works. We spent so much time in the beginning, this little team working on the papers, and the information, got together very frequently, and we emailed a lot, and we IMed [instant messaged] some and it was just, exciting, it was exciting creating this new idea. And that is what, really, the creative energy is what kept me in it in the beginning. Because even still then I don't think I knew how interesting it really could be. And exhausting at that point, after a bit of that it was exhausting. I'd spend over 20 hours week doing this. That was what everyone that was doing it did."

In May 2002, the initial organizers of the PLENTY filed articles of incorporation with the state of North Carolina to start a non-profit organization through which to manage the PLENTY. The organization was titled NCPlenty, Inc. and the most active organizers assigned each other leadership roles in the agency. NCPlenty, Inc. is "working to promote local commerce, fair wages, environmental responsibility, self-reliance, and neighborliness, through the implementation and support of a local currency." Through this official body, the framework of the

currency has been codified in a series of by-laws. It is through NCPlenty, Inc. that the official design of how the PLENTY is supposed to work is explicated and it is through the actions of NCPlenty, Inc.'s Board of Trustees that the PLENTY is managed in order to achieve the organization's mission.

### *How the PLENTY Works*<sup>29</sup>

Similar to the HOURS model, PLENTYs operate like other paper currencies. One PLENTY (P) is equivalent to \$10 (U.S.) and bills come in three denominations: 1P, ½ P, and ¼ P (\$10, \$5, and \$2.50 U.S. respectively). 1P equals \$10 because \$10 is considered a minimum living hourly wage in the region by NCPlenty, Inc. While 1P represents an hour of fairly paid labor, the PLENTY is not a Time Dollar system in which all labor-hours are equally valued regardless of the type of labor performed. Businesses use the same market-based valuation of labor, goods and services that the U.S. dollar relies upon. By agreeing to use PLENTYs, businesses and individuals agree to switch part of their economic transactions into the local currency rather than to change the ways in which those transactions express the value of goods and services (even if some users do manipulate the value of a good or service based upon the exchange of PLENTYs over dollars in practice).

The circulation of PLENTYs is established to facilitate business-to-business exchanges, though over 80% of PLENTY users spend PLENTYs to obtain goods and services needed for their households (Lepofsky and Bates 2003). To obtain PLENTYs one can simply go to a participating business or individual and ask to

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<sup>29</sup> Parts of this section have been adapted from a report to the Board of Trustees of NCPlenty, Inc. I co-authored. The original report is available at [www.ncplenty.org](http://www.ncplenty.org).

exchange dollars for PLENTYs at the determined exchange rate, but the primary way participants get their PLENTYs is by joining NCPlenty, Inc. as a business member. Business members join by either paying a one-time fee (\$12) or by giving two hours of volunteer service to NCPlenty, Inc. Business members do not have to be legally incorporated entities and all members, ranging from individuals offering services in their spare time to storefront retail outlets, are recognized as businesses by NCPlenty, Inc. Once a business member joins, that business receives 5P, a listing in the PLENTY directory, and signs to advertise their membership at the business site. Individuals not employed by or owning a local business can sign up only if they offer some good or service that can be exchanged with other PLENTY members. Members are also invited to social events, contacted via NCPlenty, Inc.'s electronic newsletter, given the right to vote on certain policies of NCPlenty, Inc. at the organization's Annual Meeting.

In this system, individuals can potentially create income-generating jobs with the skills that they already have (and with any goods and services they may already provide as part of household maintenance such as home repair, child care, or cooking) regardless of the labor market conditions afforded by the U.S. dollar economy. However, since the incorporation of NCPlenty, Inc. the definition of participants has become increasingly systematized. Those that join are recognized as members of NCPlenty, Inc. and are organized into two categories: provider members are businesses who file a membership application with NCPlenty, Inc. and agree to accept PLENTYs for full or partial payment of goods and services; employee members are employees of providers who sign a contract to accept full or partial

wages in PLENTY. In July 2002, the Board of Trustees of NCPlenty, Inc. decided that those who cannot be classified as either provider members or employee members “but who support NCPlenty with their time or money are not members. These people will be designated as supporters. Supporters do not receive issuance [of PLENTYs] nor can they vote.”<sup>30</sup> By mid-July 2002, before any script had been printed and distributed, NCPlenty, Inc. claimed 30 members (no storefront businesses) and had received its first group of members from Durham. Currently in its fifth year of existence,<sup>31</sup> the network of PLENTY users has expanded to just over 180 registered members, maintains over \$10,000 worth of scrip in circulation, and values its transactions at approximately \$20-25,000.<sup>32</sup> Goods and services available through the PLENTY community economy represent a diverse range of offerings. As categorized by NCPlenty, Inc., one can use PLENTYs with individuals and businesses in many sectors of the economy: advertising, antiques, art and art instruction, automotive repair, bars and nightclubs, bodywork and fitness, book and music stores, child care and preschool education, childbirth and lactation support, clothing, computers and technology support, construction and repairs, counseling and therapy, elder care, groceries, health and beauty needs, health care, hobbies and leisure activities, tutoring, landscaping and gardening, musical instruments and repair, musical

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<sup>30</sup> The Board of Trustees had considered a revision of this statement to provide such supporters with an issuance of PLENTYs and give supporters a greater formal role in the PLENTY community economy. Such considerations were promoted by some Board members to recognize supporters as “consumer members.” This designation has been used in other HOURS-type complementary currency systems, notably the now defunct Berkeley BREAD initiative. This never came to fruition.

<sup>31</sup> See Epilogue below.

<sup>32</sup> PLENTYs also enter the community economy through grants issued by NCPlenty, Inc. To date, few grants have been issued and those that have have circulated PLENTYs to active members already accessing PLENTYs through member disbursements and exchange.



instruction, non-profit organizational support, party supplies and event planning, performers, personal services, prepared food, produce, plants and flowers, professional services (such as accounting and legal assistance), real estate, and restaurants.<sup>33</sup>

While the PLENTY currency can simply be a partial substitute or supplement to U.S. dollars, the goal of NCPlenty, Inc. is to use the currency to build community and uphold sustainable economic practices in the region. Some in the management of the PLENTY claim that the majority of dollars spent at a multinational company (such as Wal-Mart) immediately leave the place of exchange and enter a global circuitry (while any exchanges done in PLENTY cannot leave the region since they are worthless outside the area). Additionally, those in NCPlenty, Inc.'s leadership point to the potential and actual ways in which the PLENTY serves as a medium for personal interaction: PLENTYs can only be used in face-to-face relations since there is no virtual equivalent, conversations between strangers sparked by seeing the unique bills, or debates about the meaning of economics in a gathering of neighbors who try to figure out creative ways to circulate the money.<sup>34</sup> Since PLENTYs only hold monetary value when they are spent, the logic posits that when one obtains a PLENTY, one wants to continue to circulate that PLENTY and therefore socially engage with others, producing a space of encounter through communal and economic exchange.

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<sup>33</sup> Despite this range, many participants consider the PLENTY community economy to be one limited to "frivolous" goods and services.

<sup>34</sup> One PLENTY member noted at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Membership meeting that a business in her town has hosted a number of spontaneous (and at one point regular) meetings between PLENTY members strategizing how to spend their PLENTYs.

*Where the PLENTY Takes Place: Territorializing a Space of Encounter*

The concept to make the PLENTY a regional currency came through the public discussions with the larger group of people. One of the original ideas was to produce “Carrboro Cash” and link the currency to the single town of Carrboro. Carrboro was selected as an adequate location because these original organizers considered it to be a place where people would be supportive. Rather than attempt to create the PLENTY as a response to an ongoing problem in the area as some complementary currencies are designed for (i.e. to even out labor market imbalances), these organizers believed that the Chapel Hill-Carrboro area had enough people already engaged in what they considered “alternative” practices that a complementary currency would fit in nicely. Without much questioning of the specificity of place within which they wanted to initiate their vision, Carrboro was chosen simply because of how these organizers envisioned Carrboro as a meeting space for “alternatives.” As one early organizer states: “Why here is easy. This is a prime place for the concept of alternative currency. We have plenty of people with progressive thinking in the area.” In a similar way of taking the area’s sense of place for granted in terms of why a complementary currency would work, a business owner who has been a participant since before the first PLENTY bills were issued notes about Carrboro that: “...we’ve got a gay mayor and gay police chief and we’re into the arts and we love France and we’re just anti-establishment [laughs].”

The idea of Carrboro Cash was abandoned when the organizers started to gain interest from people outside of Carrboro, especially from artists, like those associated with Paperhand Puppet Intervention, and business owners in Pittsboro, a town 17 miles to the south in neighboring Chatham County. Additionally, the city of Durham

(which makes up much of Durham County to the east) became a target for potential participants because one regular meeting attendee volunteered for the non-profit agency Piedmont Wildlife Rescue in the city. According to those who attended some of the earliest meetings, the PLENTY became regional because over the first year of conversations the people who were initially interested in the idea came from a wide enough scope of places that it began to make sense to consider the complementary currency a regional local currency. However, region was defined so as to not “diffuse” the efforts, notes an early participant. By July 2002, a Business Plan for the PLENTY states that NCPlenty, Inc. would be “soliciting the initial membership from the towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro, and parts of the City of Durham and will be broadening our geographic range as the PLENTY becomes established.”<sup>35</sup>

In the course of this first year, between the spring of 2001 and the spring of 2002, the PLENTY evolved from neighbors and relatives in conversation with one another, to a vision of Carrboro Cash, to a sense that any complementary currency in the area would have to take place in a regional monetary space. With this evolution, the monetary space of the PLENTY became more clearly articulated as North Carolina’s Piedmont, despite the fact that the official range of the currency was restricted to a much smaller number of counties than what actually constitutes the piedmont region of the state. Again, the organizers chose these places for two main reasons: first, because it was in these places (the towns of Carrboro and Chapel Hill in Orange County, the city of Durham in Durham County, eventually Chatham County

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<sup>35</sup> This document goes on to state that the organizers “will be expanding geographically into Durham, Pittsboro, Hillsborough, and other nearby cities in Orange, Durham, Chatham, and Alamance counties.” (p. 3)

and most recently Alamance County east of Orange County) where the people initially interested in the idea resided; second, because speaking in terms of towns and counties was easier for the initial organizers who did not have a clear spatial imaginary they were trying to enliven. Rather, the implementation of the PLENTY was about creating a loosely defined monetary space based on a network of social relations that intersected within an already existing place.

It was only after the PLENTY became solidified as the name of the currency and the notion of Piedmont came to be attached to the space of the local currency that the Piedmont began to take on meaning for some of the participants as a particular geography within which the local currency would circulate. While some have embraced the notion of the Piedmont as evidence that the PLENTY is a financial instrument which can potentially decrease environmental degradation, interpreting the label of Piedmont in Piedmont Local EcoNomy Tender as a celebration of the piedmont's particular bioregion or watersheds, most participants have not and do not associate the PLENTY as somehow specifically tied to the Piedmont as a particular place. The regionality has more to do with the social relations across the county lines than the interface of society and nature in the area.<sup>36</sup> Even according to one of the founders, choosing Piedmont as the first term in the currency's name came about more as a way to complete the acronym PLENTY than as a way to promote a particular regional imaginary. From her account, the name PLENTY represented a

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<sup>36</sup> One member, when asked about this component of the PLENTY, summarized what many other members state: "Yeah, it certainly is something of importance to me but I don't know, I haven't had very much direct thoughts about it with the PLENTY. I actually did not know that that was one of the missions [laughs]."

commitment to a community economy of abundance, rather than a particular reimagining of place.

This stress on the particular social relationships of the original participants with minimal connection to the particular characteristics of the region within which these conversations were taking place came to be part of the PLENTY's design.

Ironically, the imagery for the PLENTY bills is supposed to convey a strong sense of place, but this became an awkward process as most people came to the PLENTY planning efforts with an ambiguous notion of place. According to the artist who designed the PLENTY notes:

"The basic story that we started out with was we just wanted it to give people a sense of place, of this local space, when they use the money. And while the PLENTY was still in development—every time we had a meeting, we would have community meetings with different people—I would come to each meeting and I would just do a survey of the crowd and ask them what type of images said Piedmont, said Chapel Hill, Durham, Chatham County. So we had a pretty decent sized running list of imagery. A bunch of different neighborhoods were mentioned—people were mentioning the Hayti district in Durham, people were mentioning the rivers, you know, the watersheds, a lot of people mentioned Weaver Street [Market] as an image that sort of spoke to them of their community. So we were just collecting places, ideas, whatever it was that made people feel like, rooted in their space or historically spoke to them in whatever it was. And then we, or I, basically it was left up to me, winnowed it down to some more generalized things so it wouldn't be as specific as one store or one neighborhood but some general feelings of ways that people interacted with each other or something that shaped the community. Old industries, the mill buildings that are now used and carried into other uses. Farmers' Markets where people would already be buying locally. So it wasn't as specific but it was some general institutions. And then I also chose to put something from the natural world on each one just to make them more beautiful. So I chose a bunch of local species that are fairly common. Beautiful to look at but not hard to find in this area. So just a general thing. We wanted one man-made thing and one natural object on each PLENTY. And then on the front of each there's an oak tree which is just a great ancient symbol of fecundity and growth and that symbolism sort sums it up."

Much of this ambivalence towards the place within which the currency would circulate (and therefore, ambivalence about what type of monetary space these people would be creating) seems to be underpinned by a basic set of assumptions about the characteristics of the area that relate to the articulations of Carrboro as a socially and

politically progressive place. For instance, a business plan generated in the summer of 2002 posits that there is a desire to achieve “sustainability” inherent in the region (and the people who live there) without any further explanation justifying this belief. “Given our community’s proclivity for social, environmental, and financial sustainability, we believe a local currency will be adopted quickly.” This statement reflects the authors’ own “proclivity” and subsequent hope for a group of similarly-oriented people more so than any evidence of a generalizable “community” in the region which would support the PLENTY. In a related argument for the potential success of the PLENTY, the authors’ of the business plan provide a “market analysis” of the area by comparing Chapel Hill-Carrboro to Ithaca, NY and Berkeley, CA. These early organizers of the PLENTY who served as the authors assumed that both these places have successful local currencies and that a comparison of basic demographic and economic data can indicate the potential success of a local currency in central North Carolina.<sup>37</sup> By simply displaying the differences in population size, population growth since 1990, median household income, and gross retail sales, the authors conclude without any explanation that:

“The population of Chapel Hill-Carrboro falls between Ithaca’s and Berkeley’s but boasts a significantly higher median income. Given the similarities in community standards and available services, including a large farmers’ market and grocery co-op, a significant university presence, and an interest in social activism, a local currency should prove as successful here as in Ithaca and Berkeley.” (p. 3)

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<sup>37</sup> An unfortunate assumption based on limited contact with organizers of the Berkeley BREAD project and the Ithaca HOURS endeavor, as well as limited critical scrutiny of the two currency’s promotional literature and websites, as noted in hindsight by one PLENTY organizer. Berkeley BREAD officially went defunct in the summer of 2004 after several years of stagnation. According to members of the non-profit which oversees the Ithaca HOURS, much of the currency is spent centrally among a few active participants and because of the key role that farmers play in the HOURS economy, much of the HOURS community economy “hibernates” during the winter when area farmers are not at market.

Indeed, the initiators did not seem to recognize the particular ways in which they had already imagined the region as a space of encounter, particular ways rendered invisible by the generalizing language of “community” to describe the area. Not only does this language obscure the substantial differences between Berkeley, CA, Ithaca, NY, and the central North Carolina region that would become home to the PLENTY, but also veils the uneven geographies and histories within the PLENTY’s adopted region as well. Relying too heavily on vague notions such as “community standards” has curtailed the PLENTYs ability to engender a localized, regional monetary space of encounter with much meaning for participants. Furthermore, it has masked the very real lines of stratification that divide the community and economic geographies of PLENTY participants from others in the area.

As noted above by the designer of the currency, in the planning stages some suggested images of a neighborhood in Durham known as Hayti should appear on the physical PLENTY notes as representations of the place within which PLENTY create a community economy. Hayti is a section of the city adjacent to the central business district that served as the cultural, economic, political, and social center for African-American residents of Durham before desegregation and urban renewal projects pushed residents into other parts of the city. Little of segregation-era Hayti remains and much of the neighborhood resembles other parts of the city that has seen significant central city devalorization after its textile and tobacco manufacturing sector moved out of Durham during post-war deindustrialization. The role of Hayti in fostering a significant and stable middle-class African-American population in

interwar Durham is memorialized through historic preservation of specific buildings (such as those on Durham's famous "Black Wall Street") as well as through the efforts of the Hayti Heritage Center. No one who has been involved with the PLENTY project at any time has had any personal or commercial link to Hayti and few residents of Durham have been involved in the unfolding of the PLENTY community economy. To suggest using an image of Hayti seemed to the currency's graphic designer to overextend the geographical imaginary of the PLENTY as something for the region's "community." She notes that the conversations about Hayti pointed out that even with the ambivalent spatiality of the PLENTY's scope, certain places in the region don't seem to fit:

"...like, why would we put that on when nobody who lives there [in Hayti] has ever come to a meeting, has ever expressed any interest? I mean it's great and it's nice to be proud of this, the history that happened there, but it feels a little bit like a reach. You know, and I think that might have been it, like if maybe we put it on then people might be more, you know, people who live there who have historical connections there, might be more interested in spending it. But, you know. It's worth a try—we could do a different set of PLENTYs every five years with different communities in mind."

While the monetary space that would come to be the PLENTY's community economy was rhetorically constructed as regional, even before the first PLENTYs were distributed that regional space was striated in particular—though not always apparent to the PLENTY's organizers themselves—and explicit ways. Although the PLENTY was not about reimagining the region and the ways in which the region's community and economic geographies produce certain spaces of encounters over others in any specific terms, the PLENTY seems to have been designed to circulate in certain places (and not others) and for certain people (and not others).<sup>38</sup> Though the

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<sup>38</sup> Though Kat insists that the PLENTY was not targeted at any particular group of people.



early organizers of the PLENTY hoped to conduct outreach to the Spanish-speaking population in the area<sup>39</sup> as well as attract others outside their already existing social networks, their reliance on an overly broad and statically crystallized notion of “community” as representative of the region’s population prevented the initial planning of the local currency from occurring outside a small (and demographically homogenous) group of neighbors, friends, and like-minded sympathizers.

#### *Who Participates in the PLENTY*<sup>40</sup>

NCPlenty, Inc.’s membership is overwhelmingly self-defined racially as a white population. According to a survey conducted by NCPlenty, Inc. in January and February 2005, 91.2% of all respondents, and 96.9% of those respondents who answered this particular question classified themselves as white. One person self-identified as Chinese.<sup>41</sup> This racial and ethnic homogeneity is in stark contrast to the overall demographics of the region within which the PLENTY circulates. Of course, it must be acknowledged that the PLENTY community economy consists of several

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<sup>39</sup> As one of early organizers who later became a NCPlenty, Inc. Board member states: “There was some effort to reach out to the Hispanic community with some Spanish-language brochures and that was tried and dropped, a, because of lack of interest and, b, we didn’t have the ability to support Spanish-speaking people. If they’d call and ask, we just couldn’t do it. The things we tried we later put aside hoping that when we get big enough we would then address those issues.”

<sup>40</sup> Parts of this section have been adapted from a report to the Board of Trustees of NCPlenty, Inc. I co-authored. The original report can be accessed at [www.ncplenty.org](http://www.ncplenty.org). Interestingly enough, this survey conducted 3 years into the project is the third such survey but the first time NCPlenty, Inc. decided to collect demographic information. The impetus to gather such data came from my desire to know in quantitative terms the demographic make-up of the PLENTY community economy. Distinctions of identity are rarely, if ever, discussed within the endeavor.

<sup>41</sup> One person, offended that the question indicated that there are any distinctions between people, provided a note expressing this discontent and declared him or herself of Viking descent to mock the inquiry.

hundred people, while the regional population is 521,670.<sup>42</sup> Still, it is striking that the group of PLENTY users is largely white when whites make up just 66.7% of this regional population (a number that drops to 51% when taking Durham County alone and wavers around 75% in the other counties). This is particularly interesting because of the dynamics within the regional population over the last decade. Carrboro, for example, has seen a 936% increase in the Hispanic population between 1990 and 2000 and North Carolina has one of the fastest growing Hispanic populations in the nation.<sup>43</sup> The most recent survey of PLENTY users does not find any evidence of this diverse regional population.<sup>44</sup> Overall, the membership of NCPlenty, Inc. overwhelmingly self-identifies as white to such a degree that it should be considered an important factor in how the “community” of the PLENTY community economy has been structured and imagined.

In general, NCPlenty, Inc.’s membership is relatively wealthy when compared to the region and to North Carolina as a whole. Within the PLENTY network household incomes are varied, with the percentage making \$25,000 or less (20.0%)

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<sup>42</sup> Using 2000 Census data. Regional figures include Alamance, Chatham, Durham, and Orange Counties unless otherwise indicated. These four counties together represent the closest territorial space to what can be considered the official space in which PLENTYs circulate. However, it is necessary to consider that PLENTYs users live and/or work in other counties in central North Carolina and move easily amongst and between these four counties and other counties (like Wake County to the east and Moore County to the south).

<sup>43</sup> Carrboro is a useful example because many PLENTY users exchanges goods and services with PLENTYs in Carrboro. Indeed, a map of the registered NCPlenty, Inc. members shows Carrboro with the highest concentration (see Appendix 1).

<sup>44</sup> This can also be attributed to the limitations of the survey instrument. The question that this information comes out of asks about race and racial categories were drawn from the U.S. Census long form. Because the U.S. Census does not consider “Hispanic” a race, this category was not an option for respondents to choose. However, respondents could write in another category in a space marked “Other” and one respondent chose this option (though apparently as a humorous way to question the need to ask such demographic questions). Despite the inaccuracies with the survey instrument, the Board of Trustees’s interpersonal knowledge of the PLENTY users confirms the accuracy of the responses.

fairly comparable to the percentage making \$75,000 or more (23.1%). When compared with regional demographics, the PLENTY community economy contains households that are relatively wealthy as measured in dollar income on 1999 dollars.<sup>45</sup> While 16% of the regional population has an annual household income of under \$15,000, only 4% of PLENTY users have such a low dollar income. Though the four-county region within which PLENTYs primarily circulate maintains both a higher median household income and a higher per capita income when compared to all 100 North Carolina counties, there are significant portions of the regional population living below the poverty line (12.6%) and it does not appear that PLENTYs reach this population regularly, if at all. At the other end of the income spectrum, 61.5% of NCPlenty, Inc. members surveyed live in households with an annual household income above \$50,000. This is much higher than the regional count of 41.9% of households with an annual income over \$50,000. North Carolina's median household income in 2003 (adjusted for inflation) was \$38,234, ranking the state 41st out of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia. This data shows that the members of NCPlenty, Inc. are relatively wealthy in terms of dollar income when compared to the regional and state population. Currently the PLENTY appears to circulate financial wealth among those who already have high levels of access to financial wealth (when the PLENTY circulates at all).

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<sup>45</sup> According to the Census Bureau from which these statistics are drawn, income is defined in the following way: "Total income' is the sum of the amounts reported separately for wages, salary, commissions, bonuses, or tips; self-employment income from own nonfarm or farm businesses, including proprietorships and partnerships; interest, dividends, net rental income, royalty income, or income from estates and trusts; Social Security or Railroad Retirement income; Supplemental Security Income (SSI); any public assistance or welfare payments from the state or local welfare office; retirement, survivor, or disability pensions; and any other sources of income received regularly such as Veterans' (VA) payments, unemployment compensation, child support, or alimony."

To further reinforce this point, home ownership, which is often a factor in measuring wealth and standard of living, stands at 82.1% among registered PLENTY users, notably higher than regional figures.<sup>46</sup> The respondent base is also highly educated, with nearly half holding a graduate degree and 89.8% holding, at minimum, a bachelor's degree. While Durham County and Orange County maintain a population with some of highest levels of educational attainment in the state, it is important to note that the state percentage of the population with a college education or more is only 22.5%. Equivalent levels in Alamance, Chatham, Durham, and Orange Counties are 19.2%, 27.6%, 40.1%, and 51.5% respectively. Such educational attainment levels often contribute to higher incomes as well as access to higher quality resources. These data reinforce the idea held by many registered PLENTY participants themselves: that the PLENTY community economy is constructed by and for a privileged group within central North Carolina region.<sup>47</sup>

Orange County is home for the majority (60.3%) of respondents, but significant numbers also reside in Chatham (20.6%) and Durham (16.2%) counties. A third of respondents have lived in the region for more than 15 years, but there are also 21.2% who have been in the region for 5 or fewer years. That nearly a quarter of

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<sup>46</sup> 14% of these homeowners own their homes outright without liens or mortgages.

<sup>47</sup> Expressions of this opinion are common. As noted in the Introduction above, one person notes: "Well the way that I understood originally some of the goals of the PLENTY were to not only to keep wealth within the community but to kind of change the way in which wealth was distributed and used and to give opportunity to people who do not have a lot of wealth in U.S. dollars the opportunity to still be a part of the economic system and one of the facets of that being to define, how to define what a PLENTY is worth and basing that on a particular wage of hourly work that is much higher than the minimum wage. And I don't necessarily think that that has happened because for several reasons, but because of the people who are interested and the way in which it's been marketed and the places that are accepting the PLENTY, it's become a very insulated group and it's not necessarily going out to people who could use more support and economic wealth or even community building for that matter. It's almost duplicating an already existing community with a different layer added to it." Another person laughed when asked if the PLENTY could be used to ameliorate poverty.

those surveyed has lived in the area for such a short tenure is not surprising given the high number of nationally recognized universities as well as Research Triangle Park within the region, both which lend to a mobile and dynamic regional population. It is notable, however, because of the community-building goals that NCPlenty, Inc. has set forth and the ways in which the use of the PLENTY complementary currency represents a commitment to support a place-based, local economy. This may also explain the ambivalence and ambiguity many NCPlenty, Inc. members express when trying to connect the activities of the PLENTY with the specificities of the place within which the PLENTY community economy unfolds.

Overall, the “community” of the PLENTY community economy is predominantly white, wealthy, and highly educated and represents only a select (and some might claim elite) strata of the regional population. While these descriptive statistics have significant limitations when trying to understand how individuals within the PLENTY community economy actually live out these modes of identity in their day-to-day lives (and even how much it is possible to derive a “community” from such apparent homogeneity), it is a challenge to NCPlenty, Inc to diversify the PLENTY users in order to have a wider social and economic impact in the region and not simply circulate wealth (and the power and privilege it brings) among those who already have a high degree of access. Indeed, if the PLENTY community economy remains structured in this way, then it seems as if this complementary currency will have an opposite effect than some of its original intentions vis-à-vis redistributing wealth and building community as stated in the organization’s mission statement; rather than distribute financial and social wealth more widely than dollars do, the

PLENTYs takes wealth out of the dollar's wider space economy and circulates that capital among a select group of participants. A less generous interpretation of the situation could point to the ways in which this select group is protecting its wealth and social status through the PLENTY, but such an interpretation would give too much credence to the financial viability of the PLENTY than is possible at this juncture.

#### *What the PLENTY Community Economy Looks Like*

While the data that shows limited circulation among a select group of users, PLENTYs do actually get exchanged by people across the regional monetary space. While the overwhelming majority of these transactions take place regardless of the existence of the PLENTY, the PLENTY then becomes a way to trace some of the social and economic transactions of particular people in the area. Indeed, it has been a goal of some Board of Trustee members to have PLENTY users share the story of their PLENTYs and track the PLENTYs as a representation of social relations. One member provided NCPlenty, Inc. with an account of her PLENTY activities and sketched out a particular set of interactions facilitated by the exchange of PLENTYs. While the space of encounter she describes is primarily one of consumption for a mobile, technologically savvy, and artistic group of people, through her account PLENTYs act as a way to map encounters between people across the region:

“Recently, I had the good fortune to sit beside Laura Wilson of Blast, Inc. at a Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce event. Talk turned to NCPlenty and Laura hit on a great idea... I would come to Pittsboro to tour the Blast campus and then we would walk through downtown Pittsboro on an NCPlenty tour.

“The drive from Carrboro to Pittsboro was faster than I expected, and I soon arrived at Blast. Blast has gone the extra mile to create a sustainable, comfortable environment and Laura's enthusiasm for her employer was apparent. Geothermal energy provides heating and cooling for the building; many areas are well-lit with

skylights and large banks of windows. Employees can attend yoga class in the airy, sunlit exercise room or they can play ping-pong in the large break room. Art covers the walls and the bulletin board in the entrance is overflowing with thank-you notes from local organizations and articles about various innovative projects headed by Lyle Estill, owner of Blast. I even spied one of his famous chess sets on the Board Room table. I was amazed to learn that Blast has networked the whole downtown--and more--of Pittsboro for wireless internet service. Pittsboro businesses can connect to the Internet wirelessly for a small monthly fee and if you visit a business with a laptop, you can log on and connect as well.

"We drove the short distance to downtown and proceeded on our walking tour. First stop: the Pittsboro General Store Cafe. Local artists display colorful work on consignment--on the walls, ceiling, and floors! A gift shop is tucked in the back corner. A local gardener has delightful plant arrangements for sale outside. Tables are sprinkled around the room; some are hidden in nooks behind bookshelves. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served here and Laura said it was quite a hotspot for Blast employees at lunchtime. Bands play several nights a week. Add in the Internet wireless connection, and I honestly can't see a reason to ever leave the General Store Cafe.

"We crossed the street and saw Cindy Edwards of Edwards Antiques & Collectibles just opening up for the day. I have to admit antique shops generally intimidate me, but Cindy is incredibly friendly and her shop is not only welcoming but full of unique home furnishings or special gifts. I found furniture, old photographs, antique jewelry, Fiesta ware and other china, and in a glass cabinet, an adorable collection of antique toys, including an old Howdy Doody marionette. Edwards Antiques & Collectibles accepts up to 50% of your purchase in PLENTYs.

"French Connections is another NCPlenty member in Pittsboro, with two locations downtown. We peered through the window at the first storefront to see colorful bags and small furniture items. We found owner Wendy DuFour (she runs the shop with her husband, Jacques) at the second location in a house a little further down the main road. Items were spilling onto the porch and into the yard from all parts of Africa: furniture, lamps, masks, etchings, jewelry, art. I made our honorary NCPlenty tour purchase here: a fabulous market basket from Ghana, just perfect for a trip to the Fearington Farmer's Market on Tuesday evenings (where you can of course find NCPlenty members, including Perry-winkle Farm).

"Laura was returning to Blast to eat lunch with her coworkers (they take turns cooking on Thursdays). I was off to pick up my son at the Children's Cooperative Playschool (another NCPlenty member!) and later we would shop at member Weaver Street Market for our dinner, where I remembered to ask for some PLENTYs as change so I could find a way to filter it out to more of our NCPlenty community. I remembered it's all about community."<sup>48</sup>

Such an account is useful to understand the potential role the PLENTY can have in creating a space of encounter, but it is limited by having one participant as the central focus of the circulation. While the movement of PLENTYs are restricted by

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<sup>48</sup> Such an account reinforces the statements above by PLENTY participants that this is an economy of luxury goods and conspicuous consumption despite the diversity of goods and services offered.

the movement of the people who actually use them by design, the accumulated movements of PLENTY participants through the regional monetary space adds up to more than one single user at any given time. Drawing up the temporal and spatial abstractions inherent in money, the space-time of the PLENTY's community economy is one of heterogeneous simultaneities (Massey 2005)—a sphere of multiple and contemporaneous trajectories—even if at a smaller incidence than what the initial planners and current leadership would like.

Yet the actual use of PLENTYs has been limited and few participants claim that the PLENTY has fostered any social or economic exchanges that wouldn't already have taken place. Nearly two-thirds of surveyed members have never received a PLENTY through their business or wages, and nearly one-third have spent no more than their initial issuance of 5 PLENTYs. While this data indicates a low rate of participation, this reveals a slightly higher rate of participation when compared to a survey conducted by NCPlenty, Inc. in February 2003. That initial survey of the membership found that after the first four months of PLENTY distributions, 71.9% of members had received no PLENTYs and 80.1% had spent no more than their initial 5 PLENTYs. Currently, almost half of the membership (43.9%) has no PLENTYs currently on hand. There is a small group of participants who have used PLENTYs as money on a regular basis. From the most recent survey conducted in January and February 2005, 17.9% of registered members have accepted more than \$100 (10P) in PLENTYs, while the percentage who has spent more than this amount is 50.7%. There were 15.2% of respondents who report having greater than 10P on hand, with a handful holding more than 50P (\$500 US). Some of these transactions exist between



just two members. For example, some farmers who accept PLENTYs primarily obtain them from Weaver Street Market, a Carrboro-based grocery and café. These farmers then spend the PLENTYs at Weaver Street Market for groceries. Others create a similar relationship to Weaver Street when they do ask for PLENTYs as change:

“I ask for them at Weaver Street and then I end up spending them right back at Weaver Street. Which isn’t such a bad thing it just seems slightly counterproductive when I don’t go and circulate them around in a more meaningful way.”

Members regularly express such sentiments and Weaver Street Market has curtailed its policy to pay employees and contractors in PLENTYs because more often than not, the PLENTYs end back up in the Market’s register tills.

This most recent survey conducted by NCPlenty, Inc. offered members the opportunity to write additional comments and several people took this opportunity to share their thoughts. Overwhelmingly, survey respondents demonstrated the “catch-22” of the PLENTY community economy: one’s desire to support the initiative mixed with a lack of trust that anyone else supports the initiative enough to accept PLENTYs for payment on goods and services one seeks to purchase. This phenomenon of a catch-22 is a common experience for many complementary currencies and extends beyond the divisions between competing models such as HOURS, LETS, or Time Dollars. As one participant describes this problem, it has to do with trust and belief in the viability of the currency. Too many participants are aware of their own lack of participation and believe that others are as lackadaisical as themselves. Since many participants do not use the PLENTY, they assume that others in the network do not use the PLENTY and therefore wouldn’t really accept

the currency as money. Realizing that part of the difficulty is self-motivation, a farmer who is a registered member explains the conundrum:

“...to be honest, I’m not even really sure who takes them. I know there’s a little listing but I haven’t studied it. But I don’t think, like it would be nice if every little local shop that say you could walk to in downtown Carrboro would take them, you know what I mean, instead of—it’s almost like it has to be really well known and big and then it will work. But it can’t get to that point unless it’s already working, so that’s why it’s like a catch-22. I mean, I feel like if I was walking down the street and everybody had a sign that they take PLENTYs and you could walk in and spend them, and there wasn’t like, no, we only take a certain amount, you know, then I would totally take them... But I feel like there are constraints on spending them and I just can’t hold on to a bunch of cash that’s not useful to me at this point.”

Others indicate a similar lack of trust that the PLENTY is a viable currency and express frustration that no one has used PLENTYs with them. As one anonymous respondent to the 2005 survey writes: “[The PLENTY is a s]uper idea, but we are having a hard time making use of PLENTYs. We aren't earning any so any we get will be in change and this doesn't happen much because we use credit cards (mainly for the record of purchases).” Another person states: “The PLENTY seems to have lost steam as of late. It feels like the energy is waning. Don't hear much about the PLENTY these days. Board seems lackluster, communications with members seem to have slackened. I'm losing confidence in the PLENTY.” Another member writes more bluntly: “PLENTYs don't work for me. :( .”<sup>49</sup>

PLENTYs have a limited circulation and when the members do spend PLENTYs, the members often spend them centrally rather than across the regional

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<sup>49</sup> Part of this frustration and the related belief in the catch-22 scenario has to do with the way many participants believe that the PLENTY is an economy of luxury goods: “...it’s become kind of an accessory economy and that the people who are in this already existing group that are already financially stable might not necessarily have enough money to get a massage once a month or to, you know, buy organic foods that they want to, and this might supplement that in a way in which they can almost barter their time and goods with somebody else for something that they do to allow them to do services such as massage or other things that are seen kind of as a luxury and not a necessity. But they’re not necessarily going to, the PLENTY isn’t necessarily helping people who are not already economically sound become more sound.”

space of the PLENTY community economy. The average member has spent PLENTYs with 2.4 other members, up from February 2003 when the average member had spent PLENTYs with only 1.2 other members. However, for 85.3% of respondents, one of those members was Weaver Street Market—a cooperative grocery store and café—and for 39.7% of those respondents Weaver Street Market was the only member with whom they spent PLENTYs. According to Weaver Street Market’s own financial data, at the end of March 2005, the cooperative held 7% of all circulating PLENTYs in its bank.<sup>50</sup> Weaver Street Markets has averaged \$500 a month in PLENTY transactions since first accepting PLENTYs in May 2003 and is by far the most significant member in the PLENTY community economy in terms of exchanges. This despite Weaver Street Market’s efforts to reduce its intake of PLENTYs (by twice reducing its acceptance rate as well as encouraging customers to ask for the PLENTY as change).<sup>51</sup>

The 2005 survey helped NCPlenty, Inc. gauge members’ participation in both the use of PLENTYs as well as their involvement in the PLENTY community economy in other ways. Questions asked whether members had recruited other members to the PLENTY network, attended an NCPlenty, Inc.-sponsored event, or utilized the organization’s website. In all three areas, more than half of respondents

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<sup>50</sup> Though this is down from nearly 20% in June 2004 due in large part to a major PLENTY transaction between Weaver Street Market and T.S. Designs, a t-shirt manufacturer, in September 2004. A graph of PLENTY exchanges at Weaver Street Market displays this trend of accumulation. See appendices for details on Weaver Street Market’s financial records of PLENTY-based transactions. This is the most recent data available as the management of the firm has significantly reduced its commitment to the PLENTY initiative as well as its tracking of the currency.

<sup>51</sup> Weaver Street Market is currently considering withdrawing its membership in NCPlenty, Inc. due to its overaccumulation of PLENTYs. The firm has set a goal to have only 25 PLENTYs on hand at any given time. It currently holds over 100. See Chapter 8 for further discussion of this dilemma.

had not participated, with 70.1% never recruiting another member, 58.8% never attending an event, and 56.3% never using the website. Interestingly enough, there seems to be much support for the idea of the PLENTY but few willing or able to implement the currency into their everyday lives. Many participants describe their own desire to see a community emerge out of the PLENTY experiment, yet almost no participants believe that there has been any organization of community through the PLENTY to date.<sup>52</sup> In short, the PLENTY has yet to create any substantial space of encounter other than a space that already existed. Part of this limitation stems from the ambivalence with which the PLENTY was imagined and implemented as an endeavor which takes place through participants' social and economic geographies.

At one point, in a series of conversations, the Board of Trustees attempted to visualize what the PLENTY community economy looks like as a dynamic monetary space through words and graphics. Many of the ideas remained in the development stage. Most of these mappings have related to a specific project within the PLENTY endeavor to create smaller, sustained microcircuits of exchange. Such microcircuits, called LOOPS (Locally Organized Occurrences of PLENTY Spending) by the Board of Trustees, represent an attempt by the Board to directly manage the circulation of the currency. The impetus behind LOOPS came from the pattern with which PLENTYs are currently spent: centrally among a select group of users who then overaccumulate the currency and are unable to spend as many PLENTYs as they take

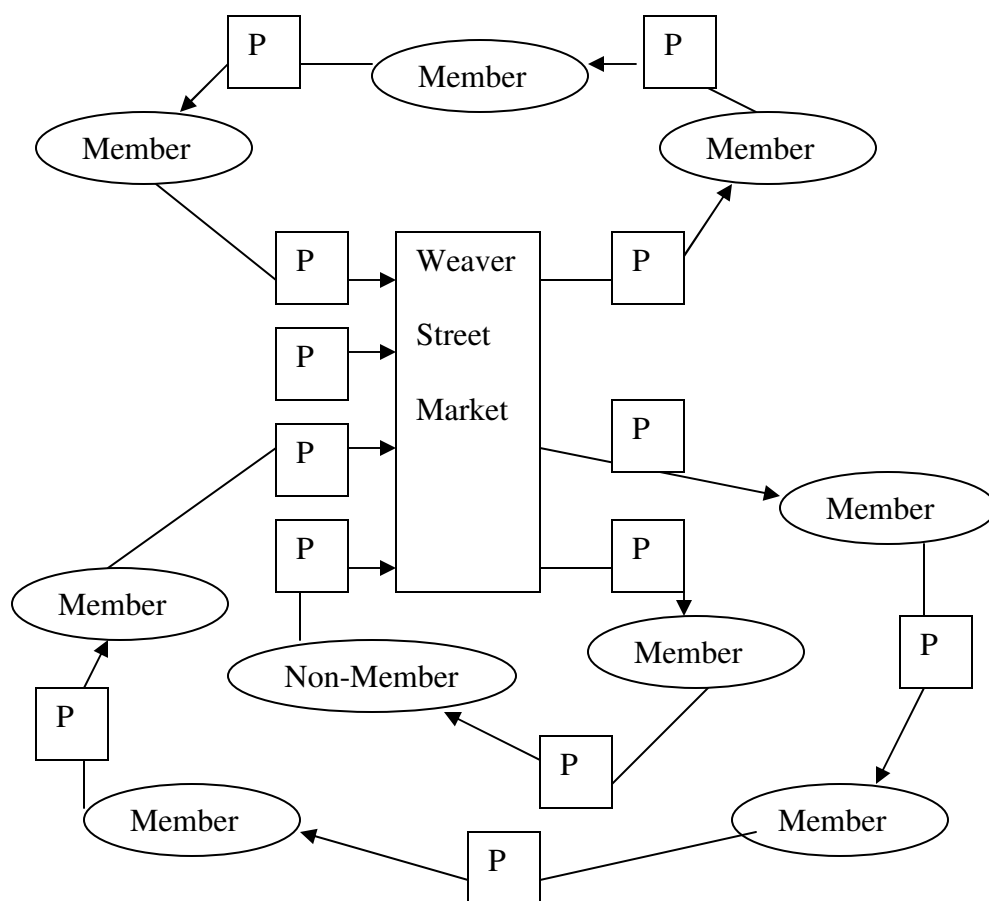
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<sup>52</sup> What members do speak of is the potential of the PLENTY to organize community and produce a new space of encounter. This notion of potential community will be examined below.

in. The goal for LOOPS is to even out the distribution of PLENTYs among members by purposefully arranging circuits of exchange among small groups of participants.

The LOOPS project has been on the agenda for NCPlenty, Inc. since October 2003 but has been slow to come to fruition. Within the planning process, members of the Board of Trustees attempted to visualize what PLENTY circulation actually looks like as well as what the ideal circulation might be. In March 2004, using butcher paper and magic markers, Board members collectively sketched out diagrams of the PLENTY community economy. The first of these maps represents what has taken place within the actual circulation of PLENTYs. It shows a basic circle and maps the circulation of PLENTYs among members and non-members, using Weaver Street Market as a central terminal (see Figure 5). In this schematic, PLENTYs pass through Weaver Street Market and re-enter the community economy through Weaver Street Market's spending with other members (such as farmers) or by members asking for PLENTYs as change. This abstract model represents the PLENTY community economy as a relatively closed system in which the exchanges occur among a regular group of people.

**FIGURE 5<sup>53</sup>**



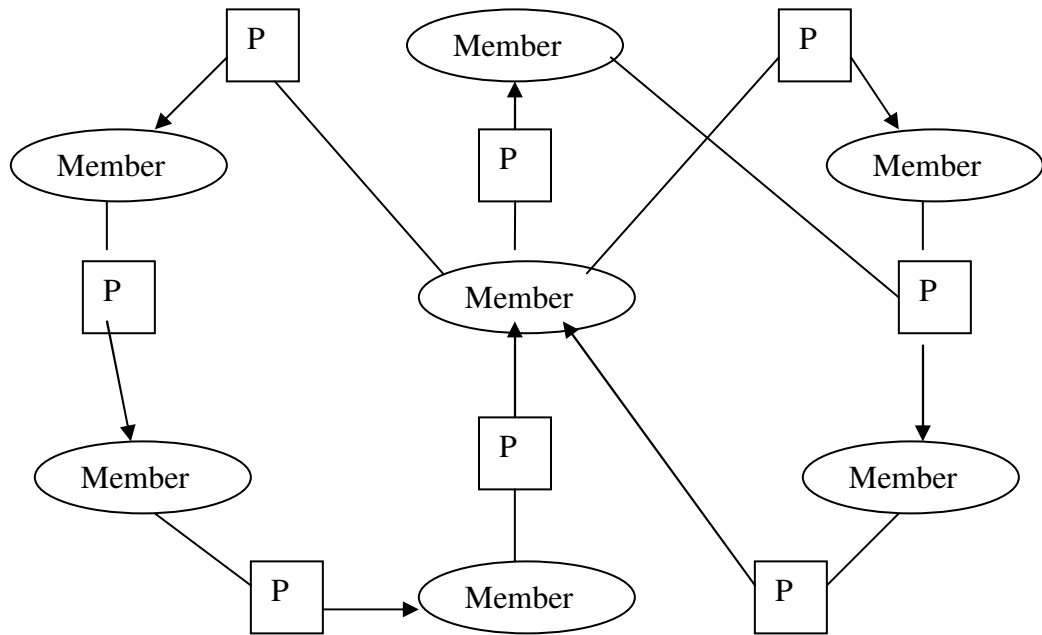

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<sup>53</sup> This is my rendering of what was composed at the Board meeting.

This model is contrasted by the Board with a second diagram that represents how LOOPS could modify the circulation of PLENTYs (see Figure 6). The main difference between the two visions is that in the second schematic, there is no central terminal through which PLENTYs circulate. Alongside these models, Board members attempted to create mathematically formulas to measure PLENTY circulation, taking into account the velocity, rate, directionality, and frequency with which users spend PLENTYs (taking into consideration varying acceptance policies among members). Such formulas (which never got past a draft stage) were to be used in modeling an ideal vision of the dynamic, heterogeneous simultaneities of PLENTY community economy (which has often been expressed by Board members as a state of constant PLENTY spending that averages out to each member having the equivalent of 5P, or the initial issuance, on hand at any given time).

While the second figure maps the PLENTY community economy in somewhat more dynamic ways (to show multiple trajectories and end points), both models reveal a remarkable aspatiality as maps of a localized set of social and economic relations within a given space. There is no sense (in either the models or the attempted formulas) to consider the ways in which distance, transportation networks and access, or other spatio-temporal constraints may or may not hinder the circulation of PLENTYs. These models (eventually tabled by the Board of Trustees) represent one way that the PLENTY community economy has been visualized as a space of encounter in line with much of the ambivalence within the geographical imaginary guiding the planning and implementation of the currency: in astonishingly aspatial terms.

**FIGURE 6**





Any representation of the space of heterogeneous simultaneities is always partial and incomplete. Yet the PLENTY provides a unique opportunity to trace the spaces of encounter among its users in dynamic ways. While an accurate map of the space chartered by the circulation of PLENTYs would be an impossible Borgesian repetition of the PLENTY's movement, the points of exchange provide a snapshot of the forms of relationality enriched by PLENTYs. Because there is no technique for tracking PLENTYs currently in place nor any central database to distinguish the temporal component of PLENTY exchanges,<sup>54</sup> any map of the PLENTY community economy would have to use the accumulated set of PLENTY transactions to date. Using information gathered by NCPlenty, Inc. as well as the accounts of members themselves, the PLENTY community economy can be sketched as a snapshot of all the accumulated transactions over the three years of the life of the currency. Figure 7 presents a representation of the PLENTY community economy as a space of encounter in which PLENTY exchanges mark social and economic interactions among participants and provides a framework within which PLENTY participants can visualize themselves as in relation to each other and the region. Such a map does not guarantee the existence of community but visualizes the potential within the PLENTY initiative to produce spaces of encounter and enliven particular geographical imaginaries of responsibility.

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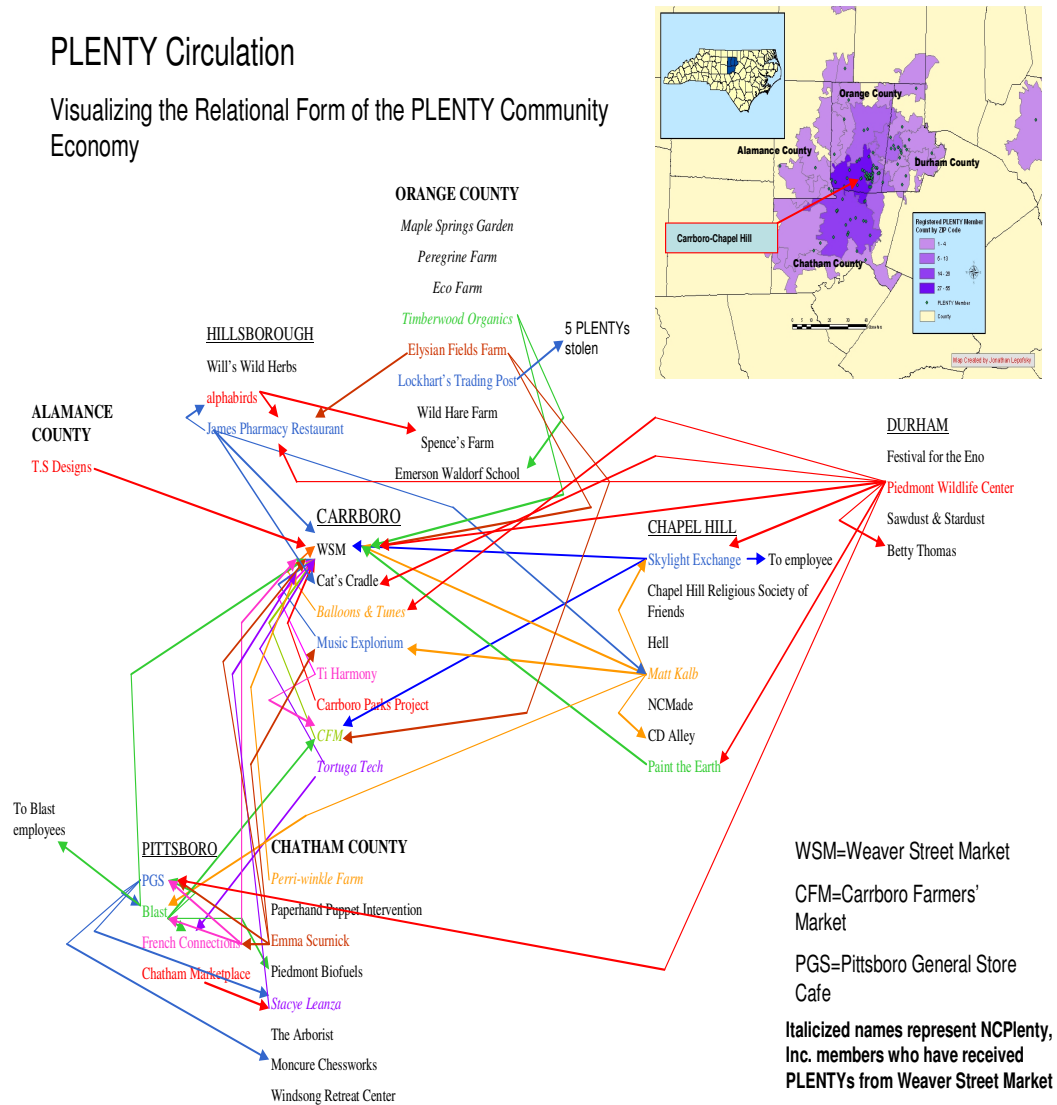
<sup>54</sup> Surveys conducted by NCPlenty, Inc. do not distinguish between transactions occurring in the first four months from transactions occurring in the last four months so the most recent survey counts all transactions that have reportedly taken place. Furthermore, participants' memories can not be assumed to be entirely accurate and often conflict with others' accounts of when specific transaction events occurred. Of all the members, only Weaver Street Market keeps financial records of PLENTY transactions. Additionally, because one does not need to be a member to access PLENTYs (for example, by asking for PLENTYs as change) there are a small amount of PLENTYs that circulate outside the membership. No system is in place to account for these transactions.

What is rendered visible in Figure 3 is the PLENTY community economy as a circuit of flows with particular vectors, directionality, and a particular set of relationships. While this diagram does not distinguish the amount of PLENTYs that get exchanged between participants (which, as noted above, is usually a small amount of money), it does demonstrate the relational form of the network: directed heavily towards Weaver Street Market in Carrboro with limited lines of connection between places that do not cross through Carrboro first. Almost no PLENTYs move from Hillsborough north of Carrboro directly to Pittsboro—most of the community and economic geographies of the PLENTY take place in reference to downtown Carrboro, particularly Weaver Street Market. While Weaver Street Market has tried to redistribute the PLENTYs more widely, the PLENTYs continually flow towards this point of exchange. Simply put, most of the participants in the PLENTY community economy already spent money at Weaver Street Market. Without a coherence spatial strategy to enrich a community economy and alter community and economic geographies, it is no surprise that these participants occasionally switched purchasing groceries from dollars to PLENTYs when the opportunity to do so arose. The PLENTY community economy as a space of encounter, then appears merely as a supplement to the space of encounter already provided by Weaver Street Market. For most participants, this is precisely how they think of the PLENTY.

FIGURE 7<sup>55</sup>

## PLENTY Circulation

Visualizing the Relational Form of the PLENTY Community Economy



<sup>55</sup> Some of the businesses and individuals represented in this diagram have dropped out of the PLENTY network because of going out of business, leaving the area, or other reasons.

*Conclusion: Money to Build Community?*

While the organizers of the PLENTY continue to promote the complementary currency as a mechanism primarily to build community, it appears as if the PLENTY endeavor is still in its infancy even after five years, nearly 200 registered participants, and over \$20,000 worth of scrip in circulation. While participants and the leadership alike still hope to use the PLENTY to create a space of encounter that opens up the community and economic geographies of the region, to date the PLENTY has merely replicated patterns of spatial flow among people, goods, and services in the area which existed prior to the implementation of the PLENTY. Indeed, few people actually use the PLENTY as money and when they do, the PLENTY is spent centrally rather than across the community economy's wider potential monetary space. Much of the limitations of the PLENTY appear to be linked with the incoherent geographical imaginaries of the place within which PLENTYs flow as put forth by the initial organizers and the current leadership. But it is also important to understand the relationship between the regional context within which the PLENTY has been inserted and why it has become the project among the select group of users that it has thus far turned into. The next chapter will explore how the PLENTY offers a way to come to terms with the regionality of the Triangle, potentially alter that production of space through a complementary regional imaginary, yet why the PLENTY initiative seemed to lose sight of this complementary role by becoming too much against the Triangle as a "global" space (and subsequently why those who use the PLENTY represent only one—yet the most visible—organization of community within the region despite the goals to do otherwise).

## **CHAPTER SIX: NEGOTIATING THE LOCAL**

### *Introduction*

People and institutions use complementary currencies to illuminate and strengthen the socio-spatial networks of social and economic geographies. As Lee, Leyshon, et al. posit, complementary currencies are spatial strategies to identify, create, and sustain particular histories and geographies (Lee, Leyshon et al. 2004a). Sometimes, these histories and geographies are already visible and the complementary currency is used to further illuminate them by tracing out their contours and performatively celebrating their existence (Lee 1996; North 2004). However, the purpose for many complementary currencies is to establish new linkages between people and place and allow the paths of monetary flow to unfold into unknown socio-spatial patterns of exchange (Lietaer 2004; Seyfang 2002). Hence, complementary currencies get used throughout the world as part of community development practices to distribute social and financial capital to a group of people regardless of previous interpersonal associations or ties to place (Williams 1997). Drawing upon the social and spatial abstractions of money (as an apparatus to capture exchange value) interpersonal associations and relations to place can be built among a group of people who meet up through the monetary space of the currency (Lietaer 2001; Thrift and Leyshon 1999). The monetary space of a complementary currency, therefore, mediates the relationality of those who use the money: it unfolds as the meshwork of articulations among the participants and becomes a space of

encounter. As such, the monetary space of a complementary currency is supposed to become an ethical space through which participants express a geographical imaginary of responsibility to those who they may encounter in that space (Thrift and Leyshon 1999; Williams, Aldridge et al. 2003; Williamson, Imbroscio et al. 2002).

The implementation of complementary currencies takes place at multiple scales and the space of any complementary currency is never pre-given; it is a space in the making. The majority of complementary currencies that have emerged as part of the contemporary movement take place within some “local” space. Indeed, localized versions of complementary currencies are the most visible set of these contemporary monetary experiments and the most studied (Lepofsky and Bates 2005). The modes of localization remain multifarious: some cities in Britain contain several neighborhood-based LETS programs while German complementary currency activists are developing an interconnected system of regional monies that can move capital, goods, and services within and between regional configurations across the space of the nation-state (Pacione 1998; Schroeder 2005; Thorne 1996). What is at stake in the construction of any history or geography within which a complementary currency circulates, therefore, are the ways in which a complementary currency produces space through its scalar configuration. The form of that scale locates the geography of exchange relations that are to be privileged by the currency and structures the ways in which participants express geographical imaginaries of responsibility. In short, how a complementary currency is scaled is fundamental to understanding what particular histories and geographies that currency circulates through, which histories and geographies that currency bypasses, and why.

In the case of the PLENTY, the scalar configuration has been identified as the “local”—a spatial scale that takes places somewhere within four contiguous counties in central North Carolina. Rendering the local as a particular set of social and economic geographies within this discrete space has emerged through a process of negotiation whereby participants in the PLENTY initiative use the currency to illuminate and understand their individual and collective translocal subjectivities. This translocality is particularly relevant in central North Carolina, where the dominant set of translocal trajectories that have met up to produce a local geography there over the last 50 years remains a condition of possibility for many people’s participation in the PLENTY endeavor as residents or consumers in the area.<sup>56</sup> For many of the participants, this negotiation is still ongoing and there is a diversity of ways in which the local gathers meaning.

Yet, an important reason that the PLENTY has had less use than its originators anticipated relates to the ways in which the leadership of the PLENTY have scaled the PLENTY’s monetary space and points to a divide between how the PLENTY has been constructed as a “local currency” and the ways in which participants actually use the PLENTY to negotiate the local. While many of the participants use the PLENTY to explore the degree to which they feel an ethical responsibility to people and places as a way to figure out the spatial impact of their lives across multiple scales, the leadership of NCPlenty, Inc. has halted its own negotiation of the local and often uses the PLENTY to designate people and places as

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<sup>56</sup> As noted in earlier chapters, such trajectories link the region to other places through multinational knowledge production firms, translocal migration, low-density and sprawling urbanization, and state-sponsored recruitment of capital investment away from other places.

either “local” or “non-local,” assigning a privileged ethical relationship to the former and not the latter. These conflicting modes to cultivate an ethics of the local (Gibson-Graham 2003b) help explain the limited circulation of the PLENTY. While many participants try to balance the making of new histories and geographies in the region with the celebration of ones imagined to be already in existence and authentically “local,” the leadership of the initiative has provided little guidance as to how the PLENTY can be used to negotiate the local, instead relying upon an absolute belief in an unstated and ambiguous “local” space that is already believed to exist.

The way in which the PLENTY is articulated as producing space for “local” community economic relations has minimized the initiative’s impact on either community or economic geographies which take place in the region in three main ways. These outcomes seem to stem from the ambiguous (and nonchalant) decision-making process through which the PLENTY community economy was imbued with a specific spatial structure. One result of this unintentional ambiguity of the PLENTY’s scalar configuration has been a lackluster response from participants even among those with unwavering faith in localist praxis. Another consequence has been that there is no basis from which to distinguish different renderings of the local, so contradictory politics rest uneasily under the ideologicoical framework of the PLENTY without any resolution of these contradictions. Finally, the potential translocal impact of the PLENTY is lost as the justification for supporting the “local economy” and “local community” is legitimated as a good in its own right rather than as a way to create new histories and geographies between different locales by intervening into particular social and economic relations which meet up in this region.



As such, the PLENTY has become more about defining activities as either local or non-local entirely on the physical location of such activities in an already identified space, rather than by the spatial effects such activities have as translocal processes within an unfolding space of encounter. While the geographical imaginary of many participants' ethics of the local is networked and open in regards to its territorialization, the imaginary of those leading the PLENTY is increasingly pointilist and already territorialized around a narrow set of relations that are "local" in form (yet ambiguous in content). This discrepancy underpins the skepticism many participants share about the PLENTY as well as limits the ways it is possible for the leadership to use the PLENTY as a complementary currency within the area's regional geography.

#### *Envisioning a Local Community Economy*

As with any venture, there are many different genesis stories which describe the initial implementation of the PLENTY. Most descriptions from the earliest protagonists of the PLENTY describe generally the same line of events: in the spring of 2001, a small group of people residing in Chapel Hill, North Carolina—mainly neighbors and relatives—started discussing the idea of creating a complementary currency which would highlight the existence of local economic transactions. From those conversations, public meetings were held, social networks tapped into, and cold calls were made to recruit interested businesses and individuals. The most active and interested participants founded an organization called NCPlenty, Inc. to draft by-laws and strategic plans, design the money, and give legitimacy to the project. Before NCPlenty, Inc. issued a single PLENTY bill, nearly 100 storefront businesses and

individuals from 3 counties in central North Carolina agreed to accept PLENTYs as partial payment for goods and services. In October 2002, NCPlenty, Inc distributed the first PLENTYs to its founding members at the first Annual Meeting in Carrboro, a town next to Chapel Hill.

The above line of events is accurate but lacks the various starts and stops, fumbles, confusions, frustrations, and negotiations that NCPlenty, Inc. members worked through as they created a localized currency. Even the very notion—so central to the project today and its mediation of the politics of community—that the PLENTY would be a local currency was up for debate, particularly the parameters of that localness. The ways that these people articulated the relationship between community, locality, place, and the regional economy provides the basis for how the PLENTY has fostered the politics of community over the last five years. While there is still much diversity in thought as to how the PLENTY is a local project to valorize certain community economic practices, the general trend has been a narrowing of the definition of the local by the leadership of the project even while the location of participants and their own personal and collective trajectories point to the translocality of the region in which the PLENTY circulates.

But this narrowing of geographical imagination appears to represent a disconnect between the leadership of NCPlenty, Inc. and the ways in which the PLENTY gets used by area residents to negotiate the scalar form of their own community economic practices. While the official discourse of the PLENTY seems limited to a basic localism, the ways in which those who have signed on to use the PLENTY reflects a more complicated imaginary of the ways in which a translocal

nexus of relations gets constituted in the region. Indeed, many of the occasional participants have a greater sense of how the region is an open system than the leadership expresses. Despite limited use of the PLENTY as money, the implementation of the PLENTY has opened a new way for the initiative's participants to negotiate the local both individually and collectively.

One of the more unique stories of the early days of the project comes from one of the two women credited as the original founders of the PLENTY. It is a story that complicates the “local” ties that bind the PLENTY network together and reveals some of the ways in which the initial planners negotiated the idea of the local when developing a local currency designed to support local community economics.

According to Kat, she was advertising an upcoming public meeting by walking around downtown Carrboro and stapling flyers to telephone polls. As an artist and someone connected to several artists networks in the area, she knew that this would be an effective way to reach a potentially interested public (meaning for her those already supportive of the intersection between community and economic relations expressed at a localized scale). She imagined this potentially interested public existing in Carrboro for several reasons: because of the success of Weaver Street Market—a consumer- and employee-owned cooperative grocery store and café which would become the most significant partner in the PLENTY endeavor—as well as the Carrboro Farmers’ Market (one of the largest in the state); because her own social networks often intersected with downtown Carrboro as a member of Weaver Street Market, as a participant in a babysitting co-op, and as a contributor to the local art scene; and, because her own experiences with alternative economic activities and

art in other places before she moved to Chapel Hill in 1999 resonated with the sense of place she felt when she spent time in Carrboro. In short, she felt that any interested public would see her flyers in downtown Carrboro because of the ways that place existed in her imaginary as a meeting space for local exchanges that complement the formal, dollarized economy. She describes both Chapel Hill and Carrboro as places where alternatives to the mainstream are not alternative, but part of the mainstream.

As she walked in front of a shopping center in downtown Carrboro, pushing her toddler in a stroller and attaching flyers to the bulletin boards of sympathetic businesses, she heard a radio news report through the open window of a pizza delivery car. It was September 11, 2001. She thought the report was a joke at first, something about planes crashing into the World Trade Center towers in New York City. She stopped and listened. The reporter tried to describe what was happening but it was still unclear exactly what was going on. Later on, she reflects that she realized that whatever was happening in New York City was an event taking place at a different scale than the activities she was organizing. Somehow, what was taking place in Manhattan that morning was quickly understood to be “global” while her efforts to develop a complementary currency were apparently “local.”

Obviously, the trajectories that met up that morning in New York City had a wide spatial extent and the ramifications of that event have been expressed in a complex global space of flows. What is important to understand about the ways in which the PLENTY represents an intervention into the production of place and the politics of community is why the PLENTY came to be understood so easily as “local” (particularly in the face of such a “global” event). Indeed, as this originator of the

PLENTY recounts this story, she expressed that the PLENTY does have something to say about globalization, but that the link was never clearly stated and has remained “too abstract” for many people to carry into their everyday lives or into the politics of the complementary currency. This despite her own concern with the translocality of the area as someone who had come to central North Carolina from somewhere else, as someone familiar with the multi-scalar networks that meet up in the region around the area’s universities, and as someone who had promoted the PLENTY in reference to a multi-scalar space of flows. Whether as an invited speaker at an activists’ conference on the topic of “glocal” politics or as a citizen concerned about the ways in which multinational firms, like Wal-Mart, connected the region to certain global networks over others, she expressed an explicit understanding of how the region was always already more than local and a vision of how the PLENTY could be used to challenge the structure of such translocal relations. Indeed, her desire to implement a complementary currency stemmed from a hope to reveal cracks in the seemingly coherence system of global capitalism, to foster economic difference, and “to live in/tension with globalism.”<sup>57</sup> Yet, despite the involvement of others who brought their own translocal experiences to bear on the development of the PLENTY, the unfolding of the PLENTY initiative has become increasingly territorialized at a particular scaling of the local. This local scale has become crystallized through the

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<sup>57</sup> She expressed this play on words directly in the course of my interview with her: she stated that the word “in/tension” should be written that way and explained that she wanted to use the term to capture both the intentionality of the PLENTY as a response to translocal processes as well as troubling effect she had hoped to see the PLENTY have as it’s circulation would create a space in tension with the smooth spacing of global capitalism as characterized by free market ideologies, privatization of resources, and transnational corporations—her characterization of the Triangle as a global/regional space.

ways in which the PLENTY flows through an already existing set of social networks that pine for an expression of local community (despite its translocal conditions of possibility). As the PLENTY has become solidified as local in this way, it has atrophied as an intervention into the politics of community and as a practical component of participants' everyday lives.

### *Arbitrarily Local*

In November 2004, the members of the Board of Trustees of NCPlenty, Inc. were completing their monthly meeting and trailing into more general discussions about community economics. The Board is involved with the maintenance of the currency, is responsible for supporting those who have agreed to accept the PLENTY as a money, conducting outreach, public relations, fundraising, and recruitment of new members, and setting the strategic plans for the future of the organization and the project. One of the members of the Board raised a topic that he had recently learned about: remittances sent by Latino workers from North Carolina to families in Mexico, Guatemala, and other Latin American countries of origin. He was amazed about the amount of money that was leaving the state and going into the pockets of people somewhere else. He was brainstorming out loud about how it would be great to link these workers up with the PLENTY so that all that money would stay in the region, in the "local" economy, and not go elsewhere. Another Board member wondered if the existence of these monetary networks hurt local family farms which didn't have enough capital to hire a lot of labor outside family networks. She raised concern that such a leak in the local economy contributed to the corporatization of agriculture in the area. The person who initially raised the topic went on and compared this system

of remittances to being just like the retail firm Wal-Mart: both create a major leak in the local economy that need to be plugged by something like the PLENTY, something that traps capital (and the social relations it represents) in some space called the “local economy” in order to benefit some entity called the “local community.”

This articulation between the linkages created by the geography of Wal-Mart as a transnational firm and the linkages joined together through the networks of transnational migrants is made possible because their value to the local is measured by these Board members in terms of their ability to be located within a bounded place. While both share a disdain for the social and spatial abstractions captured by capital and deployed by multinational corporations, at that moment neither could distinguish the complex array of geographical effectivities and power geometries that differentiate the accumulation strategies of Wal-Mart from the distribution mechanisms of the anonymous, rhetorical group of transnational migrants under discussion. In evaluating these two “leaks” in the local economy, Wal-Mart is an easy target: it dominates local market shares in a range of retail categories by combining a strategy of low pay with minimal benefits, anti-unionism, control over sourcing and distribution, and a management of capital across its retail outlets to penetrate markets with low consumer prices. The outcome of the firm’s strategy are well known: a Wal-Mart moves into a new location, often in an area with a low-income population that both needs jobs and needs inexpensive retail outlets, the store undersells any local competitors, gains control of market share and becomes the primary retail outlet. This business strategy isn’t new, but the scale and success rate

of Wal-Mart's activities have caught the attention of many who see Wal-Mart as a major leak in any local economy—the low pay with little job security drives down local wages and household incomes, the loss of competition channels more of area residents' spending towards Wal-Mart which in turn siphons money out of the locale into the firm, and increasingly local municipalities pay out large sums of money to obtain a Wal-Mart (through subsidizing construction costs, infrastructure expansion, and tax breaks) reducing the amount of public money that go to other services. In the eyes of those in the complementary currencies movement the problem with Wal-Mart is that it moves capital in a unidirectional vector from one locale to somewhere else (capital that is assumed to somehow already have some stickiness to the locale in question).

If this is the only lens through which Wal-Mart (or any trajectory that meets up in a place) is interpreted, then it is easy to compare Wal-Mart to and similarly oppose the set of transnational immigrants who remit money back to their countries of origin. Through this line of reasoning in which the local place is rendered static, where money is either here or somewhere else, both Wal-Mart's accumulation of capital and transnational workers' redistribution of capital are evident as examples of leaks in the local economy, as money that is simply lost from the local. Such a line reasoning both simplifies the complex geographies that link either Wal-Mart or transnational migrants to any given place and denies the power-geometries which connect Wal-Mart to the exploitation of transnational migrants through Wal-Mart's reliance on a low-wage, socially and legally marginalized workforce (not to mention the denial of the contributions made by these transnational migrants to the local



economy through production, consumption, and tax revenues). While both Wal-Mart and migrant workers' remittances draw capital out of places, the ways in which these processes happen are quite different. Yet these key differences become glossed over when the local gets defined as an actually existing point in space rather than negotiated as a dynamic site where heterogeneous flows meet up and travel particular trajectories.

Protecting the "local" economy from these leaks is precisely what the initial organizers and current leadership of NCPlenty, Inc. hope to achieve. According to promotional literature aimed at recruiting businesses into the PLENTY network, the PLENTY can boost the "unique local economy" because it "shields local culture from the infiltration of big-box stores and 'Generic Americana'" (NCPlenty Inc. 2003, p. 3). By designing the PLENTY as a "local" currency within a particular space, the intention of the originators became to trap capital into a monetary system that only has value within the (originally) tri-county region. "PLENTYs function just like US cash except they can only be spent in our local area" (NCPlenty Inc. 2003, p. 3). This initial urge did not stem from a basic localism; rather, the hope was to encourage businesses and consumers in the area to use the PLENTY to modify existing economic practices and figure out new social and economic relations that would relate them to the local differently. According to a founding member the goal has never been to isolate the area from the rest of the world or have the PLENTY replace the dollar, "but offer a different way to live in this world."

Some founding members acknowledge the social and economic privileges involved in offering and enlivening that difference. One founding member, when

talking about the challenges many people face when trying to buy locally because of the higher costs associated with many goods and services, noted a used beverage container from a multinational fast food restaurant that had been sitting in her car from earlier in the day. She used this as evidence that her involvement with the PLENTY was centered upon her desire to see a range of consumer choices in the area, choices that she sees curtailed by the expansion of firms with wide spatial extent (i.e. aren't "local" businesses). She posits that the very abstraction of exchange value by money—in which the value produced by socially necessary labor time can be moved easily across space—is what allows the spatial expansion of firms and facilitates the removal of capital from one place to be deposited in another. The private printing of localized currency could alter the spatiality of capital's money form. In doing so, it could also be distributed in ways that could give more people access to money and therefore more access to the array of consumer choices in a local economy not dominated by multinational firms. For her, in grand terms, "the potential of the PLENTY is to bridge gaps that seem unbridgeable" by overcoming the disparities of wealth which divide area residents into those who can choose where to consume (and the ways in which their consumption practices create translocal exchange relations in ways other than through pure accumulation of capital) and those who must rely upon goods and services made inexpensive through translocal production and distribution systems driven by the logic of capital accumulation. Not only would the PLENTY reduce social and economic exclusion within the local region, she speculated, but it could also impact such processes elsewhere.

While for some the initial goal of focusing upon the local was not simply to prevent leakages in the “local” economy, but to provide a way for those who meet up in the locale to construct new economic geographies that would allow the trapped capital of the PLENTY to circulate and generate wealth for those able to use it, for others the idea of the local is simply a taken for granted good that should be supported to stop “leaks.”. As one charter member states:

“Well, to me the big assumption that I saw was that local businesses, while they supported the idea of buying local or shopping Orange [County], didn’t really do that themselves. So the common thing when we started it, and we went door to door signing up businesses, but the common thing was: ‘I don’t buy anything locally made. Even my accounting is done out in Ohio. My paychecks are issued from Connecticut.’ You know. So, it’s like: ‘You do nothing locally?’ And it’s like: ‘No. And I’m not willing to do that either because, you know, I’m going to go with the lowest cost thing.’ So the whole idea of what we were trying to do wasn’t even accepted by the businesses themselves. So it seemed in a way that a little bit ludicrous. So you encourage the customers to pay a little bit more to shop downtown or you say there’s some better value, there’s some better service, or whatever, but essentially you end up paying a little more here than at Wal-Mart. And you say that’s because the money stays here and it’s local and it’s good and then, they just don’t put two and two together.”

The reason it seemed to make sense appears to stem from the ways in which some of these initial organizers conceptualized the project as something local. Though this rendering of the local went through its own series of negotiations, after about a year of discussions among participants at public meetings, interested individuals, and (positive and negative) feedback from recruited storefront businesses, the definition of the local within the PLENTY community came to be more settled. As noted above, the idea of a local currency was tied to a single town, Carrboro, and was to be called Carrboro Cash. In part, this is because the Carrboro Board of Aldermen had considered adopting a Carrboro-based currency in the late 1990s and some of the PLENTY’s organizers assumed that the interest remained. But two other attempts to launch a local currency in the area had been tried outside of

Carrboro within the last decade (one successfully initiated in Durham, but now defunct, called Bull City Bucks). That the already existing social geographies of those who came to participate in the early planning all intersected in Carrboro—particularly through Weaver Street Market—and this system of social relations structured what would come to be the central local space of the PLENTY and justified the localization of the PLENTY in the town. But soon the organizers realized that the spatial extent of Carrboro was too limited. They wanted some space with a wider scope, but not too wide. As one original organizers recalls:

“We definitely wanted to keep it very much place-based. And there was some discussion in the very beginning of, well should we try to include Asheville [North Carolina], you know, how broad should we be reaching out. And what the decision basically was—and I’m still not sure how I feel about this—we’ll let Asheville make their own money, you know, if they want it they’ll, the point is to keep it local, to really work with our neighbors and to strengthen the bonds that we have here rather than diffusing the energy. If we were sharing our economy from Asheville then there would still be the problems of trucking things in long distance, problems that come with non-local economies. It’s more the local, so it was very important to have it be focused. You know, we even said Raleigh [North Carolina] can go ahead and make their own money if they wanted to because for some reason that felt like it was getting too dispersed.”

The original move to associate the currency with a particular space that somehow adequately captures the local has had to be balanced with the social networks which crisscross this space and reveal its leakiness even among a localized set of social relations. While the leadership has referred to the “local” as an actually existing entity with social and economic geographies which could be bolstered by a complementary currency, many have been cautious about localizing this geographical imaginary too much. As one long time participant notes:

“...when we were first trying to get the initial 200 members or whatever it was, the story was, whoever you could find to barter with was welcome to join because the idea was, it’s an organic life form, almost, that’s going to spread, and if you can convince your car mechanic to take it, then it spreads there and if your car mechanic happens to be in Hillsborough, the so be it. But I think it’s the nature of this area is that people really do drive. It’s not a tight knit, you know, an urban area where people really have their small neighborhoods, but people really do travel a lot to

meet their needs. And I think that's just the nature of the way this area is laid out, that it can't be so tightly focused because people don't think that way, I don't think in this area, people don't—you know, they might want to shop locally, but not that locally [laughs].”

But in the course of these negotiations about what shape the local might take, Kat claims that the assignment of the local to the three (now four) counties in which the PLENTY officially circulates had been arbitrary, that what was more important was identifying willing participants in the area and then drawing the boundaries of the “local” around their collective location. While this had the potential to create a much more dynamic understanding of the ways in which the PLENTY represents locality, tracing these meshworks came to be delimited by the political boundaries of counties in the area. In part, this came from the model that some early organizers worked with. The Ithaca HOURS complementary currency in Ithaca, New York is credited by many within the contemporary movement as reinvigorating interest in complementary currencies in the United States. The majority of complementary currencies systems that have been started in the last 15 years in the U.S. have used Ithaca HOURS as the model (in part because the founder of Ithaca HOURS, Paul Glover, sells a kit which provides the resources to start a complementary currency and celebrates the success of the HOURS project). The PLENTY is directly inspired by HOURS and some of the early organizers of the PLENTY studied the HOURS resource kit to get practical help in establishing the PLENTY.

While one person remained skeptical about the HOURS model (instead hoping to initiate a Time Dollars system), most of the early organizers agreed that an HOURS-based currency would be the best fit for their goal to enrich the histories and geographies they loosely envisioned constituting the local. The advantage of the

HOURS model, many believed, is that is explicitly a local currency and associated with a discrete place as defined by the political boundaries of maps (i.e. Ithaca, NY). However, according to many of the original PLENTY organizers, this spatial strategy seems to have been done for no particular reason and wasn't particularly strategic. As one of the initial organizers recalls the determination of the currency's basic structure and "localness" was never completely explored and seemed to emerge by default:

"And though I really had no knowledge about what that was, I don't know other systems or how they work, so I guess yeah, I just let [two other initial participants] decide the format and then we'd work out the details together, is how it came about."<sup>58</sup>

This spatial designation of the local seems to have been done for simplicity, but also, as one of the founders posits, without explicit reference to a particular geography because the early plans were "largely about the members" more so than which places those members existed in. The first year of development, before the money actually got printed and distributed, saw an ambivalence as well as ambiguity about where the monetary space of the PLENTY would take place. These different interpretations of the initial planning remain and many participants treat the local as an empty signifier that does not need to be filled with meaning because they take for granted their own understanding of the local. But after tracing the network of

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<sup>58</sup> Others recall a similar naïveté about the choice to use an HOURS model and feel that this decision had been made by one or two people with little collective input. Some reflect a sense of frustration at themselves that they didn't look into the details of the HOURS model more closely or question the development of local currency simply because it would be local. Interestingly enough, the leadership of the HOURS project are currently looking into ways to expand the circulation (and their own discourse about it) of HOURS into the regional space of the Finger Lakes region in upstate New York in recognition that the social and economic geographies that meet up in Ithaca (and get highlighted by HOURS transactions) often extend beyond the confines of the town.

relations that constituted the linkages between those interested in the complementary currency in the earliest stages of development, the founders more clearly targeted their efforts at a particular geography of the local, one that could be readily mapped onto existing spaces. It was this stress on the already existing linkages between potential participants that appears to have delimited what the local would come to mean for the leadership of NCPlenty, Inc.

In following already existing boundaries of the counties, then, early organizers of the PLENTY used a framework of bounded spaces through which they could collectively talk about, identify, and make visible a local space. As the project became more institutionalized through the development of NCPlenty, Inc., the space of the projected PLENTY community economy and its scalar configuration came to be rendering in more discrete and bounded ways. A proposal for the PLENTY written in 2002 states: “We are soliciting the initial membership from the towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro, and parts of the City of Durham, and will be broadening our geographic range as the PLENTY becomes established.” This statement seems to come from an urge to compare the space of the PLENTY to the spaces of other complementary currencies in the U.S.—systems which have unfolded in their own bounded expression of the local, particularly the Ithaca HOURS initiative upon which the PLENTY was heavily designed. But it was not necessarily a local space created out of the intervention and one which accounted for the translocality of people’s trajectories. Rather, the rendering visible of this local space through the boundaries of certain counties in central North Carolina allowed organizers to begin to speak of

the difference between “here” and “there,” “local” and “not local” when constituting their vision of a local community economy.

*The Lackluster Response to Ambiguously Rendering the Local*

The most common response given by PLENTY participants when asked why they initially decided to participate is similar to the response given by one of the initial organizers about her own involvement: “It sounds kinda neat.” (Or, as another participant stated as if surprised by the question: “Because I think its cool.”) While that statement may simplify the variety of reasons people have joined and the ways in which NCPlenty, Inc. actively recruited participants with justifications about the need for a local currency, it summarizes the ambivalence with which many participants treat the PLENTY. In different terms, this ambivalence appears related to many participants’ already existing commitment to localist political praxis and many have seen the PLENTY as just another activity that is somehow in support of the “local.” Without a clearer expression of what that local could be as a space of encounter, many participants simply look upon the PLENTY as a low-level commitment which can be added to a list of activities that reinforces their own local praxis. As one participant reflects on his reasons for joining:

“It was cheap as a marketing vehicle and, plus, I liked the concept of trying to trap dollars in the local economy. I’ve spent a lot of time on local economics in Chatham, in one form or another, and I’m very pro-microenterprise and very environmentally oriented. So for me it was a no-brainer. It just made perfect sense, I think just bumped into them, dug into my wallet, plunked down the 12 bucks or whatever it was and signed up then, nothing to it.”

A farmer who has been involved since the beginning notes that she joined because:

“It just sounded like a great thing. I was attracted to it because it’s different, it’s out of the mainstream... It’s an alternative. I’m just an alternative kind of girl. Really,



sometimes, that's just the most appealing thing to me is people trying to do things differently."

Similarly, a business owner shares:

"I have a pretty strong anti-corporate bent to myself. I grew up on a farm. The idea that money stays in a community has a real appeal to me... I don't think, I mean, I was not a hard sell [laughs]. And I also wasn't a person who questioned it a whole lot. I mean who would ask a lot of questions about it. It sounded like something that would be good, that could work maybe, and that if it was going to happen I would definitely have my name on it as a place."

Another participant states his reasons for joining:

"...it just seemed like a good idea. For some years we try [to] keep, try to spend as much money locally as possible. And wherever I've lived I've supported the food co-op. You know keep our currency, our resources, that kind of resources, here in the community. And it just seemed like a natural extension. So, I think mostly to keep the currency local."

What these participants' responses share is an already existing commitment to some sort of the politics of the local to which the PLENTY was an addendum.

Indeed, few participants in the PLENTY have been inspired to cultivate a new relation to the local—rather, the PLENTY is just another way to express already held beliefs. This becomes evident when participants compare their initial excitement about the ideas behind the PLENTY (which many equate with their own individualized localist praxis) and their ambivalence about the actual achievements of the endeavor. Several participants prefaced interview appointments with warnings that they had nothing useful to say about the PLENTY because they never use them. Few can specify buying goods or services with PLENTYs and of those that can, only a handful of transactions are identified as ones which wouldn't have taken place without PLENTYs. Others shift conversations towards other practices like local biodiesel production or community supported agriculture programs to avoid talking about the PLENTY. Many, however, are forthright about their lackluster response to

the way in which the PLENTY has been carried out as a “local” initiative. One particularly jaded participant states:

“So I see that that’s what they’re trying to do and I think there are a lot of ways to try and enforce that and this is one of them and unfortunately I don’t think it’s really that practical of a way. And it’s unfortunate because a lot of people are behind it and putting a lot of energy and resources into it and it seems like, I don’t know what other way would work, really. Maybe just like a big campaign to educate people on the importance of, why it is important to buy local. Maybe there are a lot of people who are just like, what does it matter? And maybe if there was some big educational campaign, I don’t know, where all these people were putting their energy and effort into that, but I don’t know if it’s really working. I’m just talking about from my perspective. Like I really haven’t talked to other people who are using the PLENTY except for the other farmers who are all like, ‘I don’t take the PLENTY!’ [laughs]”

Others are similarly direct about the ways in which the PLENTY inadequately captures a meaningful and practical way to enrich the local as a space of encounters. Some relate this directly to the geography of the project and speak of Carrboro as the center of the PLENTY network and other places as peripheral despite NCPlenty, Inc.’s focus on multiple counties:

“I mean we don’t have a lot of—I guess you’ll get to questions about spending—we don’t have a lot of options for spending it here yet, so we haven’t taken in that much more than we can use. I feel just kind of on the fringe of the area that’s using it so we’re not getting a lot I think for that reason.”

Another participant outside of Carrboro makes similar remarks:

“I do absolutely think I’m on the fringes of it. I think that it goes from Pittsboro. I feel like it’s a corridor that goes from Pittsboro to Hillsborough and the problem is that I live in Moncure and Moncure is up here [points]. As far as vendors for my business relationships, most of my vendors are in Sanford. Sanford is outside the realm of the PLENTY so I can’t spend them at the welding store or the scrapyard or places that we would go to lunch at in Moncure, there’s no. I think that the fact that the geographical range is restricted is a good thing, but I’m on the fringe of the geographical range.”

He goes on to note that the ambiguity of the PLENTY’ localism and how it connects the four counties into a monetary space of encounter might even be counterproductive to the currency’s stated goals:

“I don’t want to go to Chapel Hill, so I’m not going to drive to Carrboro to spend my PLENTYs. And so I wish there was a grocery store down here that would take them, you know? I wish that my mechanic down here would take them. I’m not going to

go drive to Carrboro to go get a massage. I'm probably not going to hire a carpenter from Chapel Hill. I mean, that's not sustainable either. So my thing is, my carpenter in Moncure doesn't take PLENTYs, OK, I don't get to blow PLENTYs on carpentry."

Many participants see a significant gap between what the PLENTY could accomplish and what the PLENTY does accomplish. This gap is hollowed out by the conceptual ambiguity with which the PLENTY has thus been structured as a "local" currency. Even the most ardent supporters of localist politics within the initiative struggle to describe NCPlenty, Inc.'s achievement in implementing the PLENTY in positive terms. Overall, the ambiguity and ambivalence of the PLENTY's official localism has been met by ambivalence by many of the participants. Few express disappointment at the PLENTY. Rather, participants speak with a nonchalant tone or describe the as yet unrealized potential of the endeavor. Participants connect their own lackluster response to the geography of the PLENTY, yet some still see a powerful ethics of the local within the network because of the way monetary space can be constructed as networked, open, and as a space of encounters. As one participant who has yet to receive any PLENTYs (other than those provided by NCPlenty, Inc. when her business joined the network) shares:

"And what's interesting to me about the PLENTY is that it seems that most community building initiatives are focused around neighborhoods, buildings, or schools, or churches, or that sort of thing and the idea of money or the economy being something that a community is focuses around is very different. And it's also, I think, has the potential of being something that's much more unifying than any of those other things because there's always a limit to who is a part of a community of a school, or of a church, or different group or whatever else it is that people feel connected to. Whereas money and the economy is something that we all are affected by day-to-day, extremely affected by and need in order to function in the way in which our society is set up and so the opportunity to have a connection of a community, a regional community, is much more broad than the way other communities tend to be focused on for developing."

However, the realization of this articulation between an ethics of the local and a dynamic politics of community appear clouded by the ways in which the

PLENTY's empty signifier of the local gets filled with contradictory—and exclusionary—ideologies that rest uneasily together as proclamations in support of the “local.” In other words, the PLENTY is presented as a mechanism to uphold the “local” economy in the face of “global” economic forces, yet in doing so undermines the capacity to enact a unique local ethics past the social stratifications which are already visible in the local region, stratifications which have emerged as local articulations of global processes and which offer unclear and at times contrary imaginaries of the “real” local space.

*Conservative or Progressive: Unpacking the Local and the Politics of Community*

One of the members of the Board of Trustees occasionally jokes about some of the publicity that the PLENTY has received. One particular public statement appeared in an issue of the Hippie Hill News, an online blog that is designed by its author as a way to meet the “challenge of keeping all these liberals on their toes!” in Orange County, North Carolina. Often providing news stories that appear to contradict the policies of Democrats as well as personal diatribes against “liberals” in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, the Hippie Hill News noted the 1st anniversary of the PLENTY with a brief blog entry. From the perspective of the NCPlenty, Inc. Board member who recalled reading this blog, he was surprised that the first reaction from the Hippie Hill News was supportive: “First of all I want to say that I support local business (you can ask pub owners like Tyler), and think the idea of the NCPlenty could be cool” (Hippie Hill News 2003). After this introductory statement, however, the blogger posited that the PLENTY is actually a socialist, anti-capitalist experiment that isn't really about supporting local businesses but redistributing wealth. While the

member of the Board doesn't think this is the best publicity for the project, he appreciates any acknowledgement of the PLENTY's existence. But his surprise that such an ardently politically conservative source would affirm the idea of a local currency initially struck him as odd.

Indeed, many of the participants (as well as organizers) of the PLENTY assume a progressive, leftist politics to the endeavor because of the ways in which they articulate the local as a political category. But, as this anecdote highlights, the local does not have any necessary political association and can easily be adopted into a variety of political projects. While the notes of a blogger are a benign example of the PLENTY's conservatism, the failure of NCPlenty, Inc. to explicitly frame how the local as a particular space of encounter (and what sort of ethical relationality can be mediated through a local currency) allows the participants of the PLENTY to justify how their particular social and economic geographies reinforce regional inequities, social divisions, and instigate a politics of exclusion. Often such expressions emerge as ways to fill the discursive void of the "local" within the PLENTY's ambiguous localism when participants use the PLENTY as a device to negotiate their relationship to the "local." This has become evident in the multiple ways in which participants and organizers stress the possessive pronoun in the PLENTY's three-part slogan—our community, our economy, our money—and allows people in the project to define the content of that "our" in conventionally local terms. What is "ours" is defined as what is distinct from the "Hispanics" immigrating into and acting different within "our" space, the social mores and economic patterns of generational residents who don't share "our" proclivity to connect consumer choices with political action, or simply

conceptionalized as an actually existing physical space with accurate boundaries that differentiate one town from another as either inside or outside “our” space.

This negotiation of local encounters and localized spaces is not simply one in which everyone is equally translocal. Indeed, further speculation into the local that the PLENTY purports to support often reveals a particular set of localized relations that get privileged because of the ways in which these “local” relations come to be articulated with a rendering of community. One of several members of the PLENTY network in Chatham County is an antique dealer who procures merchandise from all over the world. Indeed, this merchant believes that those who are most attracted to the type of localism engendered by the PLENTY tend to be cosmopolitan, unbound by place, who he contrasts to the authentically “local” residents of the area:

“But the very local people—I don’t really want to say this on tape, but—redneck North Carolina [laughs] who are not at all the kind of people who would be here and I think are the kind of people who don’t even want to hear about the PLENTY. The type of clientele we have here are people who’ve traveled, a lot of Carrboro-Chapel Hill folks who have an exposure to international products, and so was kind of natural that the arts crowd around Chatham County and Weaver Street [Market] would bring a different type of art that might also be a competition, but it’s not, it becomes part of the people who want to bring some new art to Chatham County. The [Pittsboro] General Store [another PLENTY participant], we go there regularly so we knew that any PLENTYs that we would get in here we’d spend right down the street. That is why it’s a logical way of coming in. I do understand that there’s all of the organic farmers or things like that, which are very local products, and internet services, or whatever, but I don’t see why we can’t be part of that game.”

Such a contrast between the “redneck” North Carolinians that represent the kind of people who would not be interested in the localized practices of the PLENTY with the translocal residents who seemingly form the base of the PLENTY’s localism ties back into a ongoing conflict within the localism of NCPlenty, Inc.’s efforts and something that others in the network point to in various ways. He goes on to note that:

“...in Chatham County you have two very separate groups of folks. I mean you have a bunch of people who don’t want to hear about any newcomers and you have the artsy kind of people who are happy to see things changed, they want the growth to be smart, they don’t the big developments to come in and ruin the countryside or whatever, but are open to new ideas, to something like we have in here. But the ones, those *local folks*, I don’t think they’re interested in it. They’re interested in buying at Food Lion or the Dollar General...” [my emphasis]

Or, as another PLENTY user says when talking about the difficulty he has had convincing others to accept PLENTYs at their businesses, that there is a difference between the “hippies” who are in the PLENTY network and the seemingly more politically conservative generational residents:

“You’re out here where guys still sitting around and chew and spit in the morning and you know, and that’s the good old boys that you’ve got [laughs] So, yes, of course, they look at you like—and of course, I’m sort of looked at like that, I’m an enigma out here, people don’t know me, know what to do with me [laughs].”

Another member indicates a related divide when discussing what he sees as a lack of participation in the PLENTY but for a few select people:

“So I have staff that live Garner, that live in Raleigh, outside of the edge of the PLENTY. But then another part of that [pause] I don’t know what the opposition is, conservatism? Is that the right word? I don’t know if that is the right word—there’s just a fear, a reluctance. Because actually, at the end of the day, I’ve got people on staff that don’t buy it. You know? They don’t care about local circulation. They go to Wal-Mart. I have people on staff that actually eat at McDonalds! So those people, you’re not going to impress with your local currency, especially when it’s a bunch of, like, aging hippies from Chapel Hill. So I think that maybe why we don’t have as high of an adoption rate as we could have.”

Similarly, a member who conducts most of her work outside the areas within which PLENTYs currently circulate speculates why her clients in these areas wouldn’t accept the PLENTY as money:

“‘Cause they’re very traditional, like, Republican-types [laughs] I don’t know, maybe they would, maybe they would, but I’m not sure that they would quite get it.”

While the conditions of possibility for such statements relate directly to the 50 year history of central North Carolina as a region in a particular set of global relations, it also reveals the very limitations of the PLENTY’s localism as enacted so far. Despite the all encompassing rhetoric through which the PLENTY unfolds as a

“local” currency across a regional space, in fact it is a particular set of relations that meet up in this locality which constitute the PLENTY network. These “local” relations are only temporarily ordered as local and only “local” from a certain perspective. Despite the proclamations from the leadership of NCPlenty, Inc. that the PLENTY is fundamentally a local endeavor, the translocalness of both the people and the place within which the PLENTY circulates is a condition of possibility for the PLENTY’s own localism. But what the ways in which the PLENTY has been negotiated and defined as local also sets the limits on the geographical imaginary of responsibility among people and place in the locale and structures how the PLENTY mediates the politics of community.

Interestingly enough, few of the originators or active participants have resided in central North Carolina for more than a few years. Yet only occasionally does this spark explicit reflection. One participant does note:

“I think coming here from outside has helped me to become very—and it’s a double-edged sword—to become very conscious of what is—because I’m an outsider I’m creating my community around me, it’s not something I was born into, but it’s something that I consciously have to build, and choose, and develop for myself because it’s not the people I went to high school with, it’s not the, my parents’ friends, it’s people that I have to go out and meet. And so you are constantly making choices as a newcomer.”

In terms of the politics of community, this translates into a particular group of people attempting to produce their own vision of a localized set of social relations, while claiming a local subjectivity to justify their actions. It isn’t that the participants in the PLENTY initiative or the Board of Trustees of NCPlenty, Inc. aren’t really local (as if this authenticity could be validated in any meaningful way), it’s that the PLENTY becomes a tool to construct an identity that defines the local primarily as their own particular localized relations. For the participants in the PLENTY project,



the local becomes where they are now and shifts the definition (and negotiation) of the local away from its territorialization in space and towards the ambiguity of the “they” as a set of social relations that can be recognized as a community. For some, the community that constitute the local does not include “redneck North Carolinians” even if these “rednecks” have lived in the locale for a longer period of time. For others, this construction of a local community is an unfolding process of negotiating spatial relationships.

In terms of the spatial politics unfolding alongside the PLENTY in the region this localized notion of community sees its expression in the common desire by many participants to be a part of a mode of community that is open to those who can be similarly interpellated as local subjects. Despite the international networks and cosmopolitanism of the antique merchant’s economic relations, when reflecting on his decision to reside in Chatham County, he states: “We’ve moved to a small town because we wanted to be part of a small community.” Such a concern for “small community” resonates strongly among many of the PLENTY participants and folds into many negotiations of the local and who properly belongs to this space. Echoing both the desire to have a small, “local” community and the conversation among Board members about the similarities between Wal-Mart and transnational migrants, one participant describes her pleasure in living and working in Carrboro because “it’s small enough that the downtown is maintained and has been for years and years and years and people shop downtown and people have a real feeling of spending their money locally” then frowning when asked about Carrboro recent wave of Mexican immigrants in the last 10 years and stating that she’s “had some very bad

experiences” and describes her negative feelings about what she perceives to be a lack of social values among the Hispanics living in the town.

*Losing Sight of Translocality: The Local as a Good*

Recently, NCPlenty, Inc. has begun to consider new ways to link up social and economic geographies that would deterritorialize the dominant reification of the local. But it is an on-going process, one that is taking place after five years of negotiating the local towards a more parochial and closed geographical imaginary. It is a negotiation that has limited the geographical imaginary of responsibility too closely to a place, a community, and a set of “local” actions. The general trend within the PLENTY network—at least among some of its most active participants and in the conversations of the leadership of the managing non-profit—has been to steer the development of the project towards defining the local as a good in and of itself and away from a negotiation of how the relational flows that meet up in this locale can become local differently. Yet the (often occasional) participants draw upon a different geographical imaginary of the local, one that defines the local as an unfolding space of encounter, a becoming, and outlines the possibility that the PLENTY can be used to foster an ethics of the local with a different geographical imaginary than the one envisioned by the official discourse of the project.

The aforementioned conversation on the relationship between Wal-Mart and transnational migrants offers one perspective on how the PLENTY intervenes into the politics of community through a configuration of the local. Though this may be a particularly influential statement—one with significant truth-effects in terms of defining the space within which PLENTYs circulate—it is only one way to negotiate

the local within the project and only one way to see the PLENTY as an intervention into the politics of community and a mechanism to redirect regional economic flows. As one member of the PLENTY community economy acknowledges, even Wal-Mart can have a complex relationship to place, especially when it's relationship is defined exclusively in terms of impact on a local set of community economic relations:

“Actually, the local Wal-Mart put some money into the local Arts Council tour, and actually, Wal-Mart's got a foundation that our local folks can apply to. So as much as we like to call them evil, just distributing cheap shit, they also probably do some reinvestment that goes back into the community.”

Rather than position Wal-Mart only as a leak in the local economy (and destroyer of the authentic relations of community supported by that local economy), this person uses Wal-Mart as a rhetorical device with which to negotiate the phenomenon of “globalization.” In doing so, he recognizes that the place within which PLENTYs circulate is always already a part of globalized relations and that the local is opened up by “the global.”

Without supporting the business practices of Wal-Mart, he is able to express a more nuanced statement about the need to support “local” community economic relations because he does not begin with the assumption that the local actually exists in isolation from other sites of relationality. Supporting the local place against Wal-Mart isn't about preventing leaks in the local economy. Rather, supporting the local and being anti-Wal-Mart is about creating different relations through which capital and people become translocal. In this case, Wal-Mart (and other transnational, capitalist firms) creates a certain set of translocal relations (one that is dominated by exploitation of socially marginal populations, manipulation of a perceived political economy of place, and a private, highly politicized control and redistribution of social

surplus). Being anti-Wal-Mart in this case is about imagining and enacting a different set of translocal relations. He goes on to note that seeing the PLENTY as a translocal project helps clarify “globalization” as well as offer potential alternatives to the mode of globalization he and others identify with Wal-Mart:

“...Global capitalism poses a huge problem for me, because I’m a Canadian and I moved here as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and I started [my company] in this little ten foot by ten foot office with no window and I’m a multinational, [my company] is a multinational company. I’m publicly traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange. OK, there you go. I have shareholders in Canada. I burn a lot of hydropower going to Canada...So it’s like, well, where does my wealth come from? My wealth comes from global markets... Where does that luxury come from? Global capitalism. Great. I stayed open in Brazil, I stayed open in Hungary, so there have been times when I participated absolutely whole heartedly in—I lost my shirt in Brazil, I lost my shirt in Hungary...”

He goes on to say:

“...So this globalization thing is really confusing to me. So, if you look at [my company], [my company] has this stellar corporate image in Chatham County [in North Carolina]. Everybody, you can go onto the rolls of every charity in Chatham County and they go, oh, yeah, [my company], oh yeah, [my company], doesn’t matter. Go to the volunteer fire department, to rape crisis, to you name it, they will all say, ‘thank God [my company] is here.’ And at the same time that we are this corporate citizen that is like, much prized, I will then go down to a planning meeting, or a community session about this or that, and I’ll watch the guy get up and bitch about global corporations, and multinationals are a problem. Now in the history of [my company], I’ve always said, if I’m going to make the money in Halifax, I’m going to put the money back into Halifax, or if I make the money in Winnipeg, I leave the money in Winnipeg, and so on with all of my travels. That’s one of the reasons I opened in Brazil was I thought I could make some money in Brazil and put the money back in Brazil, I thought I was going to save the rainforest, but instead I came home with my tail between my legs. So I think we have sense that the multinational corporation would be like a Wal-Mart where the dollar goes back to Bentonville [the town in Arkansas where Wal-Mart’s corporate headquarters are located]...I don’t know their numbers and I don’t know anything about them but my guess is, it’s real easy to demonize globalization...”

When asked directly if the PLENTY helps him understand globalization and the relationship between central North Carolina and “global” relations, he quickly responds:

“Absolutely. It completely does. It is a symbolic representation of sustainability, or some sort of sustainable model that we’re not right quite clear about right now, but maybe we’re working towards, or maybe we can leave them. But yes, I think it does provide a platform for that, absolutely.”

This participant is not the only one who expresses an ambiguous relationship between “globalization,” their own personal translocal trajectory, and their participation in the PLENTY initiative. Indeed, despite the current, basic localism of NCPlenty, Inc.’s official rhetoric, many PLENTY users have a complex relationship to local place and use the PLENTY to think through their own mode of relationality between central North Carolina and other places. Through the PLENTY, many of the participants realize just how translocal their social and economic geographies actually are because of the difficulty they have in using PLENTYs for exchanges that can take place only through a specific rendering of the local. As a farmer within the PLENTY networks posits:

“I think it’s a nice idea but I don’t think it’s a practical way of enforcing those kind of ideas of trying to promote local businesses, keeping things in the community, keeping it personal. I guess, I don’t think at this point that it can really work because there is so much that we’re dependent on outside of our community. I think that if something happened where we all had to be dependent on our community that a lot of things would change, but I don’t think we’re going to change unless that happens.”

For others, in the PLENTY network, such as storefront businesses, this point is reinforced when evaluating ways to incorporate the PLENTY (or “local” purchasing in anyway) into their supply chains. One business owner who has been involved with the PLENTY since its inception notes:

“We don’t, I mean, there’s not a lot of that that we have access to. Our main supplier is in Atlanta [Georgia]. Our helium comes from a company in that’s in Cary [North Carolina]. Pretty much all of our stuff comes from out of town I would say, ‘cause there’s not much manufacturing here, you know, so we wouldn’t be able to have that kind of thing, but like when we get a cake for students, we go to Weaver Street [Market] and get our cake, you know, we don’t go to Food Lion or to Harris Teeter.”

A restaurateur in Hillsborough supports the idea of the PLENTY but has had trouble actually using this money because of the ways it is accepted as a local currency: “Yeah we really haven’t had any way to use it ourselves, that’s been our

biggest, hurdle, I guess. We'd probably encourage more people to spend it here if we knew we had more places to spend it ourselves."

A similar concern is raised by the director of a school which is a registered participant in the initiative. When trying to figure out where to spend PLENTYs, she explains her frustrations:

"I have looked for other outlets and there's very few that work for the school's needs. So that if we were to actually accept PLENTY in tuition—if somebody came and said here you go—really, buying supplies from Weaver Street [Market] would be one way we could spend them, or paying a teacher, who I think in turn would probably go and use them for something similar. The problem that I found and the other person on the Board who looked around was that most of the services that are offered from people who accept PLENTY are not something that are in our day-to-day usage of the economy."

For another participating business owner, the notion of "local" is insignificant, despite her use of the term to describe her business, because she sees her sound economic standing as reliant on so many factors that extend to other places. This ambivalence towards the local is realized in the purchasing she does for both her business and her household:

"You know, the character of the town is such that it is enhanced by local businesses. But, you know, I'm not an avid, I confess, I'm not an avid local business devotee. Our bisque comes from Durham and Raleigh. It also comes from Italy. Business like this—and I know, we had this argument recently in our temple about organic produce and the advantages and everything—but if it costs four times as much it's really, it's difficult to support and you know, this is not a business that rakes in huge sums of money and so the differences in cost of a local thing or a non-local thing are significant. So, you know, I don't have the commitment to the extent that we don't buy anything that isn't local... I mean, we're not big consumers to begin with, but I, you know, I don't think twice before going to Bed, Bath & Beyond or Linens & Things to get a towel and I'm much more likely to get that than I am to get a hand-made towel that's going to cost twice as much."

It is important to note that despite the very translocality of these businesses and the explicit recognition of their dependence on places outside the PLENTY's local space, these businesses are still considered to be local by the leadership of the initiative. Indeed, there is a lot of ambiguity as to what makes a business or

individual local or non-local. In the case of one of the respondents, her business sells goods in Carrboro that are primarily made elsewhere. While she, her partner, and her employees add value to the product at the store and she lives in Carrboro, it seems that her business is considered local simply because it is located where it is and it is not part of a retail chain. Similar with other participants in the PLENTY community economy, it is not clear what makes them “local.” For some it is value-adding labor which occurs within the defined space of the PLENTY’s circulation. But there is no process whereby a potential participant is verified as either local or non-local by NCPlenty, Inc. As long as a participant is willing to use PLENTYs in exchange for goods and/or services, that participant is considered part of the local community economy. Indeed, as one participant jokes: “I’d love to see the PLENTY be accepted at Harris Teeter and Lowe’s—it’s a fantasy, but—because I know that their suppliers aren’t local” and it would be one way to force these corporate firms to source differently and negotiate their relationships to the locales in which their retail outlets are located. This flexibility opens up the definition of the local to reconcile that whatever takes place locally is only one portion of a network of relations that have translocal reach. Yet in practice the significance of the ambiguity about what makes a someone or some business local has not been elucidated by the leadership of the PLENTY project and has remained a missed opportunity to encourage participants and others to use the currency to negotiate their own explication of the content of the local beyond conventional classification and see how the translocal relations which underpin their own local experiences might include them into ethical relations with people and places within and outside the local space. Furthermore, it has frustrated

many participants who see the PLENTY as a failure because they cannot use it to get a significant amount of goods or service within the local economy, reinforcing (rather than overcoming) a belief that there is any significance to distinguishing the local from any other component of social life because they continue to articulate the local as an unproblematic, actually existing space. By not encouraging the negotiations that are already occurring through the PLENTY vis-à-vis many participants' understanding of locality, the organizers seem to create the conditions for frustration and a sense of failure. It is not the ambiguity of the term local that is at fault; rather, it is the lack of celebration of that ambiguity that leads participants and organizers alike to push to identify a clear vision of the local.

### *Ongoing Negotiations*

Part of the ways in which participants currently negotiate the local is constrained by the parameters established near the beginning of the project that tie local to a specific and bounded place. But it was always and continues to be a negotiation for many of the PLENTY users. One artist actively involved in the network envisions:

"It's local and in terms of local I can see it expanding out a little bit more. I know Raleigh already has something. I think it could encompass more areas. There was some people like in Lee County, in Sanford, who I thought would—I feel like that's a technical question an economist would be able to answer that. But it feels to me that if were big, if the area was bigger then it would be just as good and perhaps a little bit better."

But more than use the PLENTY to demarcate a discrete space in which the local exists, this participant sees the PLENTY as a mechanism whereby the intersections of translocal networks in the region can be highlighted:

"I had this idea, that I just want to make a map for the NCPlenty. But I wanted them to pay me [laughs]. That illustrates the concept of money recycling itself in the



community versus needing to go to Iowa or to a sweatshop in Asia. You know, that would illustrate it and a map that would be and a poster that you could buy because it's good looking and everyone had their town on it. So like a map of the PLENTY, with all the shops and things like with some arrows going, and you shop at Lowe's and your money goes here and you shop at Wal-Mart and your money goes over there [laughs]. And if you shop at French Connections in Pittsboro, your money goes over to Weaver Street [Market]. I thought that would be a good thing that we could sell, get the word out, illustrate the concepts that we're trying to promote and create a buzz as my fundraising friends say, you know."

This notion that the PLENTY could serve as a tool of illustration, as a pedagogical device which could foster an ethics of the local, parallels other participants' visions for the PLENTY:

"Well it has the potential to be—you know, PLENTYs sit in people's wallets until they go spend them. If a place where there is a pretty high volume of customers sees somebody spending PLENTYs, it raises awareness. 'Wow, what's that?' Or, 'Where's that person shopping?' [pause] And that's why I say it's a more of an illustration because if people are using regular dollars or paying in a certain way that anybody can pay in—well, I'm not saying this right at all—[pause] We're not in a position where we're excluding PLENTY membership from big box businesses. In practice, that's just happened by default. People who are interested in environmental sustainability and community building are likely to be interested in the PLENTY and are likely to already shopping at places, at businesses, that would be interested in accepting the PLENTY. The larger businesses wouldn't necessarily want to change their tune and people shopping at those places may not be interested in the PLENTY. So there needs to be a way to again connect people who are already, connect the choir with the preacher, or the people who haven't come into the church yet, I don't know how else to say it...But again I think that it is a useful tool and that it might—I just can't say definitively because my experience is so limited—be able to have an impact in community development even if it just serves as a tool of illustration. Even if it just, if somebody just says, 'Wow, I joined with this local currency, I found out I could spend them here and there, and it made me think about where my money goes and the kind of place that I live in, the kind of businesses that I, that my money goes to support, someone that I can meet and talk to and not a big box store that has these corporate policies that destroy the environment' or whatever."

For another, the "local" of the PLENTY can mean a simple geography lesson:

"I think what's happened in American society, is we've lost a connection of where stuff comes from. We don't know where our gas comes from, we don't know where our food comes from, we don't know where our clothes come from. So, we end up making decisions based on not having all the answers. And the thing that I will usually challenge people with is, you know, I'm not sitting around bashing Wal-Mart, I'm not going to bash Made in China, I'm not going to bash gasoline even though I don't use it anymore, just be aware of where that stuff comes from. Gas doesn't come from a gas pump. 60% is imported from imported countries. So when you buy a car that gets 10 miles a gallon and do a lot of driving, you know, you're utilizing a resource that there's a lot of other costs tied to it other than that 2 dollars that you're paying. So that kind of the mess we do and that's what we say about our product. There are cheaper products on the market, but you know, if you care about

the environmental impact, the social impact, of which the purchase you're getting ready to make..."

Indeed, as this recent participant in the PLENTY network suggests, this geography lesson of "where stuff comes from" is important in terms of ethical decisions and in how people negotiate their responsibility to one another across the territorializations of scale and place:

"...I can't go totally local. A perfect example, I drive that Volkswagen Golf out there. It's made in Germany. I mean I can want all I want to, to use the fuel I want to use, I can't buy a domestic made car. So, again, I try to weigh those decisions out and balance between—definitely all things equal, I'll go local first because it keeps the dollars to our community. But there's going to be certain times that I'm going out here and I'm going to have to step out of that. Unfortunately there's no shoe manufacturers around here, but I try to support shoe companies that support at least fair labor practices, you know, like Birkenstock or something like that. Just try to be aware of my purchases and do the best I can do. You know, I went to buy some products from China, I went to buy some products from other places. But again just trying to be aware of doing the best that I can possibly do."

Knowing this, he makes the lifestyle choice not to go "totally local" and he is able to stretch his geographical imaginary of responsiveness through the cultivation of an ethics of the local which recognizes that the local is not only the set of relations between those trajectories that meet up in a particular location, but also the set of relations that link a particular activity in one locale to another, and that local ethics upholds a sense of responsibility for people and places in other locations. Many participants in the PLENTY endeavor express this urge—ranging from a lucid analysis of transnational economic geographies to the more common and vague references to sweatshops in China and a desire not to contribute to the reproduction of such labor systems—and this urge is expressed in spatial terms different than those used among the leadership or within the official discourse of the PLENTY. One of the failings of the PLENTY—and perhaps a significant reason that few people use the currency or are inspired by its ideals—has been this discrepancy in how people

conceive of the space of the local and the ways in which the PLENTY has been designed as a local currency. There remains significant potential to broaden which histories and geographies are enlivened by the PLENTY by expanding the ways in which participants can enact their geographical imaginaries of responsibility as translocal subjects. So far, however, much of this potential is still unrealized.

Yet, despite this failing, the PLENTY has allowed people to negotiate the geo-history of the Triangle as a translocal space that they have inherited and continue to produce through their own social and economic geographies. What the PLENTY has done is open the possibility of an alternative regional imaginary by bringing attention to the very constructedness of the region. The more that the participants pursue this complementary role, the more viable the contra-Triangle politics of the PLENTY's community economy might actually become. Additionally, such attention to complementarity (and, subsequently, simultaneous heterogeneity) highlights the diverse ways in which the "Triangle" already leaks as a place and as a geographic construct. The next chapter will examine how the spacings of the PLENTY overlap and contribute to the spacings of the Triangle's diverse economies and ways of being regional subjects.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: OPENINGS: RETERRITORIALIZING THE REGION THROUGH ITS DIVERSE ECONOMIES**

### *Introduction*

As seen in earlier chapters, the last 50 years has seen the consolidation of a dominant regional identity for the central North Carolina piedmont, an identity captured by the name “the Triangle.” As with any identity, this way of summarizing the system of social relations that meet up in this location conceals as much as it reveals. The Triangle is a name used to describe a region at the cutting edge of competitiveness in a global political economy of place because of its high degree of amenities that are attractive to the creative class, its institutional and infrastructural forms which allow for the proliferation of knowledge-based firms to flourish, and its welcoming climate (both social and physical). The Triangle is also positioned as a significant nodal point in a global network of people, information, and capital, especially in terms of the information technology, pharmaceutical, and biotechnology sectors of the economy. This has brought about a new way in which this area experiences a global sense of place and has brought in new people, new channels of wealth, and new histories and geographies in the last five decades. The PLENTY community economy, at least as it has been officially articulated, attempts to create a contrasting and localized imaginary for the region.

By conventional measures, the region is a successful example of a post-industrial transformation, especially when compared to other regions in North Carolina that are struggling to replace departing industries with new sectors of the

formal economy. Yet the indicators that social scientists and policy makers use to measure the economy captures only a portion of the activities through which people labor, generate capital, identify within a class, use money, and express value. Indeed, as noted in the previous chapter, the PLENTY opens up the opportunity to view the region differently, both by recognizing already existing alternative imaginaries of the local and creating new ways of connecting people and place. While the PLENTY struggles to effectively accomplish this task, many of the participants in the PLENTY community economy actively reimagine the region as something more than just the Triangle as it is conventionally known. Indeed, many participants use their connection to the PLENTY as an exercise to negotiate their relation to the Triangle as a translocal space and make ethical decisions from that space. But the PLENTY also elucidates the ways in which people already interact within this region in an alternative set of social and economic geographies that are not visible in the accountings of the formal economy. While the PLENTY has had difficulty accomplishing its goals in terms of membership, capital generation, or community building, what it has done is clarified the ways in which people currently residing in the region have an active role in producing the region. As such, these people can actively participate in the production of the region as simply the Triangle, or as something more. While the quantitative measures show the limitations that the PLENTY has had in shifting the dynamic regional territorialization that has been assembled over the past 50 years, the words of the PLENTY participants indicate that the PLENTY remains an important component of the production of regional subjectivities which are always more than associations with the Triangle. While

many of the registered participants in the PLENTY community economy remain what J.K. Gibson-Graham refer to as reluctant subjects in terms of their use of the PLENTY, a closer look at their participation in the community economy assembled by the circulation of PLENTY notes shows a strong willingness to view themselves as subjects of a diverse and multiple regionality which is always more than simply the Triangle.

### *Tracing Alternative Regionality*

As noted above, the notion of a community economy opens up the range of possibilities with which to examine economic geographies. The circulation of PLENTY notes illuminates crystallizations of social and economic relations through which community is built in a variety of ways as temporary orderings, orderings that require a community economy perspective to be seen and explored. While the PLENTY is not always directly incorporated into these diverse economic practices, the ways in which the PLENTY circulates alongside these practices allows for a provisional mapping of the region's diverse economies as a set of community economies in the making. Some of these community economy relations are more stable than others and some extend across a broader spatial scope than others. What the PLENTY does, however, is both acknowledge the existence of and account for the value of these practices in ways that escape conventional indicators of a regional economy.

These various relations of community economy intersect to create a fractured and uneven map of the region. At times this map is very much like the standard maps of the Triangle that have come about through the dominant production of space over

the last 50 years: wealth circulates along particular lines of connection between people and institutions and these lines represent many of the social and economic barriers of the region's uneven development. But at other times these lines act as mobile contours, shifting and opening up new ways to map the region's geographies. While many participants in the PLENTY complementary currency project hold onto the potentiality of their endeavor and believe that the PLENTY has not yet—but someday will—tap into the latent possibilities to create a new community economy within the region, one can already see the ways in which a more economically diverse and socially complicated region exists by tracing the circulation of PLENTYs.

In part, the alternate map PLENTYs make through their circulation is different because PLENTYs do not exist in large enough numbers or get exchanged at high enough rates to impact conventional measures of the regional economy. There have been no new jobs created as a result of PLENTY spending that can be reported through labor statistics. No one has financed residential construction nor paid commercial rent with PLENTYs. No government will accept PLENTYs for tax payments. The total value of PLENTYs circulating is hovers near \$10,000 and the total value of PLENTY exchanges is around \$25,000. The majority of PLENTY exchanges are retail sales—people purchasing food and other goods at Weaver Street Market in Carrboro, the Pittsboro General Store and Café, Skylight Exchange in Chapel Hill, and through vendors at the Carrboro Farmers' Market. This dollar value includes PLENTY activities across Alamance, Chatham, Durham, and Orange counties between 2002 and 2006. In comparison, the retail sales in Orange County

alone in 2003 as measured by sale tax receipts totaled over \$1.35 billion, up almost 8% from 2002.<sup>59</sup>

Storefront businesses that accept PLENTYs for payment report that PLENTY exchanges represent a negligible percent of sales. Many do not even keep official records of PLENTY exchanges in their accounting books. The ones that do keep track report a steady decline in either in-flow or out-flow of PLENTYs since 2003, the first full year PLENTYs circulated in the area. This trend holds true across the PLENTY membership except for Weaver Street Market in Carrboro, where 85% of PLENTY users spend their PLENTYs.

Despite these figures, many PLENTY users indicate that exchanging PLENTYs is part of a wider range of economic practices that they employ to obtain goods and services outside of the dollar economy and through their social relationships. In order to understand how the PLENTY maps the diverse regional economies of central North Carolina and opens up the possibility for people to use these mappings to create new modes of solidarity and new community geographies, it is necessary to understand how the PLENTY highlights and supports firms and individuals who (already) incorporate a diverse range of exchange practices into their economic activities. Sometimes this is done consciously, other times it is just how business is done. But this is perhaps more than just adding another layer to an already existing community. For those firms and individuals connected to the

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<sup>59</sup> These figures are chosen as a way to compare the entire length of the PLENTY community economy with a single year, which happens to be the most robust year to date for the PLENTY community economy, as a way to demonstrate the quantitative insignificance of the PLENTY. Of course, the goal of this chapter is to point to other ways to measure the PLENTY's impact. The next chapter will take a closer look at how the PLENTY is valued.



circulation of PLENTYs, they appear to maintain this range of practices for two main reasons. First, the diversity of economic practices stretches their budgets of time and money. Second, these practices contribute positively to their social relationships. Regardless of the specific rationale, almost 80% of surveyed PLENTY users engage in non-monetary exchanges that represent a diverse set of economic practices. Of these members, over two-thirds use straight trade and just over 60% barter to obtain goods and services. Nearly a quarter of these participants engage in such activities on a weekly basis.

As people see the multiple ways in which they labor, contribute to a household income, or add value to something through the provision of a good or service, they begin to feel less constrained about how they budget their time and money. For many of these businesses and individuals, time is not easily divided between work-time and non-work-time and money is not the sole medium to obtain goods and services. As one person notes when describing his own use of trade and barter:

“I never wanted money to be a reason [someone] didn’t get whatever services I was offering...if you can’t fit it in there somewhere, there’s other things we can do and we’ll work something out. In general people tend to either have time or money. And have if they don’t have money they usually have more time, not always, but usually.”

When describing this relationship between time and money—one often brought up by complementary currency activists, especially in the LETS and Time Dollar systems that are aimed at alleviating unemployment—he goes on to explain that people with money can pay for what they need through dollars, but people without money can pay with time. For this individual, payment with time can come in terms of negotiated trade: his service is worth another person’s time along a sliding

scale and according to an individual's skills and capabilities. For some that translates into working in his garden. For others he requires them to provide childcare for his son. Among those that practice this strategy, many feel that such activities do in fact stretch their household incomes. 38% of surveyed PLENTY users believe that the non-dollar-based exchanges increases their household purchasing power. In doing so, people recognize that waged work is just one form of labor that they practice to produce a form of exchangeable value. It is less important that the value exchange is precisely equal (as can be tracked through dollar-facilitated exchanges) and more important that needs get met by drawing upon a collective range of skills and resources.

Many members of the PLENTY network practice such modifications of payment in a variety of forms. For some there is a formal system of trade incorporated into their firms' accounting system. For others there is much more fluid and informal acts of gifting, barter, and non-monetized exchange. People embrace these practices as ways to do more with their time and money because they provide people with greater flexibility in terms of the valuation of goods and services, in terms of the temporality of an exchange, and in terms of accounting for their own and others' assets, skills, and wealth. Participants in the PLENTY network stress the choice that the PLENTY, and the diverse economic practices they associate with the PLENTY, offers. PLENTY participants who acknowledge the presence of these diverse practices often describe the constraints placed on them by the dollar economy, constraints that get thrown off when they engage in exchange practices that the dollar, by their own accounts, is supposed to replace. Though the PLENTY is a money,

most PLENTY users describe the complementary currency as facilitating exchanges that can be categorized as somewhere between barter and dollarized exchange, exchanges that open up a space between the two. As one of the originators of the endeavor states, “It’s one of these funny little things that is semi-symbolic and semi-very, very real to have a different way of spending money. A different way of—spending money is just a way of interacting with your community and to give people this choice. That’s what it is, a choice. I can either go here or go there, work with this person or work with that person.”

One location on the PLENTY’s map of the diverse regional economies is the downtown historic district in Hillsborough. Hillsborough is the county seat of Orange County and sits about 12 miles north of Chapel Hill in between Interstates 40 and 85. The town has a long history as a mercantile center, first for the indigenous peoples who traded along the banks of the Eno River and then for white colonial settlers who traded among both native people and themselves. This economic history continues through today and officials in the town actively promote the role of downtown Hillsborough as a gathering and mercantile space for residents and travelers alike. Part of the celebration of this economic geography has to do with Hillsborough’s location along major transit routes. Local politicians and business leaders remain eager to lure drivers off of the interstates in order to have these drivers spend money at Hillsborough’s numerous restaurants, antique stores, and quaint shops.

Such efforts are not simply designed to create an intervening opportunity so that travelers refuel in Hillsborough instead of Graham or Burlington down the road.

Hillsborough's political and business leaders actively market the town's historic roots through regular festivals, public celebrations of the downtown, and the maintenance of a historic downtown district that evokes a small town lifestyle with a regionally and nationally important history. A volunteer Historic District Commission, authorized by the municipality, administers the appearance of downtown through zoning regulations, building codes, and architectural guidelines. Downtown is structured to provide a uniform built environment with low rise buildings, inviting storefronts, wide sidewalks, and strikingly detailed architecture that encourages walking, socializing, and discovery. Tourists, interstate travelers, and those needing to conduct municipal and county business are invited to eat, shop, and explore the downtown area through the marketing of colonial history and slow, country life.

Unlike other urban areas nearby, manufacturing has never been a large part of Hillsborough's economy. Currently, manufacturing is just under 15% of the Hillsborough's formal economy and the overwhelming majority of the measured economic activity occurs in the service sectors, both for government-related services and for tourism and trade-related services. But similar to those in the many places that rely heavily upon a tourist economy (even when part of that tourist economy attracts local residents), merchants in the downtown Historic District struggle with the ebbs and flows of seasonal sales, competition from low-priced retail outlets like Wal-Mart (now a super Wal-Mart just a few miles south from the Historic District's boundary, in between the interstate and the downtown), and shifts in the regional economy that change how people spend whatever income they have (such as the 2000-2002 recession that hurt the Triangle's IT sector). In order to weather some of

these fluctuations and uncertainties, many merchants in the immediate downtown Historic District have created a system of trade and barter. Though these merchants describe this system as a necessary strategy to stretch their firms' budgets, such activity doesn't seem to appear in the economic statistics that measure the local economy nor do such practices figure into the strategic planning for Hillsborough's downtown in the formal channels of politicians or business leaders with the Chamber of Commerce.

Several participants in these trade and barter networks are members of NCPlenty, Inc. and accept PLENTYs for partial or full payment of goods and services. But the PLENTY is money and the trade and barter system is a non-monetized set of relations. Those that have joined the PLENTY network see the PLENTY as money that is closer to bartering and trading than national currency and hope the PLENTY can contribute to their diverse economic practices. Part of the rationale to join the PLENTY for these merchants is to connect to another mechanism that can support the local economy in ways that are not clearly formal or informal, but rely upon a sense of camaraderie among the merchants. As one restaurateur in Hillsborough who regularly trades states:

"I have a small business and I know that it only works if the fabric of the local economy supports it—that it has to be interwoven with all the other businesses. And I'm very interested in sustainable economy, in people being able to work on a small scale."

This business owner articulates the cooperation generated through activities like exchanging PLENTYs or trade and barter as a way to create a sustainable local economy. Though the discourse of sustainability often refers to issues of environmental conservation, in this context, sustainability means both the sustenance

and growth of particular social and economic networks that contribute to a steady accumulation of wealth among a group of merchants. The fate of one business is tied to the fate of a collection of businesses within the same locale. The importance of the localized geography of these social and economic networks gets reinforced by the geography of the Historic District itself—without a well-fortified District, many merchants believe they would be unable to sustain their individual firms. The Historic District serves as an organizing point for the community economy and helps structure both the geography of diverse economic practices as well as how merchants understand terms like “local” and “community.” While a regional imaginary exists, the geography of that region is of a limited range and directs people and money towards Hillsborough without necessarily going the other way.

The particular geographical imaginary that this business owner expresses seems necessary to her because of the way in which she draws upon the trading system within the Historic District. The tight spatial scope of the district facilitates trust and cooperation, two essential components to the creation and maintenance of any economic system, especially one not clearly recognized as formal. Trust is a recurrent theme among PLENTY users and is a term used to explain both why the PLENTY has been successful and why it has failed. Nearly half of surveyed PLENTY participants believe that trust backs the value of the currency. Some explicitly state trust among participants within the network has not yet been built and limits the use of PLENTYs. Others point to their experiences in trade and barter relations, like the ones among merchants in Hillsborough’s Historic District, as a model for what the PLENTY can accomplish and a social infrastructure that the

PLENTY can circulate through. One Hillsborough merchant who stresses the importance of trade and barter in both the financial health of her firm and her household notes:

“My partner and I have 3 kids, so, and we don’t always get time to go to the grocery store and things of that sort, so it’s nice to be able to trade services back and forth... we’ve been able to trade and barter with pretty much any of these businesses, which is nice ‘cause not only does it give you that opportunity to trade services with each other, but it builds up a kind of fellowship, really, among some of the business merchants and stuff. It makes it more of a family.”

This merchant stresses the fellowship of business owners in the District, something that she does not find through the formal channels of business linkages, such as the Chamber of Commerce. Indeed, this merchant believes that the Chamber is too political and can cause strife among those that would otherwise see themselves as working together positively. For her, the trade and barter helps overcome the limitations put into place through the restrictive management of the Historic District, management that she argues makes it hard for small businesses to succeed. She speaks of the other business owners in the District as her colleagues. “We support each other, we help each other.” The formal channels, she posits, can interrupt the development of trust and cooperation. Again, trust and cooperation are highlighted as necessary for success within the District because of the ways in which trust and cooperation lead to more flexible incomes through a diverse range of economic practices:

“For instance, you know, some of the bartering with [Business A]. They’re right across the street. I can go get something to eat. If the kids come over here and they’re ready to eat and do homework, then we can go over there and get something to eat while we’re trying to finish up some work here, and things of that sort. It also, by having that, you get to know people and trust people and help each other out. And people will say, you know, I don’t really have cash, but I have this and I really like—it helps them, too. Like, for instance, [Business B] is a new restaurant that’s just opened up here, it’s beginning to start a business, it’s really hard, you know, to have that extra cash to get business cards done or to make an ad or something like that, but it’s essential, in this day and age, or it sure does help for them to have

something that looks nice, that catches people's attention. And so, you know, it works out great. We need food, they need advertisement. And so I think it's a win-win situation for both of us."

It is important, however, to recognize the specific geography of these relations. Such descriptions of economic activity provide a rich account of how diverse these economic practices really are and how "non-economic" factors like trust and cooperation underpin the standard ways to accumulate and redistribute money. But these relations reinforce the belief that a community economy is bound to a discrete locale at a fine scale, somewhat counter to NCPlenty, Inc.'s efforts to enrich and sustain a regional community economy across four counties. In part, that is because these barter and trade relations are one-to-one exchanges between participants and the value of the exchange is trapped between the two participants in the exchange. The PLENTY offers greater mobility to store value and facilitate multi-lateral exchanges while still circulating wealth through face-to-face interactions (and therefore aiding in the production of trust between participants). This tension between the localized relations of trust that become reinforced through the propinquity of barter and face-to-face trade and the regional monetary space of the PLENTY that can potentially build community in ways other than through the regulation of nearness present an on-going challenge to the leaders of the PLENTY endeavor.

The way that these linkages increase the purchasing power of businesses can also increase household incomes. Half of PLENTY participants have registered to accept PLENTYs for goods and services that represent their primary source of income. While many within the entire PLENTY network complain that too many goods and services available for purchase with PLENTYs are "luxury items" or "not



basic needs,” others, like a merchant in Hillsborough’s Historic District, sees the opportunities created by diverse economic practices as making “luxury” goods and services more affordable because one doesn’t have to use dollars to obtain them:

“The other thing that comes to mind just when thinking about the trade and barter system, I probably would not have felt like, you know, getting a massage would have been more of a luxury with all of the other things that I have, and I probably wouldn’t pursued that. But because we’re able to trade and barter it was something I was able to do.”

Others in the PLENTY network make similar claims. When asked about diverse economic practices and how they affect household income, one couple involved in the PLENTY network responded:

Husband: I would say yeah, it gives us options. Like I wouldn’t say that there’s any way we could get massage nearly as much as we do if we weren’t doing it.

Wife: I had one yesterday and I’m getting one today!

Husband: Generally one or both of us get a massage every week. If we were paying for it there’s no way. So I’d say yeah, definitely.

Wife: It’s nice to live like a rich person but simply.

Husband: And people trade who’re coming to see me, I’m sure they’re able to get stuff that they wouldn’t otherwise be able to get without the trade opportunity.

While many people may consider the ability to obtain massage as a luxury regardless of how it is obtained, it is important to note that in the above exchange how one of the respondents feels she can live like a rich person despite having a low dollar income. Such moments intervene in the normal ways people identify through class and open up the ways in which people position themselves relative to standard measures of wealth. But massage is not the only service PLENTY participants obtain through diverse economic practices. In other example, a merchant from the Hillsborough Historic District uses PLENTYs to obtain childcare care at a summer camp that her family would otherwise not be able to afford if only paying in dollars.

The director of the summer camp, whose program is located on a farm outside of Chapel Hill, then uses the PLENTYs to teach children about work, responsibility, and money by paying the children PLENTYs for completing chores which they can exchange with him for horse rides or more time at the farm. He is also able to use the PLENTYs to get groceries at Weaver Street Market in Carrboro. The PLENTY connects these different participants across space and fosters a community economy that expands people's purchasing power in different places across the region.

Others PLENTY members use diverse economic practices through other exchange networks that exist wholly outside of the PLENTY system. One merchant in Chapel Hill is part of a regional barter network based in Raleigh, North Carolina, which connects her business to goods and services across the country through the linkages the barter system has established with other formal barter systems. Organized as a for-profit venture, this business barter network allows member-businesses to access a wide range of goods and services for minimal cost through managed "barter points." The merchant who participates both within the barter network and the PLENTY laments that the PLENTY is too limited in its range of participants and has only done two or three PLENTY transactions in the last 3 years. She celebrates the barter network, on the other hand, as a creative and useful mechanism to sustain her business:

"...basically you can look at a list of people that are in the system and buy whatever you want to buy and you pay for it in Barter Dollars. 10% of the transaction goes to the organization that runs it and so you pay that—you have to pay that on a monthly basis basically—but the rest doesn't. And we've probably done \$3000 in barter, which has been very nice. Again, for a small business to have a non-cash currency makes a lot of sense, because I don't believe that it cuts, in that sense, I don't think that it cuts down on our cash business. I could be wrong. Because, you know, if obviously if we're doing all barter it wouldn't work. But in a business like ours where table space is the operative cut-off point—as long as we have an extra table—you know we've already got the lights on and we're paying the mortgage, so it's just

more business. I'm not sure that would be true if we were selling widgets because we'd have to buy every widget we sold. Because this is largely a service business that works very well for us. And the network continues to grow and there are people that are very actively selling it, they're also actively trading with other barter networks around so you can get, you know, a vacation house in Charleston and other things, but we've only used it locally. We've gotten computer repair, and we've got a move, and we bought a used laser printer, and we used it to get the paper that we use, this paper, which are usually in rolls, and we get it from Triangle Printing—they're a member—so those things barter out...And again, it just made very good sense—the same way the PLENTY makes sense. I wish we did more PLENTY business. You know, it's not, I just don't have a sense of that network personally, I don't have a sense of it working very well because my interaction with it is very limited."

Farmers are another group of business owners that draw upon a diverse range of economic practices to stretch incomes and obtain goods and services that would be less accessible through the dollar economy as well as bolster social relations through diverse economic practices. In parts of central North Carolina, farmers increasingly have the opportunity to sell directly to customers through Farmers' Markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA). Not every farmer is able to access these opportunities and customer preference is given to growers that use green technologies, organic seeds, and farms within a certain radius to the markets. What Farmers' Markets attempt to do is close a sector of the agricultural market among a selected group of producers and try to generate higher incomes among this group of vendors.

The largest Farmers' Market in the state takes place in Raleigh and is much more open to a variety of growers, producers, and distributors than the localized markets in the area. The Carrboro Farmers' Market is the most well-established of the local markets in the region. This market has taken place for over 25 years, has three selling days, and two locations. The primary location is in downtown Carrboro next to the Town Hall and the vending takes place in a permanent structure the town built specifically for the Market on the Town Commons. The Market is run as a non-

profit organization with farmers sitting on its Board of Directors. Carrboro's Farmers' Market only allows growers, producers, and craft vendors who reside and produce their goods within a 50 mile radius of the Market in North Carolina. Sellers must be the original producers of their goods and all vendors must apply to join the Market. Applications detail the type of good to be sold, the production process, and applications get reviewed for approval by the Board.

Farmers and others who can access customers through the Farmers' Markets are able to sell directly to consumers in a protected market for which they pay a small rental fee. At the Carrboro Farmers' Market, some farmers are able to derive their entire income needs due to its popularity, reputation for quality, and large customer base. Other Farmers' Markets, like in Pittsboro, Hillsborough, and Durham are less well known and are supplemental to farmers' marketing, which includes selling to local grocery stores, restaurants, and distributors. While the Carrboro Farmers' Market is not a registered PLENTY member, many of the farmers who sell at that market accept PLENTYs for full or partial payment. Many see a direct link between their activities at the market—selling directly to consumers, avoiding middlemen, and keeping a local food economy alive—and the mission of NCPlenty, Inc. Several of the farmers that accept PLENTYs and sell at the Carrboro Farmers' Market regularly engage in a variety of economic practices that they see as part of a diverse, and healthy, local economy. They welcome the PLENTY as another mechanism to participate in economic activity (even if their direct use of PLENTYs is limited).

Many of these farmers already use diverse economic practices on their farms and at the market. As with the merchants in Hillsborough, these activities are

supported by relations of trust and cooperation. For one farmer, one of the first farmers to join the PLENTY community economy and to whom person who other farmers attribute their own involvement, the PLENTY is primarily an affirmation of her diverse economic activities and the ways in which her community and economic geographies overlap. She notes that her involvement started simply because she saw the PLENTY as “an alternative” and when pressed further, stated that the PLENTYs are an alternative to credit cards but that more significantly, she is “just an alternative kind of girl.” But in the course of describing her own limited use of PLENTYs and her own time constraints that prevent her from being a more active participant in the organization, she notes the way in which farmers are already engaged in non-dollarized trading schemes which help stabilize economic and social relations:

“At the Farmers’ Market we all trade stuff with each other. You know, that’s kind of like at the end of the day, or, you know, if there are certain products that are favorites of yours, you know, we trade amongst ourselves. But that’s really it for barter, you know, I have neighbors that we just do stuff for and then they do stuff for us, it doesn’t mean, you know, it’s not that we’re bartering, you know, time and stuff.”

Additionally, this farmer revealed another component of her diverse economic practices. In the course of my interview with her at her farm, an older man carrying a shotgun appeared behind me. He was greeted amicably by the farmer and her dog and the two began a friendly discussion. After a few minutes, the two started discussing deer and deer hunting on the farm, at which point the farmer turned to me and said: “This is a whole—I’ll tell you the story in a minute, this is like, I used to not let anybody ever out here deer hunting but they’re killer. The deer are just hurting us bad out here.” After a few more minutes of conversation, the deer hunter got into his truck and drove away from the farmer. The farmer then went into more detail about how she had initially refused to prevent deer from coming onto her land and in effect

created a deer sanctuary. After several growing seasons of lost crops, it became apparent that the deer were negatively impacting her farming business. She then allowed certain people from the surrounding area access to her land, provided deer stands, and allowed a small group of hunters to use her farm for hunting. These hunters have been able to cut down on the impact that the deer have had on crop destruction. At the same time, the hunters bring family and friends and are able to socialize and foster their own social relations in the stands. Additionally, the hunters regularly sell and gift the deer that they procure from the hunting to supplement their own diets and household incomes. While such spaces of community economic activity are quite removed from the circulation of PLENTYs, the movement of PLENTYs through this farm helps illuminate this farm as a part of overlapping yet divergent non-dollarized economic practices within the region.

Another farmer who also sells at the Carrboro Farmers' Market notes her own trading networks. While she remains hesitant to classify these as anything more than occasional, convenient transactions, she does note that they occur and provide her a means of distributing surplus for commodities she wouldn't otherwise obtain (surplus that would otherwise go to waste). Additionally, she has been able to pass along these other goods to her customers and has begun to look into more consistent ways to incorporate trade to bolster her own CSA program and satisfy her customers:

"Occasionally we have done trade with other farmers produce for fruit, things like that, but it's not something we do systematically. We have trade, I have even trade pies for vegetables, pies for pumpkins with a neighbor but that sort of thing, it's not something that we've be doing systematically. But we have on occasion... Like I said I trade berries, for example, with a farmer who has lots of berries at some point in the season and I have lots of greens which she doesn't have so we traded that way. I served my CSA customers then with her berries and they know about it, they're informed and they're happy. They like the idea that, oh yes, look at that. Through this farmer I can get from yet another farmer and they coordinated it. So they like it. They think it's good. It gives them also the opportunity that we will, we can keep

people satisfied even more within the community, with the resources within the community. It's just a matter of being, or coordinating. But like I said, we have done it occasionally and we're looking into it more and more actually. At least a couple of situations through the season when we're low in something and that person, that other producer is low in something else, then we can trade. It works pretty well."

Farmers offer a particularly insightful understanding of the spatiality of the PLENTY community economy and its associated networks of diverse community economies because the farmers involved are bound to the specific markets within the PLENTY's region (the Farmers' Markets in Carrboro, Pittsboro, Hillsborough, and Durham) yet many live outside the official space of the PLENTY. Additionally, several farmers sell at multiple markets, adding mobility to the currency and broadening the spatiality of their own diverse economic geographies. Indeed, the movements of farmers across the network of relations constituted by the movement of PLENTYs helps bring into focus what is an idealized alternative mapping of the region conjured up by the PLENTY: how the PLENTY "(purposefully) asks people to rethink the separation between places like Hillsborough, Carrboro, Saxapahaw, and Pittsboro and to understand these distinct places as part of a local region known as the Piedmont" more so than just locales within the Triangle (Lepofsky and Bates 2003, p. 3).

### *Territorializing the Region's Diverse Economies*

Yet while the PLENTY has tapped into a vibrant set of regional community economic geographies that reveal the region as much more than the location of the Triangle, the project has also struggled to create an alternative spatialization of these networks that territorializes the region in ways other than the striations described earlier. As in the case of the merchants in Hillsborough's Historic District, many of

the diverse economic practices touched upon by the movements of PLENTYs that occur outside the framework of the formal, dollar economy are focused within discrete areas within the region. Indeed, participants that acknowledge the existence of these diverse networks in their lives report the ways in which these geographies occur at scales more fine than the region and serve to dislocate them from a regional sense of place (be they focused in Carrboro, Pittsboro, or Hillsborough). Above, one member reported being at the fringes of the PLENTY community and many others express similar feelings of a disjointed, splintered geography. One participant has even suggested that there should be a different currency for each of the towns involved in the project because it would be more authentic to the actual community economic geographies of the regional space. Others have expressed frustration at what how they perceive other members' inability or unwillingness to move outside of a narrowly structured set of geographical relations. One member notes, asserting the common belief that Carrboro is the center of the PLENTY network and its associated communal relations: "No one has ever called or asked me about trading...Durham might just really be another planet." Another just poses the question: "Our business is in Chatham County. I think that the idea of the PLENTY is great but we have never taken any in for barter on items for sale in our shop. We have the PLENTY signs posted and customers (from outside our area) do ask what it is. I wonder how many folks use it in Chatham vs. Orange or Durham [Counties]."

While this localization has certainly contributed to set of limitations for the project internally, it has also maintained a stumbling block for the PLENTY to serve as a device to connect diverse economic practices across conventional lines of



stratification within the region and help territorialize a new regional identity in more lasting ways. A glaring absence from the diverse economies of the PLENTY network are the diverse economies that have been constituted by the recent increase of Spanish-speaking in-migrants to the region. Such populations have not only launched North Carolina near to the top of all states sending remittances to Mexico, but also have enlivened the diverse community economies of the region through household practices, informal transportation system, informal markets, and kin-based employment. Particularly in Carrboro and Durham, the Spanish-speaking population that has largely come from Mexico and the southwestern states of the U.S. has helped diversify the diversity of the region's community economies and made it even more difficult to identify the region in the singular sense of the Triangle that has come to dominate descriptions of the area. These expressions of diverse economic practices are absent from the networks through which the PLENTY flows and missing from the PLENTY's alternative mapping of the region. Indeed, as noted earlier, the PLENTY touches upon a relatively elite stratum of the regional population and one that is generally isolated from others in the region. While this only goes to demonstrate further the existing of diversity in the social and economic geographies of the region (and the need for a broader lens than the PLENTY provides to account for the region's actual set of economic relations), it also reveals that the diversity of the PLENTY network's diverse economy is of a limited spectrum. That is not to discount the very real ways in which the PLENTY elucidates diverse economic forms and the vibrancy of a community economy, but it is to reinforce the point that just as

the Triangle is just one way to territorialize the region, so too is the PLENTY (and increasingly, the PLENTY is a stagnant mode of regionality).

Furthermore, it is to acknowledge that the existence of diverse economic forms and the concomitant community economies are not guarantees of any particular political commitments of progressive potential. This point has been made by those who research diverse economies, particularly in the more recent contributions from Michael Samers and J.K. Gibson-Graham (Gibson-Graham 2006; Samers 2005). Samers in particular warns against the “myopia” of studying diverse economies as inherently good or politically progressive without recognizing how all economic relations represent openings and closures of social relations. Adrian Smith has also poignantly argued for care when representing diverse economies as modes of liberation, recognizing in particular the political and intellectual limits of linking diverse economies with household production and “informal” economics at a small scale (Smith 2002; Smith 2004; Smith and Bridge 2003). Furthermore, even if trust is a component of diverse economic practices (and, as cultural economy researchers have noted, all economic practices), that is not to say that diverse economic practices (such as barter or trade or other non-monetized transactions which implicate a community economy) do not also incorporate high degrees of coercion, manipulation, competition, and exploitation. As Samers argues, “trust is not generalized throughout informal economies” (Samers 2005, p. 880).

Indeed, for many—especially in the Global South—participation in diverse economies is a mechanism for survival with costs and benefits, not a pure political choice (even such actions have the ramifications of political acts), a point revealed by

Mutersbaugh's *Annals* article discussed earlier. For those involved in the PLENTY community economy, the diverse regional community economy that they create through their "informal" economic practices is often done by choice. While the above expressions of diverse economic practices certainly take place in very real ways and certainly have very real effects to make the region more than capitalist (and in some cases, very real outcomes of facilitating economic activity that wouldn't otherwise take place), it is also necessary to recognize how they rely upon more so that directly challenge the social and economic geographies that have been put into place over the last 50 years which have been consolidated under the region's identity as the Triangle.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has shown how the PLENTY's community economy simultaneously reveals that the region is already always more than just the Triangle—that the resubjection Gibson-Graham argues is necessary to allow diverse economic forms to flourish in the open is already occurring—yet that the ways in which the PLENTY's participants engage diverse economic activities is built upon their generally elite status within the regional configuration of the Triangle. Therefore, the diverse economies mapped by the PLENTY are always incomplete as a mechanism to account for the totality of the regional diversity and limited in providing a reterritorialization of the region around a more inclusive mode of identification. Yet the PLENTY still marks an opening into alternative mappings of the region and alternative regionality around the diverse economic practices it does illuminate. That the participants in the PLENTY community economy so readily

acknowledge the diversity of their economic practices and relate the economic and social gains achieved through these relations is notable in and of itself from the perspective of research on diverse economic forms. While caution is still necessary in conducting such an investigation so as not to provide simple celebrations, the existence of these relations reveals that the PLENTY has been able to tap into a range of community economic activities as well as be a mechanism whereby people actively rethink their relationships to place and each other through economic and social connectivity.

While it is not yet clear what the value of these exchanges are—a topic that will be taken up more directly in the next chapter in an analysis of the value of community—what is clear is that to these participants in the PLENTY community economy, the diverse economic forms in their lives (including the PLENTY) does have some value. The final chapter will extend this discussion of the explicit ways in which the PLENTY reveals a diverse set of community economic relations which help queer the region by looking more closely at the form of exchange relations that occur through the PLENTY community economy, in what I refer to as a set of strange exchanges.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: ON VALUE: CLASS AND COMMUNITY**

### *Introduction*

As a monetary system, the PLENTY inherently expresses value. This chapter sets out to address the following question: how is value conceived of, generated and distributed within the PLENTY-based community economy? This question is central to understanding what has been created by this complementary currency project and why the operationalization of community remains at the heart of the project, especially given the ambivalence and reluctance participants inscribe when discussing the initiative (and, in particular, as an alternative to “the Triangle”). The politics of community circulating within the PLENTY endeavor become readily visible when turning attention to the question of value and valuation, particular as the issues of community come to be seen through the lens of class relations and class-based processes. The issue of value has bearing on the politics of community in three main ways: in terms of the PLENTY’s function as a complementary currency, in terms of the PLENTY’s form as a complementary currency, and in terms of the PLENTY’s alterity as a complementary currency to the U.S. dollar. This chapter will address the ways in which the PLENTY represents value by considering how the limitations of the PLENTY to function as a viable currency and a meaningful collective project stem from the perceived value of the PLENTY. In doing so, this chapter will analyze the ways in which the conception, generation and distribution of value within the PLENTY community economy provides a way to trace the class relations articulated

through the PLENTY and the politics of community that stem from such class processes.

### *Why Study Value?*

Exploring the role of value within the PLENTY community economy is not simply an exercise limited to the activities of this specific project. Without losing sight of the specificity of the case study, this examination of value can potentially address larger issues facing complementary currencies as well as the political and intellectual projects to envision non-capitalism and diverse economic forms. As noted above, complementary currencies are situated by practitioners and researchers within the general category of the “cultural economy.” The significance of this label is found in the fundamental lesson that cultural formations facilitate economic relations (and therefore, at least theoretically add value to “economic” activities) and compound the qualitative aspect of economic value (Gibson and Kong 2005).

Directly related to this analysis is in how such a move allows an investigation to the proliferation of value forms in the cultural economy (what in this case means the community economy of the PLENTY money space). This reflects an opportunity to study value not just as a single metric of a commodity’s capacity to be bought and sold (what is most readily referred to as price in popular discourse and neoclassical economics), but also as a contested site of meaning with a plurality of forms that have a historical and geographical specificity about them (Leyshon 2005). In short, understanding value within the purview of a cultural economy requires that any notation of value be seen as a site of political action in which price is just one of many possible ways to define, structure, and perpetuate value (Albritton 2003). As a

political venture, the designation of value can therefore open up into the realm of ethics by directly posing questions about what is valuable (and providing a constant challenge to any singular logic that purports to designate value), subjectivity and power. This then takes the seemingly “economic” term value (measured as price by hegemonically dominant accounts) and forces the discussion around the social term values. Defining value, in a cultural economy, shifts from the realm of a given logos to the realm of a negotiated ethos (Corlett 1998). The ethics of value (and associated contestations) shapes the functionality of the cultural economy (Thrift and Leyshon 1999). In this case, value informs the potential and actual functions of the PLENTY as a community money.

In addition to speaking to debates about the functionality of cultural economy in general, reconciling the role of value in the PLENTY can address important questions for understanding complementary currencies. The fundamental contribution that complementary currencies provide is as monetary systems. The fact that complementary currencies serve as money is their reason for existence. As noted in previous chapters, money takes on a variety of purposes but a major reason to use money is to create a recognized, stable representation of value in order to derive equivalences between commodities. Money is a medium through which people indicate the price and value of things. The proliferation of diverse complementary currencies speaks to the wide range of possible ways to put this medium to work in order to identify and store the use-value of commodities available within these money spaces as well as the exchange-value of the complementary currencies themselves. While their functionality as money ties disparate complementary currencies together

into a common project, the form that these media take in different historical and geographic contexts distinguishes one complementary currency from another and marks the specific way in which value is to be conjured up (Williams, Aldridge et al. 2003). An examination of value in one of these contexts, such as through this analysis of the PLENTY and its associated spatio-temporal meshwork of relations, can clarify the relationship between a complementary currency's form, its intended intervention, and actual outcomes. This is particularly important within the context of the broader complementary currency movement because of the prevalence of using specific models (i.e. HOURS, TimeDollars) outside of their original context by both community-based organizations and state-based agencies (for a similar line of thought see Amin, Cameron et al. 2002). An explication of the relationship between form and value can elucidate the historical and geographical specificity of value itself and provide an antidote to the continual failed implementation of complementary currency models around the world (of which the story of the PLENTY is just one example).

Furthermore, because practitioners implement complementary currencies as purposeful projects to fill the perceived holes in national currencies, complementary currencies make explicit and implicit statements about how national currencies (and the economic relations through which they flow) produce value and produce value with shortcomings. Some of the most direct statements in this regard come from those complementary currencies whose creation overlaps with discourses of localism (such as LETS and HOURS). Such projects often carry with them explicit and implicit prescriptions for how to produce value differently and better. In the case of



localized complementary currencies, such prescriptions often declare two mechanisms to value people and place differently and better. First, the complementary currency can give a more flexible metric of price which can therefore empower people to collectively create their own conditions of value generation (Lietaer 2001). In other words, the capital created by a complementary currency provides an additional basis from which people can derive surplus value from commodity exchange and set relations of exploitation. Whether this means that certain goods become cheaper or labor gets higher wages because of the influx of capital depends on the specifics of the complementary currency—it's functionality and form as determined by its creators. But in all cases, the relationship between price and value of commodities can be recalibrated using a diverse set of metrics—national and complementary currencies—instead of just a single one whose contours are beyond the direct control of any specific collective.

Second, the complementary currency opens up the possibility of different systems of value distribution (such as the communal distribution of social surplus within a defined money space) (Seyfang 2002; Swann and Witt 1995; Thrift and Leyshon 1999). The distribution of value—another target of complementary currency practitioners, particularly those in Europe working against “social exclusion”—through complementary currencies provides mechanisms whereby value can be circulated (invested) in different ways (Pacione 1998). Both the generation and distribution of value in complementary currency systems has direct bearing on the alterity of those systems to national currencies (Lee, Leyshon et al. 2004a). Complementary currencies can replicate value generation and distribution of national

currencies and therefore provide little by way of an alternative (and therefore different or better) way to use money. On the other hand, complementary currencies could come into being with a functionality and form that allows for a radically alternative system of value generation and distribution and therefore meaningfully produce alternative money spaces (and potentially disrupt class formations, the primacy of capitalist class-based subjectivities, and the politics of community therein) (Cahn 2001). The creation of complementary currencies within a continuum from replication to radical alterity speaks to the possibility for complementary currencies to event something new in social relations and therefore shapes both the politics of community and the capacity for such projects to engender alternatives to or even explicitly contra capitalism (which, if read as the general category of communism, has at its heart a specific politics of community) (Alperovitz 2005; Gibson-Graham 2006).

It is unclear from current research how the functionality, form, and potential alterity of complementary currencies generate value. Interestingly enough, while complementary currencies are purposeful productions of money, value has remained a largely taken-for-granted concept both among researchers and practitioners (this even with wild debates on listservs and at conferences about how such currencies measure value).<sup>60</sup> For the most part, complementary currencies locate value within

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<sup>60</sup> The two primary listservs in which an international group of complementary and other diverse economy activists and practitioners debate ideas and share practices are the International Journal of Complementary Currency Research (IJCCR) listserv (hosted in England) and the Cyfranogi listserv hosted in Wales. The former was established through academic institutions while the latter started out of the efforts of a Welsh complementary currency practitioner. Both listservs allow for a range of topics, though the IJCCR listserv is much more widely used and the topics (and tone) of the discussions cut across a wide spectrum. At times, these discussions take on the topic of value and contributions range from personal reflections on the spiritual value of the earth and all its beings to the

existing paradigms of the neoclassical price theory or the political economic labor theory of value. Both of these paradigms draw upon a specific relationship to capitalism which may inhibit the non-capitalist potential of complementary currencies as well as delimit the politics of community.<sup>61</sup> In this chapter I use the PLENTY as a way to address these questions about value with complementary currencies and analyze value and the PLENTY in light of the politics of community. In doing so, I argue that the PLENTY's inability to event a new mode of value leads to the reproduction of regional capitalist class relations within the PLENTY community economy and therefore curtails the capacity of the PLENTY's circulation to do anything other than replicate already existing community forms, reinforcing these forms and ossifying the politics therein.

#### *Are PLENTYs Valuable?*

On June 16, 2005, the NCPlenty, Inc. Board of Trustees convened for its monthly Board meeting facing two dilemmas in addition to the regular agenda. The first dilemma, not considered by the group to be of major concern, was that one of the Board members would once again be unable to attend the meeting and was getting closer to stepping down from the Board. While her decision to remove herself from this level of involvement showed a continued decline in the membership of the Board

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implications of pegging complementary currencies to a basket of commodities in terms of establishing a stable and authentic form of value. At times, these debates can lapse into personal attacks (as many of the regular contributors know each other through practitioner conferences) and at least one person—a activist from Canada who sees complementary currencies as a way towards a usury-free society and who had proposed complementary currencies to the United Nations when the UN was creating its Millennium Development Goals—has been banned from posting on the listserv due to the tone of his responses to others.

<sup>61</sup> Of course, no complementary currency can be assumed to be anti-capitalist or aiming for non-capitalism. The PLENTY is a case in point.

(this was the second person—and second female<sup>62</sup>—to resign a Board seat in 2004), the Board had not operated at full capacity as defined by the organization's by-laws since its inception. When I joined the Board as a non-voting Advisory Member at the end of 2003, only four of the seven Board slots were filled (and many subsequent discussions were spent figuring out the appropriate way to make decisions with a less-than-complete Board and only three voting members).<sup>63</sup> With the anticipated departure of this Board member, the total members, including myself, would become three, with only two having voting powers. Despite the appearance of dismal support and willingness from participants in the PLENTY project to commit any time to the endeavor, the expected resignation was neither disheartening nor disruptive. Since she had not regularly attended meetings in several months, the official declaration of her leaving wouldn't change much in terms of Board meetings. Additionally, she had been an early participant in the PLENTY—running a home-based catering service for PLENTYs outside of her full-time employment in Durham, another part-time job, and her role as a divorced mother—and still stressed the importance of the PLENTY as a concept. As someone whose time was scarce, she could no longer give as much to this project, and she was switching her primary job to boot. But her unwavering support was seen by the other Board members as just as valuable because she saw some value in the PLENTY initiative.

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<sup>62</sup> For an excellent analysis of gender politics within complementary currencies, see Raddon's analysis of LETS (Raddon 2002).

<sup>63</sup> This eventually caused a revision to the by-laws at the 2005 Annual Meeting so that the Board of Trustees could operate in its official capacity as the governing body (i.e. vote on business matters) to allow for a reduced Board until either an increase in overall membership or 2007, which would come first.

The other dilemma registered as a much higher priority than all other business. Weaver Street Market, based in Carrboro, had noted a slump in PLENTY-based exchanges over the past two summers, a time when the movement in and out of the grocery and café was anticipated to be at its peak. Weaver Street Market has always been the largest receptacle for PLENTYs—some members of NCPlenty, Inc. even think that the PLENTY is a project of the Market<sup>64</sup>—and is the most recognized public face of the currency. In many ways, this has been celebrated by both Weaver Street Market and NCPlenty, Inc. For the cooperative Market, the Board of Directors had outlined a mission statement that explicitly supports other endeavors to boost a dynamic local economy and has been the financial and visionary impetus for other non-profit initiatives which have attempted to realize a diverse community economy (from a non-profit real estate firm, to a housing cooperative, to a cooperatively run radio station, to a now defunct Hispanic-owned restaurant and community center which also provided inexpensive English and Spanish instruction). Additionally, Weaver Street attempts to source locally when possible to help recycle wealth amongst local producers and consumers (and some of its customers are therefore both).<sup>65</sup> The PLENTY was seen as a mechanism to deepen this commitment to a localized, diverse community economy both by supporting a start-up non-profit that

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<sup>64</sup> Kalb and Lepofsky 2005.

<sup>65</sup> “Weaver Street Market's mission is a vibrant, sustainable commercial center for the community of owners and potential owners, which is: Cooperative - control and profits stay within the community; Local - maximizes local resources to meet local needs; Ecological - works in harmony with the environment; Primary - provides for basic community needs; Fair - mutually beneficial and non-exploitative; Inclusive - accessible to the whole community; Interactive - creates opportunity for community interaction; Empowering - enables fulfilling work and customer experiences; Educational - develops an informed community; And is reliant on community support - to purchase goods and services, invest in the cooperative, and participate in governance” (Weaver Street Market 2007).

could potentially create backward and forward linkages between producers in the area, and by providing area residents a new means to circulate wealth locally.<sup>66</sup> Initially, Weaver Street Market—as did many other supporters and participants—envisioned the PLENTY as adding some value to their own economic activities as well as to the community economy as a whole.<sup>67</sup> For NCPlenty, Inc. the support of Weaver Street Market meant both the backing of a successful and reputable member of the region’s business community (giving legitimacy to the project) and opening up the diverse array of goods and localized commodity chains to the PLENTY network, vastly expanding the money space of the currency.

The slump in PLENTY movement in the summer of 2004 mirrored a slowdown in exchanges experienced the previous summer. While (unbeknownst to both the business manager at Weaver Street Market and the organizers of the PLENTY) other currencies, such as the Ithaca HOURS project, are very seasonally

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<sup>66</sup> According to the Finance Manager at the time when Weaver Street Market joined the PLENTY project, “I guess one of our missions is to increase local spending so we’re always trying to increase the number of local producers we buy from and then a local currency is almost an extension of that, you know, saying we want to buy from more local producers means we want to spend more money within the community. So it’s basically a part of our mission.” That said, she went on to explain how in the process of crafting a mission statement and long-term plans for the firm, there is a distinction between the financial mission and the social mission. The PLENTY, she noted, was seen more as part of the latter than the former: “the way I try to think about is there’s the numbers, the you know, actually, physically you can see the income statement and the balance sheet, and then there’s this other side. So the mission is to be financially stable so that we can do all these other socially responsible items, so that kind of falls—when we do our 3 year plan, we kind of base it on our mission statement, which is in the Annual Report, it’s 7 items, sustainable, ecological, I can’t remember what all of them are, but that’s what’s we base the 3 year plan on—NCPlenty fits within that. I think it’s sustainable, you know, keeping money within the community.”

<sup>67</sup> As evidenced by the above statements from Weaver Street Market’s Finance Manager as well as other respondents who struggled to articulate why joined they agreed to use PLENTYs, what that value is is not quite clear. This chapter hopes to elucidate that point, or at least clarify why there is such uncertainty despite people’s general conviction that the PLENTY adds something to their lives as subjects in a community economy.

based,<sup>68</sup> the organizers of the PLENTY did not anticipated seasonal fluctuations in the PLENTY economy because it had developed as a diverse set of providers not tied to a single sector. However, the primary way that PLENTYs circulate out of Weaver Street Market is through formal and informal contractual agreements between the Market and area farmers that are registered participants in the PLENTY community economy. Such arrangements have these farmers accept PLENTYs as partial payment for goods supplied to Weaver Street Market (a few other suppliers to Weaver Street have on occasion opted for this arrangement, but farmers have been the only suppliers to do so on a regular basis). Because farmers are only supplying Weaver Street Market with produce for a portion of the year (the growing season, which lasts from April to October in the region with the bulk of production in the summer months), there is an inherent seasonal imbalance of this system that relies on farmers boosting the outflow of PLENTYs and recirculating PLENTYs through the economy.<sup>69</sup>

In 2003 and then again in 2004, Weaver Street Market did not see as many PLENTYs leaving as it did coming and its bank of PLENTYs grew at an uncomfortable (and, according to representatives from the firm, unsustainable) rate. In part this was because some farmers were increasingly unwilling to accept as many PLENTYs for partial payment as they had in the past because they had accumulated a number of PLENTYs which they couldn't figure out how to spend. When this issue

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<sup>68</sup> According to a staff member at the E.F. Schumacher Society and organizer of a major conference of complementary currency practitioners, the Ithaca HOURS economy “shuts down” during the winter because the primary set of exchanges occur between farmers and the Greenstar Cooperative market in downtown Ithaca.

<sup>69</sup> And recirculation, in this case for several farmers, means that PLENTYs are paid out for goods and those same PLENTYs are then spent at Weaver Street Market for other goods.

was raised by Weaver Street Market to the leadership of the PLENTY project in 2004, an unexpected transaction occurred between the Market and a new vendor who accepted over \$1100 worth of PLENTYs, but when this vendor tried to spend those PLENTYs back at the Market, he was discouraged by the stringent acceptance policy put into place and declared that he wouldn't accept PLENTYs from Weaver Street Market in future transactions. Back in 2003, realizing that the summer outflow was not offsetting the winter inflow as much as hoped, the management of Weaver Street Market attempted a two-pronged strategy to move PLENTYs back into circulation. First, the business manager tried to get more employees and more suppliers to accept PLENTYs for partial payment of labor and commodities. This met with little success even after individual meetings between the business manager and suppliers, personal letters, and a public relations campaign among Weaver Street Market's own employees.<sup>70</sup> Related to this was an attempt to gift PLENTYs as a reward to employees for particularly dedicated and productive work or for celebrations. However, most PLENTYs that had been gifted by management were spent back at Weaver Street Market and were seen by employees as Weaver Street Market gift certificates. The other tactic was to implement a new policy further limiting the number of PLENTYs accepted for purchase in order to make it harder for consumers to spend PLENTYs at Weaver Street Market. Weaver Street Market and NCPlenty, Inc. also called upon respective members and the general public to spend PLENTYs

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<sup>70</sup> The business manager at the time, it should be noted, was one of a handful of Weaver Street Market employees who did accept PLENTYs for partial payment.



at other establishments.<sup>71</sup> These efforts were repeated at the beginning of 2004 in anticipation of a similar trade imbalance. The second attempt, from the perspective of Weaver Street Market, was much less successful. In short, the PLENTY was no longer being seen as valuable, and to some in Weaver Street Market's management, seen as withdrawing value from the business.<sup>72</sup>

At the beginning of June 2005, in an email to the acting President of the NCPlenty, Inc. Board of Trustees, James Watts, the Operations Manager at Weaver Street Market, conveyed the Market's managers' concerns that the amount of PLENTY holdings at Weaver Street Market was unacceptable, especially since the Market was about to enter the winter season with even less anticipated outflow (and continued inflow). In response to an email about an article that the acting NCPlenty President had been writing for the upcoming Weaver Street Market newsletter, Watts replied:

"FYI, Weaver Street Market has over 100 Plenty [sic] on hand at the Carrboro store again...I'm increasingly concerned that Weaver Street has become the de facto Plenty repository. I know that the NCPlenty Board has been made aware of my concerns in the past, but I've not heard any solutions being offered by NCPlenty's Board to the problem. It's imperative that WSM bring down the balance and keep it below 25P. Please advise me of ways that the NCPlenty board can help facilitate this process." (Watts 2005)

While such a communication had been passed along in the past, this message and a subsequent email five days later had a new tone. Without directly stating it, the

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<sup>71</sup> Indeed, in Weaver Street Market's monthly newsletter (which is available for free at the two locations and is mailed to the coop's members), the firm directly asked consumers to spend PLENTYs elsewhere, in effect direct potential sales to other businesses.

<sup>72</sup> Some of the managers at Weaver Street Market by June 2005 just wanted to cut ties with the PLENTY, willing to recognize formally the store's bank of PLENTYs for what they already considered to be: dead capital. Others saw the PLENTYs a significant enough of a liability that still maintained some monetary value that they wanted to exchange PLENTYs for dollars with NCPlenty, Inc. and get a refund.

management at Weaver Street Market posited that unless NCPlenty, Inc. arrived at viable solutions to its accumulation problem (seen as a problem that NCPlenty, Inc. should primarily solve) then the Market would withdraw from the endeavor (“we will have to rethink our member participation with NCPlenty” (Cleary 2005)). The follow-up message, in response to an invitation to the NCPlenty, Inc. Board Meeting to discuss the matter, stated that despite the Market’s managers’ attempts in “many ways to help the program succeed...This is the second time our bank of PLENTYs have [sic] increased to an uncomfortable level...having so many PLENTYs is not good for WSM or the PLENTY program” (Cleary 2005). This subsequent email, from Finance Manager and former NCPlenty, Inc. Board member Connie Cleary, even provided a 30 day timeframe within which a proposal “to keep WSM’s level of PLENTYs at a reasonable level (25P)” (Cleary 2005) or the Weaver Street Market management would proceed with making a decision on its own. What had consistently been, for better or worse, the anchor of the PLENTY community economy was threatening to leave.

When the NCPlenty, Inc. Board met for its monthly meeting, several conversations had already taken place by phone and email regarding Weaver Street Market’s apparent ultimatum, some more concerned than others about the message from Weaver Street. The members of the Board thus entered the monthly meeting with several options available on this pressing issue: ignore the message and see what would happen; respectfully acknowledge the email and respond that the organization was aware of the continuing issue and would continue to work with Weaver Street (as it would with any member) regarding accumulation issues (i.e. continue to press the

LOOPS project, the Ask For PLENTYs As Change campaign, and other public relations efforts to get more circulation overall); or, focus special attention to the issue at Weaver Street Market and direct the NCPlenty, Inc.'s resources more fully towards this member. Despite the overwhelming importance of Weaver Street Market to the circulation of PLENTYs, the ensuing debate as to what to do was an uncertain and negotiated process.

While the option to ignore the email was quickly dispelled as a viable response, much of the debate that occurred focused upon what value Weaver Street Market brought to the PLENTY community economy and what value did the PLENTY bring to Weaver Street Market. In preparation for the meeting, the invitation was rearticulated to Weaver Street's managers and the acting President of the Board requested more details about Weaver Street Market's own efforts to reduce PLENTY holdings, in part because another Board member pressed the idea that members needed to be responsible for managing their use of PLENTYs and take more ownership over the project as a whole (seeing this as an opportunity to further diversify the PLENTY community economy and move away from a dependence on Weaver Street Market).<sup>73</sup> Additionally, email and phone conversations took place

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<sup>73</sup> The response to this request for more information came from the Finance Manager. She supplied a two page document entitled "Weaver Street Market's Support of NCPlenty" which contained two columns of information, "Action" and "Measure." The document laid out from Weaver Street Market's perspective 18 actions that the Market had taken (and were currently implementing) with subsequent indicators of success in redistributing PLENTYs. The actions ranged from "Mailing personal letters with accounts payable check to encourage local vendors to accept PLENTYs" (the result: "Done twice (about 100 vendors) with no responses from any vendors) to "Paying After Hours bands in PLENTYs" (the result: "Most did not want to accept PLENTYs or spent the PLENTYs at WSM"). After Hours is a free, weekly concert on the large lawn in front of Weaver Street Market's Carrboro location that occurs each Thursday during the summer. Several hundred people attend each week. In addition to the music, Weaver Street Market allows local non-profit organizations to sell food (either Weaver Street's food bought at cost or other food) as a fundraiser and outreach mechanism

between Board members to vent as well as strategize. On his own volition, one Board member even met with the head of Weaver Street Market's management team to propose more training for Weaver Street Market's cashiers on how to effectively encourage customers to receive PLENTYs as change (an idea that was turned down because it had been tried in the past to no avail).

The conversation on what to do was held just amongst the Board members because the invitations to several managers at Weaver Street Market to join the meeting were repeatedly declined. The discussion at the meeting quickly shifted from the specifics of the email to the goals of the PLENTY as an intervention into local community and economic relations. As part of this, one Board member raised a point that he had raised in an unrelated conversation about expanding the PLENTY into Durham over two years earlier: that Weaver Street Market is not a real cooperative and as such, "it isn't as local as it could be."

The Market, he posited, functions as a consumer- and worker-owned cooperative, with the vast majority of the shares held by consumers. While both employees and consumers held positions on the Board of Directors, the real power of the co-op rested in the hands of consumers. Consumers, he recognized, that could be from anywhere and could have different (and no guaranteed) attachment to place, only real commitments to products. Additionally, while Weaver Street Market had a stated commitment to supporting local producers,<sup>74</sup> without being a cooperative run

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for their organization. All profits from the sale go to the guest organization and this event can generate upwards of \$1500 on a particularly successful night.

<sup>74</sup> And by its own accounting, sources heavily and in increasing amounts from local providers, though local to Weaver Street Market is defined as a 250-mile radius from the Carrboro store, a much larger local space than the PLENTY's money space and a different geographical imaginary of the local.

directly by local producers (supposedly tied to the physical area in some capacity), there was no guarantee that commodities would be local.<sup>75</sup> Thus part of the surplus value generated by Weaver Street Market would always be distributed out of the area (even if it would be “local” actors making such decisions on where to distribute profit).

This, he argued, counterpoised a “real” cooperative which is fundamentally producer-owned. A producer-owned cooperative, such as a Farmer’s Market, draws a direct link between the production of a commodity, the generation of profit, and the distribution to that profit’s rightful owner: the local producer. That is how surplus value would circulate locally. This point would be important in dealing with Weaver Street Market, he noted, because it had direct bearing on what type of local community economy the PLENTY would help create. If, on the one hand, the PLENTY would be an entity contributing to a local community economy in which the power of an economy was to be driven by local consumers (who could very easily consume to and from elsewhere), then it would never truly be local. If, on the other hand, the PLENTY was to help build the types of linkages as proposed by the LOOPS project through localized commodity of localized producers, sourcing goods and services from this place, then the PLENTY would help realize a truly local (and self-sufficient) economy. Therefore, he suggested, NCPlenty should consider how a PLENTY community economy without Weaver Street Market might be less active, but also may be more local. But more realistically, NCPlenty, Inc. needed to express

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<sup>75</sup> Indeed, even with the local sourcing Weaver Street Market does, it remains an important part of the firm to support organic, fair trade, and green commodities from all over the world and it does so through a significant import-based stock of goods, from wine to produce to coffee.

to Weaver Street Market's managers that any solution to the overaccumulation problem would be found in incorporating the Market more heavily into local commodity chains held together by the exchange of PLENTYs. The goal of this Board, he went on to argue, should be to think beyond Weaver Street Market: "The focus [should be] on [NCPlenty, Inc.] members spending with each other, not not spending at Weaver Street Market." To accomplish that task, the Board needed to "highlight the value of exchange."

While this stark division between the benefits and limits of a producer- versus consumer-based cooperative harkens back to debates between Marxist and Owenite socialists in 19th Century England about who had captured the true socialism (Webb and Webb 1921), this connection between the issue at hand (Weaver Street Market's overaccumulation and ultimatum) and the real meaning of a cooperative is interesting in how it conveys a central issue at the heart of the PLENTY's community economy, and, indeed, any intentional economic intervention: the source and content of value. What this Board member had declared was that true value (and the value that mattered for a local economy) came from the labor that productive residents of the area performed. This is a summary rendition of Marx's labor theory of value and a conventional accounting of value within leftist politics. Yet at the same time, the value of the PLENTY was identifiable in exchange, its use as a currency, as a mediator of exchange (not as much as a store of value from expended labor). Moreover, this was an attempt to settle a heretofore unsettled component of the PLENTY: where does the value of the PLENTY come from? What gives it value,

and what gives it value as money? What is the relationship between value and the type of community being instituted through the PLENTY's community economy?

*What is the value of a PLENTY?*

Part of the value of the PLENTY is identifiable in quantitative terms as seen above. Each PLENTY has a direct dollar equivalent and nearly all prices within the PLENTY community economy are dictated by the dollar economy and then translated into PLENTYs. Maurer (2003) has noted the limits of such a link to the dollar economy in an analysis of the Ithaca HOURS project, upon which the PLENTY is based (Maurer 2003). The quantitative amount of money capital, as measured in dollars, is easily to determine, either as the dollar value of PLENTYs within the community economy (approximately \$10,000) or as the estimated dollar value generated by PLENTY exchanges (approximately \$25,000).<sup>76</sup> This way of measuring the value of PLENTYs has been used repeatedly by NCPlenty, Inc. in order to celebrate the achievements of the project. Most recently, on a recruitment letter sent to potential members of several proposed ad-hoc committees (both current and potential users of the PLENTY), the Board notes that over \$10,000 dollars as over 1000P “has gone into circulation, primarily through membership and grants. Previous studies estimated these PLENTYs have added value of more than twice this amount in a two-year period.” But if PLENTYs are only a different way of storing

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<sup>76</sup> The former is calculated by knowing the total amount of PLENTYs distributed by NCPlenty, Inc. and multiplying by ten (because 1 PLENTY=\$10). The latter has been calculated by determining the average rate of use per PLENTY per registered PLENTY user (each PLENTY is approximately spent 2.5 times). While this figure has been arrived at in two separate analyses, both studies (one conducted in 2003 and one in 2005) only draw from a sample of registered users and disregard the use of non-registered users, which is seen as either negligible or accountable through the financial reports supplied by Weaver Street Market (Kalb and Lepofsky 2005; Lepofsky and Bates 2005).

and exchanging value than dollars and rely on dollars to provide that measure of value, then what is the value of a PLENTY? Does the PLENTY have any value in addition to the dollar value it represents in a pegged exchange rate (and, therefore, has its monetary value set to the fluctuations of dollars)? In short, does the PLENTY have a complementary register of value as a complementary currency?

Little research has been conducted on the value of complementary currencies outside of their framework as equivalences to national currencies. As noted above, some point to this overlap between HOURS-based currencies, such as the PLENTY, and dollars, as a significant deficiency in complementary currencies. This is understood to be a lack because it is seen as a hindrance to the alterity of such projects: rather than materialize an alternative theory of value, such endeavors simply count the same amount with different numbers. Of the three major models of complementary currencies, HOURS-based systems are the least likely to explicitly articulate an alternate value through price because prices are rarely, if ever, affected by the use of the currency.<sup>77</sup> LETS attempt to create a different way of measuring

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<sup>77</sup> In the case of the PLENTY, there is the potential for prices to change because of the use of PLENTYs: given that disbursements to members are 5P (\$50) and members can opt to pay a one-time \$12 membership fee or volunteer two hours of labor (assuming, on the part of NCPlenty, Inc. 2 hours of *anyone's* labor is equal to \$12), members are provided with \$38 of PLENTYs for free (even more in the case of grantees). Therefore, member A can join by paying the fee, receive 5P, and purchase a commodity from member B priced at 3.8P for free. If this were to spread out over a number of members, say 38, then the actual dollar price of commodities would be reduced by \$1 each. In practice, however, this is offset by acceptance policies that restrict the spending of PLENTYs per purchase as well as concentrated use with a select group of participants. All of this, of course, assumes that price equals value, which is just one way to reckon value. It is important to note, however, that in the original idea behind the HOURS project in Ithaca, was a commitment to pay workers a regional living wage in the local currency. This is the foundation behind basing 1 HOUR (and 1 PLENTY) on \$10, almost double the prevailing minimum wage of \$5.15/hour (which creates an annual income below the federal poverty line) and what organizers considered a living wage—in other words, a wage that allowed labor to socially reproduce in a manner less exploitative than currently available through the minimum wage by redistributing more surplus value back to workers. (Yet, in the PLENTY, the \$12 membership fee is waived if two hours of labor are performed, valuing labor at \$6/hour, further



value by using credits rather than denominated physical currencies, but participants still buy and sell commodities at credit-based prices that are roughly equivalent to prices found in national currency-based economies (i.e. plumbing services cost more credits than child care services). Both HOURS-based systems and LETS operate through a paradigm of valuation in which the price of commodities is equivalent to the value of commodities. This makes sense in this context because price is an indicator of how much a member of a community is willing to pay for a commodity and therefore sellers set prices according to what is collectively determined to be valuable. Such a price-theory of value stems from neoclassical economics, a form of economics that is currently the dominant form and the tenets of which have entered into the common sense definitions of economic relations in general (Gibson-Graham 2006; Westra and Zuege 2003). Prices, according to this account, are a collective communication that translates the movements of the market into a concise signal (and derive from the collection of prices of the components that contribute to the production of a given commodity).<sup>78</sup>

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undercutting an already decontextualized political statement.) In the end, it seems, that while prices are the most apparent attempted site of intervention for HOURS-based currencies, the HOURS model is built upon a labor theory of value.

<sup>78</sup> Despite the best intentions by LETS innovator Michael Linton to create an alternative system of value, all he has done appears to be create a different way of counting within the price-theory paradigm. His famous mantra, that money is just a form of measurement, like inches or grams, and that any form of measurement can serve as a form of money, may offer a slight counterpoint to monetary theorists who locate value in scarcity—because forms of measurement, like inches, according to Linton, cannot be scarce—but in focusing on money as a tool of measurement as reflective of value, he reverts back to a system whereby the value of a commodity is not simply measured, but defined by, its price (i.e. its measurement). The value of a commodity in a LETS initiative is not distinguished from its price in LETS credits, even if LETS credits are widely abundant. Indeed, LETS economies can very easily become inflationary to artificially boost the expressed value of commodities.

Time Dollars, on the other hand, try to move outside the price-theory paradigm by asserting the value of labor that goes into commodity production. A Time Dollar, by definition, is an hour of anyone's labor, regardless of the type of labor performed. A nurse and a furniture-maker who both work for eight hours would earn eight Time Dollars each in such an economy, and therefore be able to purchase the same value of commodities with this labor-money. The value of the money, and the value of the commodities purchasable with the money, is rooted in the human act of labor (Dooley 2005). Prices of commodities are set by the amount of labor required to produce them and therefore price and value can be distinguished, as the former is a measure of the latter. Theoretically, such a labor theory of value, through the specific functionality and form it takes, provides an alternative system of valuation that explicitly seeks to demystify what is seen as the proper relationship between price and value. In practice, however, participants have been reluctant to shift into this rearticulation of price and value and the concomitant resubjection it implies.<sup>79</sup> As such, in many Time Dollar schemes, those who labor in jobs with higher pay in national currencies (such as doctors) withdraw from the program, finding it less than economical to have their labor valued the same as those with jobs

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<sup>79</sup> In the Time Dollar systems, a purposeful attempt is made to modify how people see themselves and the commodities they produce and consume as valuable (or not) as a direct challenge to a capitalist order that is seen to systematically exclude particular groups from being valued subjects of society. By using a labor-based money, the originator of the Time Dollar system, Edgar Cahn, hoped to tackle the ways in which people are interpellated into subjectivity through class (seeing class relations as the primary structuring force of identity within capitalism). Since class relations stem directly from labor and how the labor-capital relationship under capitalism, Cahn sees Time Dollars as an opportunity to let people unmoor themselves from capitalist class relations and create new forms of communality. By equalizing the value of labor and concretizing that value in the form of a currency, Cahn hopes to achieve what Gibson-Graham refer to as a resubjection of economic selves for the purposes of cultivating new subjectivities and new ways of being-together (Connolly 2002; Gibson-Graham 2006).

that are paid less in national currencies (such as childcare providers) (Cahn 2001; Seyfang 2002).

Complementary currencies, in the U.S., waver between some version of a price-theory and a labor-theory of value by expressing value through capitalist pricing schemes of the market and locating the source of that value in the labor of the participants of the complementary currency. Certainly the PLENTY is an example of this phenomenon. Not only does this end up conflating price with value (entities, which Marxian political economists as well as many complementary currency activists try to keep theoretically apart),<sup>80</sup> but it raises questions about the ways in which the PLENTY can intervene into the power geometries of regional community and economic relations. Part of the appeal for a labor theory of value draws from a Marxian influence, and conventionally leftist, emancipatory political ideals: if value ultimately comes from labor, and that value can be understood to be the labor time socially necessary to produce a commodity, then exploitation and commodification become problematics whereby labor loses control over the surplus value generated through work and the relationship between labor and capital becomes obscured.<sup>81</sup>

This is summarized by Hudson:

“The significance of value analysis lies in the way in which it focuses attention upon class relationships and the social structures that they help to define. It is very difficult, not to say impossible, to see how else other than in terms of the labour

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<sup>80</sup> Many complementary currency practitioners attempt to pursue what might be termed a humanistic theory of value, in which the value contained within a complementary currency is whatever the people using it want it to be (even if actual practices reveal more conventional economic behavior) (Lietaer 2001).

<sup>81</sup> While this may appear as a standard rendition of Marx’s labor theory of value, it is important to note that not all Marxian economists and theorists agree on the meaning of “value” or even “labor.” One major point of contention is the temporal and spatial ways in which Marx himself theorizes the transformation of value into price in *Capital*. See (Freeman, Kliman et al. 2004) for an insightful and current overview of these debates.

theory of value we can explain where profits come from and why the capital/labour relation remains the key to understanding the accumulation process that lies at the core of capitalist societies.” (Hudson 2006, p. 379-80)

The implementation of a complementary currency is to demystify the (exploitative) capitalist class relations captured by price and revalue labor for what it is authentically worth. Not only is this an attempt to humanize labor, but it is also an effort to give labor a mode of empowerment—in this case, at the scale of a localized community economy—to control its own surplus and determine the distribution of that surplus in a communal way.

The localization of complementary currencies extends this notion further and replicates what the NCPlenty, Inc. Board member stated about the authenticity of producer-cooperatives: exploitation and commodification obscure where labor takes place; therefore, localizing labor (and supposedly making it more visible through localization) will lead to less exploitation and commodification. Indeed, the localization of labor that is to be ultimately created through the use of a localized complementary currency will bring about a new form of commonality—community—which has limited conditions of possibility when the relations of producing value through work get obscured. The value of the PLENTY, therefore, can be found in its functionality and form as a tool of illustration of the geography of current class relations (tracing the contours of exchange relations as noted above) while also allowing users to envision and enact other geographies of class. These other geographies of class assumedly take on the form of community. What community will bring about, is not only a sense of classlessness as posited in Marxist revolutionary theory, but a way of valuing everyone beyond monetary measures that equalize value with price and locate the value of a person through the price paid for

that person's labor in the exploitation process (i.e. the commodification of labor). Until that is possible, the process of resubjection is to begin with using money differently in order to value everyone equally through money. As such, a currency like the PLENTY can build community (beyond the divisions of class maintained by the labor/capital relations) because everyone in the community economy will be valued equally and therefore more willing and able to be with others. As one of the farmers involved in the PLENTY explains it: "It's not just about money, the economy, but also social, society and community, so everyone will be well situated and there won't be exploitation of less-favored people. Basically that's the idea." The politics of community within a complementary currency, and within the PLENTY, directly tie into the politics of class and the potential to create a different way of appropriating and distributing surplus value. The community to be built offers a realization of a labor theory of value in what Marx referred to as a system of primitive accumulation, a pre-capitalist form. In short, part of the politics of community inherent in the PLENTY relates to the possibility of cultivating other relations of exploitation and shifting the class-based stratification of the region. This, of course, assumes what many leftist political interventions assume: that if "exploitation" is made visible, people will work towards ending it.

### *Community, Class and Value*

If the community to be built is to be a classless one underpinned by a labor theory of value, does the PLENTY itself generate value to move social relations toward this ideal? Is there a value of community that can be evident within the current confines of the PLENTY community economy that somehow distinguishes it

from capitalist class processes, as a form of non-capitalist or alternative-capitalist economic relations? If it is possible to theorize community from an analysis of value, it is possible to theorize value through an analysis of community and realize the aporia that Hudson leaves open, that the possibility that a politics of community and the drive for communal modes of value generation and distribution provides a different theory of value than the labor theory of value?<sup>82</sup> In addressing these questions, I will shift from what has taken place with the PLENTY project to what possibilities have been opened up by its occurrence.

The PLENTY provides a potential intervention into current configurations of class exploitation and community form. Because the PLENTY is money that can be more accessible than dollars, can support informal economic practices without undermining their carefully constructed, underlying social relations,<sup>83</sup> and can supplement incomes with a non-exportable form of capital, it can complicate the ongoing production of class positions in the regional economy. Because the PLENTY can only be spent in face-to-face exchanges, can facilitate sociality as opposed to alienation within monetary relations, and can move diverse forms of wealth among and between various lines of social stratification, it is incorporated into the processes of community building that take place within the area. The circulation of PLENTYs resonates with what human geographers have come to acknowledge: class and

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<sup>82</sup> Another way of asking these questions follows from earlier chapters and an earlier footnote of this chapter: what is the value of the “free” \$38/3.8P disbursed to every new member? Where does this value come from?

<sup>83</sup> Once again, it is important to keep in mind how Samers (2005) reminds us not to reify or blindly celebrate the informal economy as an alternative to capitalism or an economy that is somehow beyond critique. Like any other set of economic relations, those identified as “informal” are contingent and contextual and their relations of exploitation and power are relative (Samers 2005).

community do not exist in separate spheres of social life but intersect in multiple ways.

The official discourse of the PLENTY—and of much of the complementary currency movement—celebrates the role alternative monetary spaces play in linking economic and social relations through a communal distribution of capital. One of the goals of the non-profit group that manages the PLENTY, for instance, is to create a status of general equilibrium in the PLENTY community economy within which all participants have an equivalent holding of PLENTYs so that the set of exchanges of the currency even out over time. Some plans have been generated to stimulate a sustained series of PLENTY exchange circuits through which participants would have a guaranteed (and relatively equal) wage in PLENTYs (e.g. LOOPS) are to be managed jointly by NCPlenty, Inc. and the community spirit of the participants.

In examining the value of community that the PLENTY case study raises, then, it is necessary to ask what is to be the organization of the commons through which capital generation and distribution is effectively communal? In other words, how is community to be operationalized to reconfigure regional class relations into something other than current capitalist forms? On the surface—and indeed, in practice—it is quite utopian to believe that the power of community as such can create the conditions for the classlessness that the PLENTY organizers seem to envision, even at the localized scale and small scope of the PLENTY. This caution about community is particularly apt for a project with participants that are overwhelming self-identified as white, well-educated, homeowners with above average incomes yet often speak as if they represent the diverse range of populations

in the region because they see themselves are part of “the community.” As the economist Carole Biewener notes, one must be careful when discussing the liberating potential of communal relations of production and distribution in general terms without reference to concrete forms and actualizations (Biewener 2001). This point has been well demonstrated theoretically by philosophers such as Jean-Luc Nancy (Nancy 1991) and practically by the limitations of the Owenites, among other communalists. But if one takes seriously the lessons from recent geographical research into diverse economies—research that stymies both the discursive hegemony of capitalocentrism and the material dominance of capitalism as a totalizing system structuring all class relations—then one must take seriously the efforts to use community to create economic practices that do not parallel capitalist exploitation and capitalist class processes. One cannot assume that the PLENTY, or any project that hinges on the development of community, will ever rearticulate class just because it tries to do so through community per se. But equally one cannot assume that deployments of community will never resituate class because community is a supplement to capital or an empty signifier (no matter how easy this is to do in an era of neoliberalist politics and rule through governmentality) (Herbert 2006; Joseph 2002). Both community and class must be treated as contingent, temporary, and incomplete orderings of social life that crystallize through a dynamic collection of interdependencies, spatial relations, and place-based processes. I argue that the PLENTY opens up a space of potentiality within which community can be put to work and actualize reconfigurations of class through the cultivation of solidarity (Spinoso, Flores et al. 1997) which indicate an alternative reckoning of value (one



that shifts from the conventionally economic to the more explicitly ethical, not that the two can be separated). As one member of the PLENTY community economy explains her involvement: “There’s also there’s a solidarity aspect, too. If somebody gives you a PLENTY you know they’re also supporting the same values.”

In order to investigate the relationship between class and community in the context of the PLENTY, I want to ask: what modes of solidarity emerge through the circulation of this complementary currency in such a regional space and how is solidarity productive of value? The notion of solidarity both draws upon a rich history in the genealogies of class and community as well as situates the analysis in more general terms. Solidarity can be associated with both traditional class praxis and conventional community politics but cannot be limited to either one. The Oxford English Dictionary defines solidarity in terms of “collective responsibility,” but my turn to the term is inspired by Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus (1997)<sup>84</sup> who fit the notion squarely in the process of disclosing the new, in producing an event, in what Thrift posits creates new political spaces (Thrift 2004). The challenge for the PLENTY to modify both class and community geographies is a challenge to promote collective responsibility for the regional community economy in light of the stratifications that currently characterize that space. In that way, community can be opened up across narrow lines of interpersonal meanings, values, associations, and

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<sup>84</sup> Spinoza et al. define solidarity as “a sense of ultimate responsibility to the most encompassing disclosive space that makes the activities of the entrepreneur, the virtuous citizen, and others matter most” (Spinoza, Flores et al. 1997, p. 116). They go on to refine this as stemming from a sense of shared collection of concerns, rather than a shared ordering of concerns. The process of disclosing this sharing is part of the construction of what they call a “we” and is akin to recognizing the always already compearance of space (what Massey calls “throwntogetherness” (Massey 2005) in a similar post-Heideggerian move), but cultivating that solidarity into action.

social relations of propinquity that dominate the language of professional community development and class positions can be highlighted as partial modes of identity which do not preclude certain types of action over others.

Class and community solidarities and their nexus do not have a particular political content or position vis-à-vis capitalism. Solidarity can be produced by, within, amongst, in spite of, and against capitalist relations. I do not want to assume that the PLENTY community economy is an alternative economic space and therefore a harbinger of alternative, and necessarily politically progressive, class processes. Indeed, the PLENTY intersects the capitalist dollar economy in multiple ways: the monetary value of the PLENTY is pegged to the dollar and the wealth appropriated and distributed through waged labor within the area's formal regional economy underpins most (if not all) participants' ability to access and spend PLENTYs. Furthermore, the actualization of the PLENTY has thus far failed to redistribute dollarized wealth across lines of economic stratification that are evident in the region's uneven development as measured by official statistics. As an economic development tool in the conventional language of class, the PLENTY can be wielded more effectively to reach lower-income people, to say the least.

But I also do not want to reinscribe discourses of marginalization that associate class position and class processes only with measured dollar incomes, waged labor, and positionalities vis-à-vis capitalist exploitation when exploring the possibilities opened up by the PLENTY. It would be unfair to describe the PLENTY's value solely in financial terms. The currency has only been in circulation for five years and only \$10,000 worth has been issued by the non-profit group that

privately prints and manages the money. While Weaver Street Market averages \$500 a month of exchanges in PLENTYs,<sup>85</sup> most participants have never accepted a PLENTY in an exchange and those that have do not consider it to be an important portion of their incomes. If the PLENTY is only an alternative or complementary financial scheme, then it has merely replicated the current distributions of wealth in the region. No members describe the PLENTY as an instrument to expand their purchasing power and few have used the PLENTY to conduct transactions that they would otherwise not have done with dollars. To see the PLENTY simply as a medium of exchange that stores monetary value disavows both the diversity of money in general and the ways in which people participate in the PLENTY to build community. Even the organizers' own labor theory of value seem to break down when used to explain why people join the network, why people use the currency, and what value they find in it.

Rather than only focus solely upon the financial aspects of the PLENTY it is necessary to take into account the multiple ways in which the PLENTY imagines communal distributions of wealth through the cultivation of solidarity. Money capital, such as that represented by the different denominations of PLENTY bills, is just one form of wealth that circulates through the geographies of the PLENTY community economy. As scholars of money have shown, money takes on a diversity of forms and has an array of uses of which finance is just one (Leyshon 2004; Simmel 2004; Wiseley 1977; Zelizer 1994). In the capitalist dollar economy, in which private

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<sup>85</sup> Even, as discussed in the Epilogue, NCPlenty, Inc. has ceased meeting, PLENTYs still do circulate. This figure is an estimate based on data gathered by Weaver Street Market combined with more estimated figures since the firm stopped keeping close watch of its PLENTY balance.

accumulation and distribution is foregrounded, money is used in a certain way and this specific use contributes to social organizations that we typically described through the language of class. This draws attention to the role of money as an alienating force because of its power of abstraction and its ability to universalize value across space. But this only describes how money works, not why.

Geographers such as Leyshon, Thrift, and Tickell have shown in various ways, money can only work as a currency if people believe in its value. Work must be done in order to produce and sustain the belief in money. The ways in which trust gets built can have dramatic impact on both the success or failure of money and the social landscapes within which that money circulates (as evidenced by the near withdrawal of Weaver Street Market from the PLENTY endeavor).

Similar to other complementary currencies, trust is central to the structure of the PLENTY community economy. The PLENTY is a tool to build trust among a group of people and an instrument to use that trust to distribute wealth in communal, rather than private, ways. But trust is not simply the medium through which wealth circulates. Trust is a component of the wealth that passes through its community economy relations. According to many participants in the PLENTY initiative, the development of trust is what allows them to operate at times outside of the formal, dollar economy and become more flexible in how they position themselves vis-à-vis class processes. As indicated above, one member of a household that occasionally uses PLENTY's notes: "It's nice to live like a rich person but simply." This person is able to live this way because of how her household has built forms of solidarity with others that get expressed in a diverse set of social and economic relations, some of

which has been mediated by dollars and some of which has been facilitated by PLENTYs (as well as other economic relations that are non-monetary).

What is happening within the PLENTY community economy in terms of trust, solidarity, and collective responsibility for the regional economy is twofold. One is a failure and it's a failure that has been experienced by many community development projects that direct resources primarily to the creation of "social capital." Trust, as Alphonso Lingis elaborates in his recent autoethnographic writings on travel, is an experience of giving up, of ecstasy, which happens through action (Lingis 2004). It may be enacted through particular abstract associations like location or identity but it must be realized through continuous action with another. Trust has no necessary temporal or spatial structure and it must be continually built.

The PLENTY is losing its ability to continually build trust—despite its design—and therefore its ability to cultivate the type of solidarity that can realize the communal distribution of wealth for more than a few. The PLENTY project has stagnated in the last year after a blitz of new participants joined in 2003 and a promising amount of attention on getting people to use PLENTYs in new venues. But the organizers assumed too quickly that their efforts to build community in this way meant that community existed in this way. They left the maintenance of solidarity and the unfolding of trust up to community itself without recognizing that the intervention has been incomplete and requires continuous contributions. What has started to happen is that overwhelmingly people experience what has been discussed as the Catch-22 of the initiative. As she says: "if I'm not really going to be able to spend these, then I'm not really going to want to take them. So it's sort of like

a Catch-22 in that sense...But I'm totally a part of that problem because I'm not taking them. So somebody can't trust that they can spend them with me." As another one-time avid supporter shared: "It feels like the energy is waning. [I d]on't hear much about the PLENTY these days. [The] Board seems lackluster [and] communications with members seem to have slackened. I'm losing confidence in the PLENTY."

These beliefs reinforce that idea that the PLENTY is only useful for those with money to spare, for those who have "disposable" dollars and who can afford "local" goods and services, drawing a distinction between the "upper-class" and the "lower-class" participants.<sup>86</sup> There is a growing skepticism about the ways in which localism infiltrates this community development project to impact class and community processes. While many joined up as a way to show support for what they describe in different spatial imaginaries as the local economy, many of these same voices express concern that the PLENTY's local networks are disingenuous to their own translocal community and economic geographies. The idea to sustain localized

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<sup>86</sup> One longtime participant, who had wanted to design her own currency before she had heard of the PLENTY, describes her inability to use PLENTYs as related to her financial situation as dollar-poor: "It's also a matter of, I don't have a lot of money, I don't make a lot of money so that, you know, most of my money goes to utility bills that won't take PLENTYs. And I think a lot of other PLENTY members are in a same situation, or a similar situation, where they don't have a lot of—what's the word for that?...Disposable. Disposable income." When asked if the PLENTYs could stretch her dollar income, she replied: "Nope. My budget is pretty friggin' lean and especially back when I had it it was very lean. I'm a little bit better now, but I don't have no PLENTYs left. So, it's pretty lean, so it's not even—unfortunately, I think if I had more spare income, I would pursue getting PLENTYs more." A farmer shared similar concern when describing her initial involvement: "I was doubtful of how I would be able to utilize the money, like how am I going to be able to spend this money, you know? And also receiving it concerns me. My finances are like, I've got to keep them really tight because I'm not making that much money so I have to be very careful of cost and what I'm making and keeping track of all that and so if I have money and I can't spend it, then I can't pay bills or can't use it for the mortgage, I mean, that's just a really difficult scenario. So I was pretty hesitant but I thought I'd give it a try."

circuits of wealth rubs uneasily with many participants' own needs to buy the cheapest and most convenient goods at places like Wal-Mart. The non-profit group that manages the PLENTY has failed to provide a conjunctural analysis that helps participants negotiate their desires to foster a particular regional community economy with their experiences that move through this community economy space in contradictory ways. Rather than cultivate solidarity and a sense that the regional economy can be trusted and reformulated in its set of interdependencies because its various contributors engage in some collective responsibility, the PLENTY has demonstrated to many members the weakness of local community economies within global capitalism and their own impotence to change regional social geographies that seem controlled by the Board rooms of multi-national firms, state agencies wanting to attract firms, tourists, and a mobile, financially sound creative class, and economic developers who believe a job is a job is a job.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, for some, the PLENTY has affirmed to them (in surprising ways) some necessity for the Triangle to exist as a competitive region in a "global" economy.

But, on the other hand, the circulation of PLENTYs has begun to trace out a parallel production of solidarity. Some of the most successful "success stories" of the PLENTY come from participants who do not use the PLENTY that much because for them the PLENTY has become redundant: the small business owners who engage in formal barter arrangements to subsidize their low dollar incomes; the multiple, intersecting, and differently arranged cooperative firms in the region from which one

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<sup>87</sup> This notion of jobs-based economic development has been expressed as the driving ideology by the public and private leaders of economic development in Chatham County and reflects a similar belief held by economic development officials in Durham.

can procure food, clothing, housing, various sundries, and even biodiesel fuel; the households that supplement dollar incomes with trades and gifts of time, goods, and labor. Many of the participants in these projects joined up with the PLENTY because they saw a link between it and their own diverse economic practices. The link that they saw—and continue to see—is in how the PLENTY could be another instrument for the communal distribution of wealth through multiple channels of the regional economy. But what distinguishes the PLENTY from these other diverse economic practices is the way in which the PLENTY potentially puts the community of communal redistribution under erasure. What the PLENTY does, for some members, is map out the many refractions of community relations that connect themselves to others in ways that can't be seen just through charting interpersonal relations. As one of the early developers of the PLENTYs posits:

“It's given me a better sense of how community works actually, more so than money I think. Of the networks that people create amongst themselves. I've learned a few of the pathways that the PLENTYs travels, that people who habitually spend it amongst themselves and being able to see like, oh, I give it to this person who gives it to that person who gives it to that person who gives it to that person and to be able to watch those webs form.”

These movements of this money have the potential to intersect various conventional class and community lines through the on-going and manifold acts of exchange.

Through these webs PLENTY participants can imagine themselves within a regional community economy of solidarity in which the mode of solidarity is produced alongside and between the striations of class and community. One of the beneficial aspects of the PLENTY circulation, some suggest, is that it points out both the ways in which inclusion and exclusion functions through the region and in a variety of forms. While it seems that the current construction of the PLENTY



community economy helps reinforce social and economic exclusion, there remains a potentiality that many participants still believe in to use the money to reconfigure this system of social relations. As long as some people still trust the PLENTY as a money to be a tool of communal distribution and the existence of these diverse array of economic practices, there remains the potential that it can foster modes of solidarity that use community to productively reconstruct class processes in the region.<sup>88</sup>

When asked the question directly about whether or not the PLENTY has value and where that value might come from, one NCPlenty, Inc. Board member stated that “it’s inherent that the PLENTY has value,” a statement backed up with a notion that people are self-governing in their economic decisions and that the value of the PLENTY “is in providing an alternative economic model in which people can be more adept in living their lives more qualitatively, more happily, more by their own choosing, and more in tune with the relations of community.” As noted above, there is no guarantee that such a leveling of community and class relations will occur through an intervention rooted in a classical labor theory of value. What is needed, therefore, is clarity on the relationship between class and community to push such a theory of value to be of further conceptual use in fostering the type of resubjection wished for by the organizers of the PLENTY. Such theoretical work can be found in some contemporary Marxist and post-marxist social theory that rethinks labor and communism as a form of community.<sup>89</sup> But this requires an analysis of what can be called a communal theory of value in which value is articulated through the diverse

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<sup>88</sup> But perhaps these need to be further distinguished in the PLENTY from the types of community relations Richard Florida analyzes in his *Annals* piece discussed earlier in this dissertation.

<sup>89</sup> See Agamben 1993; Gibson-Graham 2006; Hardt and Negri 2004.

labors that are brought to bear on the production of community. Turning to the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and his pursuit of community which is inoperative, which doesn't work (and in other terms, doesn't labor), we can begin to envision both such a theory of value that extends beyond a labor theory and see how PLENTY project could realize it in practice.

*Unworking a Theory of Value: From Labor to Community?*

As discussed above, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has attempted to analyze community from the perspective of what he sees as the inoperative community. In short, he has sought to understand how community works and how the workings of community relate to various projects of communism, reading communism as both a particular working of community and as a particular mode of community in which work (and the relations of work) are privileged in specific ways. The case of the PLENTY presents an interesting question that strikes at the heart of many taken for granted assumptions about community-based modes of empowerment, such as community economic development: what is the value of community? If class is not the only lens through which value can become visible, then it is possible to try to understand the value of community on its own terms, especially if class is understood to be one organization of community. This analysis is possible because of the relationship between community and work that shifts the value of community outside the framework of the Marxian labor theory of value. Indeed, if, as Jean-Luc Nancy argues, the work of community (as a type of progressive politics of collectivity such as what the PLENTY purports to be) is to be its own unworking, then we need to locate the value of community within its own process of unworking, of unlaboring,

and try to derive the value generated and distributed as such. The value of community comes not from labor, but from its own refusal to be worked.

To examine the value of community as a process of unworking, it is necessary to clarify how Nancy explains community and develops his theory of community alongside Marx and a Marxian theory of value. Indeed, Marx is a major inspiration for Nancy's writing, both in terms of what he sees as the limits of Marxian analysis to understand relations of power and sociality, as well as what he sees as opened by Marx's studies of capitalism. Nancy begins his essay "Being Singular Plural"—his most sophisticated and condensed analysis of community—with a quotation from Marx as the epigraph:

"Since human nature is the true community of men, those who produce thereby affirm their nature, human community, and social being which, rather than an abstract, general power in opposition to the isolated individual, is the being of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own joy, his own richness. To say that a man is alienated from himself is to say that the society of this alienated man is the caricature of his real community." (Nancy 2000, p. 1)

What Nancy indicates by starting with this quotation is how the Marxian analysis of power and social relationality is simultaneously the recognition of being as a social process as well as the identification of a certain type of being as the true, authentic, and unalienated form of that social process. For Nancy, this both opens up community for a strong ontological analysis ("social being"; "the being of each individual") but also closes off that ontological study in favor of an epistemological project of uncovering true meaning (which then takes Marx to his historical analysis of capitalism as the point of divergence in a process of alienation). While Nancy reads Marx as shifting from ontology to epistemology, Nancy argues that it is necessary to return to ontology in order to prevent the analysis from becoming an exercise in recovering the "lost" meaning of human kind (which can be identified

with a specific historical condition). Indeed, Nancy wishes to push Marx further by putting Marx's assumptions about individuality under erasure, arguing that the ontic condition of individuality Marx holds so dear in his vision of community through class is itself a historically locatable way of encountering the being of Being. From this perspective, Nancy launches his ontological analysis of community specifically because he does not want community to be understood as having any privileged historical setting.

A key term to understanding this move from a Marxian to what becomes a Heideggerian study is what Nancy deems exposure. As noted above, Nancy stresses the part of Heidegger's ontology which addresses *Mitdasein*, or being-with. In shifting focus from *Dasein* to *Mitdasein*, Nancy argues that Heidegger himself becomes too focused on a category of being that is always already individuated and appears as a singular entity. With attention to *Mitdasein*, Nancy wants to continue the analysis of an ontology of being prior to its appearance as an individuated self. Drawing upon Heidegger's notion of disclosure, in which the Being of being appears to itself, Nancy deploys a notion of exposure to explain the ways in which the Being of being appears to itself as a singular plural, as a being-with. It is through exposure that the Being of being appears because the process of exposure (*ex-posure*) is one in which the self as a singular being is repositioning from a singular to a plural and in which being appears clearly as always being-with. This disposition of the self—a dispositioning of the subjectivity of the self—is, according to Nancy, the foundation of first philosophy, located as it is in the context of the Greek city-state (Nancy 2000, p. 23). The city, Nancy argues, provides the basis from which to posit being's being-

with and which exposes the primordially of community not as a collection of individual self-subjects, but as the space in which the condition of being-with is most readily exposed:

“The city is not primarily ‘community,’ anymore than it is primarily ‘public space.’ The city is at least as much the bringing to light of being-in-common *as the disposition* (dispersal and disparity) of the community represented as founded in interiority or transcendence. It is “community” without common origin.” (Nancy 2000, p. 23, original italics)<sup>90</sup>

For Nancy, the misstep made by Marx (and Marxian analysis) is to see the city or any process of being-together (such as the being-together of the factory floor that is to produce class solidarity in pursuit of a class’s true meaning) as a mode of alienation rather than as a space of exposure, a space in which the self-subject is dispositioned more so than alienated. For Nancy, such spaces of exposure clarify rather than distort the Being of being as being-with of singular plurality. He notes:

“Marx ignores that the separation of singularities overcome and suppressed in this way is not, in fact, an accidental separation imposed by ‘political’ authority, but rather the constitutive separation of dis-position. However powerful it is for thinking the ‘real relation’ and what we call the ‘individual,’ ‘communism’ was still not able to think being-in-common as distinct from community.” (Nancy 2000, p. 24)

Nancy, therefore, draws the distinction between being-with (or being-in-common) from community as the difference between an ontological condition on the one hand and an ontic condition on the other. Community is a mode of being-with that is ready at hand and visible. The exposure of community as being-with exposes and brings to light the ways in which community is a particular mode of being. Being-in-common, according to Nancy, is the event through which Being recognizes itself as existentially exposed as Being-with, as a relation. Nancy posits that this is

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<sup>90</sup> There are, of course, strong resonances here with the geographical imaginary of Doreen Massey and others who read the city as a meeting space. Indeed, Nancy’s philosophy is deeply geographical, as he always writes in terms of the taking place of community.

not a relation of subject to subject, a relation between subjects, but is constituted by relationality itself.<sup>91</sup> It is not so much as being-with, as it is being-with.

Nancy shows that the failure by Marx and Marxian political economy to recognize this ontological condition leads to a movement away from the exposure of being-with and the ways in which individuated subject-selves are ex-positioned in particular historical and geographical contexts towards the dispositions of already individuated selves. The response, therefore, has been to celebrate different modes of coming together in order to recover the alienating dispositioning. Nancy refers to this maneuver as composition, and locates Marxian communism within a long trajectory of Western ideas seeking composition as a way to recover the community (everyday being-together) that is seemingly lost by various modes of disposition. At this juncture, Nancy ties this political project of composition with an epistemological project of composing meaning and reveals composition as a search for lost meaning. In a direct engagement with Marx and the politics inspired by Marxian political economy based in a labor theory of value, Nancy critiques what he terms “literary communism”: the process whereby community is worked as a specific mode of composing meaning for self-subjects (further obscuring the ontological condition of being-with).

For Nancy, literary communism, or the composition of community, is always an appropriation. The appropriation that takes place in the composition of community is related to the appropriation of labor by capital to generate surplus value

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<sup>91</sup> This seems to be akin to what Foucault and others, such as Agamben, have examined as the relation of no relation as the locus of pure relationality.

in that there is the process of work which produces a sign to be circulated within a system of meaning. Just as Marx saw a transference from one symbolic realm to another in the process of capitalist exploitation, Nancy sees the composition of community as the movement of being-with from the ontological to the epistemological. As such, this movement places the category of being-with into an economy of signs because being-with becomes a knowable sign. By imbuing being-with with meaning that can be reduced to a point of appropriation, being-with becomes a mode of community, a work that itself requires work. It becomes a subject whose meaning is locatable at an originary moment at which it is put into relation with other signs. Community then becomes a set of self-other relations and works as a mechanism to uphold these sets of relations. This composition of community is a way of writing community (hence “literary communism”) which Nancy argues is always already a violent act of appropriating community’s ontological status as being-with. When community gets written in this way, community is no longer accessible as an ontological category of being-with but only as an ontic category of togetherness (whether as “class,” “race,” “ethnicity,” or so on) that appears as work. What Nancy posits—and this becomes the way in which he distinguishes his philosophy of community from Marx vis-à-vis constitutive value—is that Marxism conflates the historical act of appropriation of sociality by capital (knowable through an adept analysis of capital-labor relations and class processes) with the epistemological appropriation of being-with which Marx himself reinforces:

“...Marxism missed the moment of symbolic appropriation by confusing it with that of productive appropriation, or even by thinking that such productive appropriation must be self-producing and, thereby, move beyond itself into symbolic appropriation: the self-suppression of capital as the integral reappropriation of Being as communal existence...Instead, this self-surpassing takes place as the

symbolization of production itself, which allows for coexistence only in the form of the technical or economic co-ordination of the various commodity networks.” (Nancy 2000, p. 50)

Rather than draw attention to an originary moment of appropriation (as Nancy claims Marx does by writing the worker as the bearer of capital and therefore interpellated into a positionality known by its relative position in a relation of exploitation), Nancy returns to an ontological encounter in which being-with is thrown into being. Nancy argues that the process of interpellation at the heart of Marxian subjectivity and the subsequent communal politics is problematic because it already assumes a particular sense of value vis-à-vis the work of a subject position. Indeed, Nancy shows that the appropriation of meaning through the composition of community in Marx creates a way to measure the with of being-with. The knowing of the community to which humankind belongs can be understood by evaluating the conditions of being-with rather than taking being with as an ontological category in and of itself. In response to the mode of valuation that capital achieves through its exploitation of labor (creating a system of equivalences and an economy of signs that can be exchanged), the Marxian politics of community seeks to control this mode of valuation by capturing the position of appropriation, the production of meaning. As such, it is through an encounter with the supposed origin of being (the exploitation of labor by capital which produces capital’s own value and sets the whole capitalist economy into motion) that becomes the basis for the true production of subjectivity, the subject-self alienated from society (being-together in the broadest of terms). Such a composition of community lends to a politics that desires positionality rather than an ethics which brings the mode of being-together (community) closer to the dis-positioning of being-with.



By measuring the with of being-with, Nancy argues that Marxian analysis evaluates relationality in terms of its relative appropriation and exploitation. That is because value is centered around the productive act. While Marx can be read as leading to politics of liberation because of the ways in which this evaluation of the with creates an equality amongst the signed subject-selves of labor, Nancy argues that this language, this composition of equality falls back upon a economy of equivalences rather than an ontology of radical alterity that reveals the ultimate incommensurability of being-with's with. That is to say, being-with is an ontological, not an economic, condition and without this ontological category as the fundamental basis of the theory, the theory requires subjects that are composed rather than disposed, of community working itself rather than unworking itself.

Nancy claims "that capital is the alienation of being singular plural as such" (Nancy 2000, p. 73) because of the ways in which it sets into motion of composition of community and a measurement of being-with's with. This latter point, the measurement of with as the locus of value (and therefore entered into an economy of signs) allows us to begin to understand the value of community in general and in the PLENTY project in particular. As Nancy writes on the composition of community as an appearance of being-together:

"When we try to evaluate this closeness (as if in a marketplace or railway station, or in a cemetery, we were to ask what are the meanings and values of these hundreds of people, of their restlessness and passivity), it comes out as frantic or distraught. But the meaning of the "with," or the "with" of meaning, can be evaluated only in and by the "with" itself, an experience from which—in its plural singularity—nothing can be taken away." (Nancy 2000, p. 98)

What he seems to state is that any value that is to be found within community is in its refusal of valuation, what he terms the "commensurability of incommensurable singularities" as a summary statement of the ontological category

of being-with (Nancy 2000, p. 75). It is being-with that has value as an ontological category which draws attention to the foundational notion of pure relationality, not any particular mode of relationality which appears as a composition of community. Nancy claims that this is the fundamental ethical contribution of ontology, but that this ethics must be recognized through the deferral of dis-positioning, rather than any ethical statements of humanity's commonality. When clarifying his notion of literary communism as a critique of Marx, Nancy notes that he "means the being-in-common of what has no common origin, but is originarily in-common or with" (Nancy 2000, p. 90). The value of community, in short, is in its refusal of valuation and therefore its refusal of an economy of signs which communicate positions of subjectivity (even if these subject positions can come together in temporary arrangements of political action). For Nancy, this is crucial to any type of ethical statements that refuse to distinguish between the violence that so often explodes in the composition of community. "The 'with' is dry and neutral: neither communion nor atomisation, just the sharing and sharing out of a space, at most a contact: a being-together without assemblage" (Nancy 2003, p. 36). For Nancy, the value of community as an ontological, rather than epistemological, category, is that it prevents us from comparing (and evaluating) the Nazi Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the ethnic cleansing of Sarajevo.

In terms of the PLENTY, in which the violent appropriations of community take on a more benign outcome than the mass massacres of the 20th Century, the value of community may be in its very immeasurability. Yet, the PLENTY project is a direct and explicit attempt to measure the with, to evaluate community, and to

position community in an economy of signs in order to communicate its value. What Nancy's analysis allows us to see is that the PLENTY makes the same mistake that Nancy argues Marx makes in conjuring up the equality of members of the community. The ideal circulation of PLENTYs in the PLENTY community economy is one in which equilibrium is achieved. This moment of equilibrium is recognized as a moment of equalization. But it is an economic, and therefore epistemological, equalization which is trying to make what Nancy argues should be an ethical, and therefore, ontological statement.

Ironically, it is the very valuation of community through the monetary system of the PLENTY which seems to obscure the value of community. Such a system of valuation requires the PLENTY community economy to be a community of work, of working together. Perhaps this is why organizers seem caught between expressing the value of the currency in terms of a labor theory of value and unsure of how to explain the value of the 3.8P that enters into the network with every new disbursement, or of community itself. According to its website, NCPlenty, Inc. posits that "the PLENTY adds value to local goods and services while U.S. dollars inflate prices to offset transportation costs, interest, etc....The PLENTY reflects our local values." This somewhat convoluted reasoning (that U.S. dollars inflate local prices but PLENTYs do not even though PLENTYs are directly pegged to U.S. dollars) indicates an important relationship between the expression of economic value and ethical values: that the value of the PLENTY has something to do with the relationality implicit in the composition of community and being-togetherness more so than the capital-labor relations so evident in the dollar economy. While 18% of

surveyed participants believe that labor gives the PLENTY value (and the same percentage are unsure), 40% of those surveyed believe trust is the basis of the currency's value.<sup>92</sup> Interestingly enough, many people involved with the PLENTY implicitly see that the valuation of trust through this community-based currency obscures the value of community. As one member has expressed, the PLENTY can develop the mechanisms of trust that make the need for money obsolete.

### *Conclusion*

In providing an analysis of value within the PLENTY community economy, this chapter has begun to formulate a theory of value that can adequately explain what value the PLENTY has from both an economical and ethical perspective, the value of community. Yet while the expression of value as a representation of a certain type of relationship remains unclear to the participants of the PLENTY project, this chapter has argued that the value of community, following Nancy's critique of the Marxist labor theory of value, is in itself. But this value cannot simply be relied upon to appear in representations of value that are put to work to create a system of equivalences. Rather, the value of community is in its incommensurability—what participants in the PLENTY community economy have struggled to express as trust or solidarity—and its refusal to function in an economy of signs. Yet that is precisely what the PLENTY achieves is putting community into a codified value form. Perhaps this inherent contradiction can help explain the limited participation that has taken place in the PLENTY and in most complementary currency projects of this

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<sup>92</sup> Respondents were provided with multiple choices to answer this question. One of these choices was "U.S. Dollars" (which only 12% chose) indicating that the 40% who believe trust is the basis of a PLENTY's value do not think that the PLENTY is valuable because of its relationship to the dollar.

type. A challenge that lies ahead for the complementary currencies movement is to articulate a complementary mode of valuation without valuing, and therefore evaluating, community.

What this can lead to is a clarification of how such a project as the PLENTY can function more fully as complementary by more fully queering the region, by producing this strange sort of value that refuses evaluation (yet is indicative of values cum ethics). In the next and final chapter, I will push further to see how the PLENTY opens the opportunity to reimagine the region in strange ways and the vision of a strange region (or a region of strangers) might be a more complete realization of a diverse, dynamic and relational community economy.

## CHAPTER NINE: STRANGE EXCHANGE

“Always encountering our own strangeness, as if for the first time, we yearn for a time when there was a sense that dispelled, or promised to dispel, this strangeness. It is in humanity’s situation that existence is both exposed and exposing, which implies that humanity is often amazed by its own non-autonomous strangeness.” (Hutchens 2005, p. 41).

“...as our long-distance communications increase so the significance may decrease of those who live next door...And that precisely would be to undermine one of the truly productive characteristics of material spatiality—its potential for the happenstance juxtaposition of previously unrelated trajectories; that business of walking round a corner and bumping into alterity, of having (somehow, well or badly) to get on with neighbours who have got ‘here’ (this block of flats, this neighbourhood, this country—this meeting-up) by different routes from you; your being here together is, in that sense, quite uncoordinated...Even those who write of care for the stranger so often figure that relationship face-to-face. It is the counterpoint perhaps to the persistent lack of acknowledgement of the strangers who have always been within” (Massey 2005, pp. 94-186).

### *Introduction*

Despite whatever disdain academicians and intellectuals have for the term and even with its unfolding disintegration, community remains an important concept to organize social relations in the world. The modalities of community that range from the nationalism of conservative, identitarian political parties to the de facto and de jure rules of segregated and segregating residential neighborhoods exist. Yet that does not mean that one is left with the choice of either fully embracing the notion of community without critical attention (the communitarian move) or debunking its proprietary claims upon an underlying humanity in order to assert individual rights to protect against the violences of community (the liberal position). Rather, the sustained importance of community should urge one to experiment with community, to play with the idea, to follow its various lines of flight into what might become

more meaningful organizations of community that reflect the undulations of social life. One can see a variety of attempts to do this as social theorists attempt to conjoin an idea of community with some sort of conception of humanity that moves past the particular modernities captured by terms like “mass society” or communism. In the contemporary moment, experiments are unfolding in this direction and speak of the multitude, or the multiplicity, and processes of heterogenesis or becoming. I want to position this dissertation (both my writing of it and the empirical project from which it stems) as part of that experimentation to open up community to its own strangeness by examining those points of articulation—even if they only exist in potential—when it becomes possible to speak of a community of strangers. In elaborating community in this way, I want extend an idea of the stranger through what Kristeva refers to as “new modalities of otherness” without falling back onto a naïve cosmopolitanism that simply posits that we are all strange as she and others do (Kristeva 1991). Doing so reinscribes self-other dichotomies without fully deconstructing the compearance of being-with. Rather than becoming strange as mode of resubjection, such moves are underpinned by a logic of individuated strangers encountering each other (outside of the power-geometries that makes one’s strangeness matter).

Crystallizations of social relations—particularly those that weave through community and economic development projects and their reasons for existing—are too significant to push aside with such logic. While I agree that we are all strange, I must also argue that some are more strange than others, especially in the context of community-building. That the strange exists is less interesting than the production of the strange and how this production of the strange can be part of the production of

community. In other words, I want to explore the intersecting productions of community and strangers as something different than just a technology of otherness and exclusion. This chapter provides an outline of how I want to understand strangers as part of how community takes place. But since strangers have an uneasy relationship to community, I also want to underscore the importance of strangers in the displacement, the disintegration, following Nancy, of community. As such, an ethics of strangers might emerge in how strangers contribute to community's own unworking and help to sustain community as a site of collective becoming.

### *The Call of the Stranger*

As noted by Doreen Massey's quotation above, increased attention to the ways in which "globalization" manifests new encounters between people raises anxiety about strangers as well as ethical calls to embrace the strange. This discourse holds that more and more people are encountering strangers, that life is increasingly organized around meetings with strangers, and contemporary citizens of the world must learn how to navigate their relations with strangers (Ignatieff 2001). One course to steer is into the closures of identitarian politics, a mode of ethics that draws boundaries, looks to minimize contact with strangers, and requires the work of community to define the familiar from the strange. Another way to maneuver, however, is to embrace the fact of strangers and find a mode of co-existence (or even to reduce and remove the condition of strangeness). Indeed, recent attention to the latter has come as a direct response to concern that the former is gaining ground as



the hegemonic way of encountering strangers, especially in the post-9/11 Global North (Appiah 2006; Archibugi 2003; Gregory 2004; Massey 2005; Nancy 2007).<sup>93</sup>

Many of the calls to open up our relations to strangers have come in the guise of a renewed call for cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the cosmopolitan ethic has reemerged as an antidote to virulent modes of community, what Harvey dubs “militant particularism” (Harvey 1996). Yet often this call for a renewed sense of cosmopolitanism comes with minimal recognition of the historical relationship between cosmopolitanism and imperialism, particularly a Kantian mode of cosmopolitanism that imagined spacing Enlightenment ideals across the world in order to universalize emergent claims to individuated subjects as the source of rights (Gregory 2004; Harvey 2000). As such, some have urged extreme caution when conjuring up a cosmopolitan ethic, noting the ways in which cosmopolitanism can slip into a manifestation of homogeneity rather than radical heterogeneity (Brennan 2003; Gowan 2003).

As such, some have attempted to pursue a critical cosmopolitanism that attempts to queer the ontological foundations of cosmopolitanism’s assumed subject. This work helps define the contours of a cosmopolitan ethic that begins with the deconstruction and full radicalization of the other into a ontology of being-with. Nancy captures this move by describing his work as driven by:

*“Threefold strangeness: that of the distant other, that of the withdrawn same, that of history turned toward the un-encountered, perhaps the unbearable. It is necessary, against an ‘altruistic’ morality too blandly recited, to hold onto the rigour of the*

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<sup>93</sup> This concern has been a driving force for much current research on European cities (as well as the policies governing them) given the expansion/remapping of Europe through the growth of the European Union, post-socialist transition, and migration to metropolises from former colonial and otherwise marginalized sites (Madanipour, Cars et al. 2002).

*relationship to the stranger, wherein strangeness is a strict condition of existence and of presence. And it is necessary to hold onto that which, out in front of us, exposes us to the sombre, radiating dispersal of our own future and of our own fissure. It is neither a question of making the Occident guilty nor of reasserting a mythic Orient: it is a question of conceiving a world that is in itself and of itself broken, by a break that comes forth from the furthest reaches of its history and that really must, by one means or another, for the worst and perhaps—who knows?—for the least worst, establish its obscure meaning; not an obscured meaning but one where the obscure is elemental. It is difficult, it is necessary. It is our need in the two senses of the word: it is our poverty and our obligation.” (Nancy 2003, p. 25, original italics)*

In such a statement, Nancy posits that being strange is ontologically foundational and that reconciling this condition of estrangement allows us to open up to the other in ways that reconstitute ourselves and others as being-in-common beyond a bifurcated self-other axis. In line with his writing on community, finding the strange in community is not a matter of expanding the horizon of community’s boundaries, but in disintegrating community into a form of being-with that allows the with to fully manifest. As noted above, the temporality of this must take on the same dimension as its spacing—it can never be a stasis. Rather, this being is an event of becoming in which subjectivity is in a continual process of resubjectivation. This overlaps with Massey’s vision of space as an event of heterogeneous simultaneities, a bundle of trajectories, that can’t be tied down to singular points in space-time (“real space (space-time) is indeed impossible to pin down” (Massey 2005, p. 80)). Just as subjectivity cannot be located in a specific body/individual (or community) without a grid of power to essentialize it, so too space cannot be located. Both articulate a spatial ontology of the strange.

It is in building off of these spatial ontologies that queer subjectivity that I want to envision the PLENTY community economy as potentially inhabited by strangers. Indeed, as the fundamental logic of a complementary currency system is a

queering of economic space as well as the mode of community it engenders, it is also a way to relate strangers to each other in new ways. At the heart of a project like the PLENTY (as noted in the previous chapter as well as in the motto of the currency: “Our Economy, Our Community, Our Money”) is to transform the alienation of capitalism into a production of community by refashioning it from within. It is to build off of the ways in which capitalism enrolls strangers together (as *trader* of capital who meet in a marketplace) and produce community. In such a way, it is a creation (in the same way that capitalism is always recreating the world), but one that works on a different (and in the hegemonic context of capitalism, strange) orientation of meaning. This pushes past the Marxian notion that people and places are interrelated through the spacing of capital (i.e. the circulation of money, commodities, labor and the general equivalence drawn from capitalism’s abstract space) because the relationality of a community of strangers is a facticity of the community’s compearance (not simply a condition of possibility rendered by the geographies and histories of capitalism). This means that a project like the PLENTY should be understood as an event when reconciling its potentialities. This means that the analysis treats it as an event, and just as its spatial dimension is neither determinately here or there (is it both here and there) its temporality is neither determinately now or then (it is both now and then), but perhaps most significantly, it is futural (it is eventual, in the contingent sense of the term). The PLENTY then potentially creates a strange world, neither present or absent, but in potential. In positing the significance of this mode of thinking, Nancy claims:

“To create the world means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence. But this means to conduct this

struggle precisely in the name of the fact that this world is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that it is precisely what forms the justice and the meaning of the world” (Nancy 2007, p. 54-5).

Perhaps it is possible, even if strange given the acknowledged limits, to articulate the PLENTY as such.

### *PLENTY of Strangers*

The underlying economic idea that drives local currency projects is that a chronic scarcity of money leads to a variety of economic, environmental, and social problems. This scarcity of money is a geographic phenomenon that is produced by the existing system of social relations. In other words, proponents posit that the modern money system is set up so that money moves away from certain places towards others in a global network, getting concentrated in areas of financial security and leaving other places in financial crisis. In response to this production of scarcity is a production of abundance: people simply make their own money in ample quantities and back the money with labor, goods and/or trust. In order to prevent a condition of scarcity within this new currency, the geography of the money is reduced to an area in which scarcity cannot take hold in such stark degrees, or at least the redistribution of wealth is more easily managed.

The problem is therefore not money, it is the geography of money, and local currencies are attempts to give money a different geography. One of the outcomes of the global geography of money is how it produces subject-positions of estrangement. Local currencies potentially try to rework these relations into new associations between strangers. While the scarcity of, for example, dollars produces plenty of strangers, the local currency movement uses a method to shift what practitioners see

as the structure of that economy of strangers in order to redistribute and revalorize the stranger.

I am hoping to outline this local currency as a site of potentially strange forms of community, regardless of the various ways in which participants draw upon familiar discourses and practices of community, which they often do in order to situate their involvement. Indeed, as shown many ways through this discussion, even the local currency model can be used to stabilize organizations of community in order to crystallize definitions of strangers as highlighted by a recent BBC report on a new whites-only local currency circulating in a town in South Africa ("Whites-only" money for SA town 2004). In doing so, I want simply to note three modes of becoming strange that can then be brought together to offer a better understanding of how the production of strangers is potentially part of the production of community.

### *Three Modes of Be(com)ing Strange*

Three modes of becoming strange seem most relevant to the production of a community of strangers in the context of this discussion. These three modes are an economic, a geographic, and an ethical. I will elucidate each of these and attempt to synthesize them into a broader statement about community.

#### *Economic*

The two immediate ways in which economic strangeness is produced through the PLENTY local currency is through the use of a strange currency and the involvement by economically strange subjects. These two technologies of economic strangeness overlap and one lends quite easily to the other. First, the fundamental practice of PLENTY participants is strange: using their own form of currency to

exchange goods and services. While the PLENTY is not a radical revision of the market-based price mechanism, nor does it introduce a new set of behaviors to the population (one still uses money as a note of exchange value to buy and sell commodities), in the contemporary moment, the use of PLENTYs instead of dollars is remarkably strange. Despite the purposeful weakening of the dollar by current government policy, the hegemony of the U.S. dollar remains well sutured within the current relations that configure a global financial system. In many respects, it is a statement that contradicts standard economic logic not to want U.S. dollars today.

When participants explain the PLENTY to others, participants note the frequent look of confusion or questions that indicate misapprehension that follow. This is particularly evident in concerns raised to NCPlenty, Inc. about how to report PLENTYs in accounting ledgers and for tax purposes. Even many PLENTY participants are still trying to explain to themselves why they are involved in the project and not simply spending U.S. dollars at locally-owned businesses, as encouraged by many “buy local” campaigns that to them have the same economic goals. Some participants debate who this initiative is really for and how they are aligned with the others they see involved, though recognize that their connections through the exchange of PLENTYs is all that is necessary to envision these others are somehow a part of their community. Because so much of the activity within the PLENTY community economy hinges upon the exchange and circulation of the PLENTY notes, much attention has been drawn to the process of exchange and many participants are finding that their everyday habits of using money are in fact quite strange.

This aspect of the economic modality of strangeness allows participants to question why certain exchanges are deemed economic and certain social or cultural or not even named at all. In making the familiar strange in this manner, exchanging PLENTYs becomes a practice of estrangement from the dollar economy that feels to them more politically productive than what is offered in the variety of DIY movements that confuse escapism from a money economy with social freedom. Through the PLENTY, one can be a stranger within the dollar economy, not just outside of it. This aspect of economic estrangement seems particularly significant for those who are interpellated into economically marginal subject positions aligned on axes of social difference such as race, class, and gender (even if few of such subjects are actually involved in the endeavor). The PLENTY local currency not only provides space for those who are financially stable yet want to become strangers in the dollar economy, it also affords those who are already strangers to the dollar economy a place to redefine their economic subjectivity. While it is not yet clear how many participants in the PLENTY community economy rely upon the circulation of PLENTYs for a substantial portion of their livelihood, in its ideal state, the PLENTY gives those who are strangers to the economy a place to be strange, yet not allow this mode of estrangement lead to the violences of exclusion from the dollar economy (a point that is of increasing concern with the continued reduction in state-sponsored welfare provisions that at least make available some basic goods to those in need). A significant reason given by several participants in the PLENTY initiative to justify its implementation is the protection of those who may be already strangers to what they define as the dollar economy: the housewife, the local barber, the independent

hardware store owner, the family farmer, or those receiving food aid from the government. Their primary connection as members of a community to various participants is maintained only through the abstractions of the currency, viable by the happenstance of place, and made concrete through the practices of exchanging PLENTYs.

The hope, of course, is that through repeated encounters of exchange, these various participants will no longer be strangers but will form a community—an assemblage of people whose connections extend beyond the economic and into the social. But there is no necessary articulations between these repeated exchanges and the formation of community in this way (or, that it would necessarily be a good to strive for, as many assume within the local currency movement). What is allowed to happen through the local currency as a model of community building is that such encounters may remain between strangers, but that the mode of estrangement changes. While there is no reason why this couldn't extend into a deterritorialization of relations defined by the maintenance of otherness and reterritorialize organizations of communitarian community between those who previously couldn't imagine themselves being-together in such a way due to axes of social difference, there is also no reason why it should accomplish this deterritorialization in order to be successful at building community. Indeed, it seems that a very successful local currency initiative could achieve its goals by increasing the economic exchanges amongst strangers—exchanges that would only be facilitated by the existence of the PLENTY and the collective fate of sharing the same spatial proximity to one another. By focusing the activities of community building on the exchange of money, participants



in the PLENTY initiative need only enter the marketplace—albeit a strange marketplace that is constructed in ways different than what may be most familiar. As geographers and social theorists alike have demonstrated—particularly feminist thinkers—the marketplace can be a site of social freedom contra the bonds of community precisely in how it is structured around the exchange of money.

### *Geographic*

The marketplace is one location of a community of strangers that the PLENTY seeks to intervene in and revise. But the PLENTY pursues another mode of geographic strangeness by locating the community economy at the scale of the region. Indeed, the PLENTY community economy that is located among Alamance, Chatham, Durham, and Orange counties is a direct response to the dominant regional identity of the Triangle. The production of this regional object, the Triangle, has fostered a particular geographical imaginary of what this area should be like, what it should be for, and who should be a part of it. Often this regional imaginary brings into focus the importance of globally integrated capitalism for the area's regional form and function, and makes visible a cause-and-effect relationship between economics and the production of place.

The PLENTY provides a different visioning of central North Carolina's regional coherence. Rather than focus the region on Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh (and Research Triangle Park), the PLENTY attempts to render a different spatial logic visible. Smaller, former mill towns like Carrboro and Pittsboro are important in the PLENTY's economic geography as are the eclectic mix of people who live or pass through these places. The PLENTY draws upon selective historical and

contemporary imaginaries of the area to envision a region in central North Carolina that does not directly refer to Research Triangle Park or global integration. This alternative construction is inscribed in the practices of NCPlenty, Inc., PLENTY users, and even in the currency itself. Much of the geography of the PLENTY overlaps with the geography of the Triangle, yet through the PLENTY, the places potentially othered by the hegemony of the Triangle are recentered as economically and socially important, not merely marginal or peripheral to the region's reason for existing. In this creation of a strange region, the PLENTY circulates among those who are located in the stranger regions of the Triangle—those places that do not appear on tourist maps, regional plans, and are otherwise discursively rendered terra incognito by the place-marketing of the Triangle. Not only does the community development foster relations between such geographic strangers, it also pursues an alternative geographical imaginary that fosters an ability to see certain places in common in a way that is not really possible through the regional imaginary of the Triangle. Without attempting to force the people in these places to become in common, the PLENTY pursues a community of geographic strangers by articulating their local system of social relations according to an alternative spatial logic that allows them to be strangers together. Furthermore, such a move pursues a different spatial logic for community development at large: much of the conventional community development occurs with the assumption that close spatial proximity—at the scale of the neighborhood, for example—necessarily fosters positive social relations and bonds of trust. In other words, by pushing the local of the local currency and the local community to the scale of region, the PLENTY maintains

some of the social and geographic distance for the existence of strangers in the face of much of contemporary community development's core logic: that the closer one is to another both socially and geographically, the more ethically one will act towards that other.

### *Ethical*

Geographers in particular have been struggling with how to critically conjoin ethics and geography, and only recently have earnest attempts been made to bridge the gap between critical geographies attempting to broach questions of social justice with the research of moral geographers who have dealt explicitly with questions of ethics (Popke 2006). The problematic of space and ethical engagement have shaped much of this work: moral geographers assume too quickly that when people share spatial proximity they practice ethical behavior with each other and those critical geographers working through questions of social justice often decry a politics of place in favor of a spirit of internationalism that can properly overthrow the chains of global systems of repression. Within each of these theories of geographical ethics, the figure of the other looms large and mediates the scalar constellation of ethics: for conventional moral geographers, the other is only ethically accessible if within a small enough geographic scale to refashion the other as a production of similarity; for critical geographers, the other is mainly ethically accessible when rendered visible through fields of repressive relations of difference—the further the social distance from the othered, the greater the ethical responsibility is obliged. The work that is recently bridging the gap between these two theoretical camps is attempting to overcome these geographical imaginations of the other in favor of a situated ethics

than nonetheless forgoes a situation of achieved concord, of community that always works in the last instance.

In drawing upon situated ethics as many have done, it is important to heed Badiou's warning about our construction of the other as an always already existent figure within every situation and within our own multiple subjectivities (Badiou 2004). The move to render everyone strange in this way—to look for the strange in every situation—can draw attention to technologies of otherness but not necessarily discern the production of the other in meaningful ways to overcome those crystallizations between self and other. What a project like the PLENTY local currency does is to draw attention to those points of contact, those moments of exchange that potentially become points of articulation for an ethics of specificity to emerge. This is not because we live in a Habermasian universe in which we all can engage in ideal acts of communication through which we find concord. Rather, the PLENTY uses a currency as simply that, a currency with which one can substitute the impossibility of community with an abstract certificate of value to mediate the exchange of difference—to draw a temporary line of equivalence that may or may not have meaning once again but can always potentially facilitate exchange. Yet this abstract medium of value is not the universalizing value of capitalist money (and the social values that often accompany it): rather, this is a situated abstract carrier of value within which the value of the stranger is simultaneously valorized and subverted.

Furthermore, a space is created in which a strange relationship between the value of an economic currency and a social exchange can flourish, can be played with

and experimented upon, and can be opened up to a process that is nearly absent from the formal, dollar economy. Rather than draw attention to the ways in which one can be economically and geographically estranged from money, a local currency project like the PLENTY potentially allows consideration for how strangeness and belonging are conditions of the production of social relations and though crystallized in powerful ways, situated within a set of conditions of existence. One can have value as a stranger, not simply either obtaining or lacking value because one is a stranger, and modes of being strange become the item of note. Value—as the source of signification for both money and morality—takes on meaning only within the situated event of the exchange. And community becomes the on-going process of strange exchanges.

### *Community of Strangers*

In central North Carolina, an old Piedmont blues song has often been sung about the familiar condition of being strange: of being out of place, of being maltreated, of being unknown and unknowable. This image of the stranger as an absolute other has shaped much of our social theories of the ethical. In a final (and speculative, futural) move, this chapter has attempted to draw upon the empirics of a local currency in the same Piedmont of central North Carolina to outline how the exchange of strange money, in a strange place, among strangers can potentially offer a new rendering of the stranger as necessarily part of the production of community, as long as that community is understood as a becoming. There is an ethics within this local currency that might articulate ethical engagements amongst strangers, an ethics that acknowledges and challenges how the strange gets produced rather than how the

stranger exists as strange. Through exchange, the PLENTY local currency is one example of the intersection between the production of community and the stranger, which in contemporary discourses of community—especially within the field of community development—is strange indeed.

## EPILOGUE

### *The Last Meeting*

On the evening of Wednesday, January 31, 2007, NCPlenty, Inc. had what turned out to be its last organized meeting. A few dedicated members, some of whom had been recently designated<sup>94</sup> Trustees to the Board in order to keep that component of the organization afloat according to the by-laws of the agency, met at Chatham Marketplace in Pittsboro. Chatham Marketplace had just recently opened its doors as a cooperative grocery store and café in an old mill building. Much like Weaver Street Market, the Marketplace stressed healthy, organic, and local foodstuffs as well as a commitment to connecting local consumers with local producers (however, the Chatham Marketplace incorporated more producer-owners in its coop model than what Weaver Street Market has developed). The meeting was intended to be an informational session as well as a membership recruitment opportunity, with the hope that Chatham Marketplace could serve as an anchor to a wider circulation of PLENTYs in Pittsboro and the rest of Chatham County (and in doing so, take some of the attention away from Weaver Street Market and Carrboro). The management of Chatham Marketplace was completely supportive of the idea, even given an

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<sup>94</sup> I write “designated” to capture some of the ambiguity of the moment. According to the NCPlenty, Inc. by-laws, Trustees with voting power are to be elected by the general membership. Since the membership elections had yet to produce a full Board, Board members modified the by-laws to allow for temporary Board positions to be filled by persons elected by the current Trustees. This amendment was approved by the membership at a sparsely attended Annual Meeting of the NCPlenty, Inc. members. This meant that Board members could in effect be appointed by other Board members, but only through a unanimous vote of the Board.

awareness of the accumulation issues facing Weaver Street Market (in many ways, some in the management of Chatham Marketplace as well as early investors saw the business as a more “grassroots” alternative to Weaver Street Market, which some within and alongside the PLENTY network had begun to articulate as too big, too powerful, and too removed from “the people” of the area). While the primary reason for the meeting was the monthly Board of Trustees meeting, as with each Board of Trustees meeting, the first hour was dedicated to a public interest session. It was to this that the members of the Board of Trustees dedicated most attention. An announcement in the Chatham Marketplace electronic newsletter was drafted and sent to all the coop’s members by email. Updated directories of NCPlenty, Inc.’s membership were printed and prepared for distribution, as well as basic informational flyers about the need for a local currency and the benefits of using the PLENTY for the local economy and community. In a flurry of emails to each other in the three weeks before this planned meeting, the members of the Board of Trustees hoped that “some fresh blood will show up” (Maggie 2007).

No one did.

#### *Coming to Terms with the “We” of the PLENTY*

That this was to become the final meeting was neither planned nor surprising. Neither is the fact that since that date, few emails have come across the Board of Trustees’ email listserv, and the ones that have been more often than not forwarded requests for information about the organization from people who saw the website have been inquiries into the status of the PLENTY and the Board as well as similar questions by Board members themselves, all of which have met with no response



from the others save for similar ignorance. The organization's website has not been updated since November 2006, even though several Board members habitually updated this outlet in the previous years and attempted to be as technologically savvy as possible to facilitate PLENTY circulation and bring attention to the endeavor. Conversations amongst the Board throughout 2006 hinged on the future of the project, wondering if there would ever be a "critical mass" of interest or a consistent group of volunteers willing to make this more than the work of three or four people. Indeed, many discussions (online and in person) had circulated around whether or not the PLENTY was indeed a "community" project, questioning the level of ownership that the "community" invested in the initiative and raising curiosity as to what would happen if the Board would just stop meeting, if anyone would fill in the organizational gap, or if all PLENTY transactions would eventually cease. This, of course, has been a conversation that has been held among many complimentary currency organizations' leadership, a concern among certain Board members after the halt in expansion seen in 2003, and a reminder of the gap in understanding between Board members and many PLENTY users (Lepofsky and Bates 2005; North 2007; Raddon 2002; Williams, Aldridge et al. 2003).

One turning point, indicating that the end of the PLENTY experiment would be coming sooner rather than later, was a Saturday morning meeting held at the Chapel Hill Public Library on July 22, 2006. In addition to the Board of Trustees, Kat, one of the founders of the PLENTY that had since left the initiative, joined to give some historical perspective and help guide the discussion towards a productive

alignment with current PLENTY users' desires.<sup>95</sup> The two hours of conversation moved from technical and everyday details of PLENTY operations and NCPlenty, Inc.'s management of the currency towards a broad visioning of the overall goals of the endeavor and how such goals matched up to the current state of affairs. Interestingly enough, the conversation became framed as a need to "expand the 'we' of the PLENTY." As one Board member wrote in an initial version of the meeting's minutes: "The Board has come to use 'we' to mean the Board exclusively and never the Membership. Our goal is to 'expand the We'" (Sam 2006a). There was general consensus that the "community" of the PLENTY had sedimented into a self-selected group of participants with little room for the recreation of that community. Indeed, the "community" of the PLENTY had very little to do with the exchange of PLENTYs among a regionality of strangers that opened up the event of community in surprising ways, lending to an alternative imagining of the region's economic and community relations. In Nancy's parlance, the "community" of the PLENTY had very clearly come to be recognized as recognizable, as inscribed, as reliant on a form of closed immanence (Hutchens 2005). While there was a desire to unwork this inscription of community, to make this we inoperable, in many ways this conversation marked a recognition that it was already too late. In some ways, however, this also marked a congruence between the Board of Trustees and the

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<sup>95</sup> Many others had been invited as potential leaders in the conversation, including the General Manager of Weaver Street Market, who Board members thought would be able to provide a critical and honest assessment of the PLENTY, as well as leaders of local economic justice oriented non-governmental organizations, who Board members hoped would inject a new energy and vision and direction to the project. All invitees declined. Even one Board member did not show (due to last minute family needs).

general population of PLENTY users: the “community” of the PLENTY was not what it set out to be.

In addition to these collective reconciliations with what the PLENTY had become and what mode of community it had engendered, there was also increasing exhaustion experienced by the personnel of the Board. One Board member, Sam, who had been involved with the PLENTY since its inception when his wife Kat had originated the idea with her brother, decided to resign his Board position after a year of deliberation. On December 28, 2006, he sent an email to the Board of Trustees announcing his decision to pursue a longtime dream of graduate studies and dedicate more time to his family and his art. As he noted, he had not given up on the ideas of the PLENTY, but rather that his energy to the day-to-day activities was on the decline. “I just do not feel excited about the PLENTY anymore; it feels very obligatory and like I am pouring time into something which is a great idea but 1) isn’t working out that well right now and 2) is competing amongst many other factors in my life which I consider more important” (Sam 2006b). Rather than be a half-hearted leader, he felt he needed to step aside.

Since Sam had been a central figure in NCPlenty, Inc. for several years, often serving as the primary public face of the organization, such a decision held potentially significant repercussions for the group and for the endeavor. While debate ensued as to how to tell the membership about Sam’s planned departure (which was put forth to the Board as a phasing out, with a reduction in role before complete resignation), Sam’s announcement raised the very real possibility broached at the July 2006 meeting: what if the Board were to go defunct? Sam had served as the person of last

resort for every role<sup>96</sup> within the organization and it was quite possible that his leaving would leave a gap that would be impossible to fill (as no one else had expressed a desire to increase their commitment to the Board and, as noted above, it was only through a modification in the by-laws that the Board of Trustees was able to function with as few members that it had). Sam's departure would mean that the Board would return to a composition of three voting members, though that was up from the just two voting members, Sam included, from just before the winter of 2006.

Indeed, since Sam's announcement, no one has stepped in to fill his role. But more significantly, it seemed as if his departure was only recognized and only reverberated amongst the small "we" of the Board of Trustees. No announcement was ever made to the membership. Email inquiries about the PLENTY still go to Sam and he forwards them to the Board (and they go unresponded to). But outside the Board, no one seemed to notice this major action. It seemed as if the question raised in July 2006 had already been answered (perhaps even before it was raised): what would happen if the Board stopped meeting, stopped leading NCPlenty, Inc., stopped managing the PLENTY and for all intents and purposes, ceased operations? Nothing perceptively different.

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<sup>96</sup> Ironically for a group that manages a local currency, NCPlenty, Inc. has not had an official Treasurer since 2004. Sam has been managing the finances of the agency in addition to being the primary meeting organizer, website developer, outreach coordinator, and overall "go-to" person for the initiative. Sam's experience on the Board often paralleled the "tragedy of the commons" and he noted this in his resignation email—that when a task would come to the Board and be identified as the job of the Board, no one would do it, and it would either get completed by him or not get done. As he indicated, when work was everyone's responsibility, it was no one's.

### *A Failure?*

So is the PLENTY a failure? To ask such a question implies that such an initiative can easily be defined in terms of criteria of success or failure, that its visible outcomes constitute the primary (and truly important) aspects of the endeavor. To ask such a question in the context of the PLENTY—or any such initiative that offers a complementary imaginary of a future world to come from the world at hand—is to preclude the answer: absolutely. In quantitative terms, the PLENTY barely registered in people’s lives either in terms of their economic or social relations. The Board of Trustees is all but officially defunct and exists only as a handful of people registered on an email listserv. No new PLENTY notes have entered circulation in over two years and the membership roles have been generally stagnant since 2003. Its realization of new community and economic relations within the region in a sustained fashion has been nil.

So perhaps asking if the PLENTY has been a failure is not the right question (especially when comparing it to another revisioning of the region’s social and economic relations: Research Triangle Park<sup>97</sup>). So what is the question to ask of the PLENTY? To what is the PLENTY an answer, what is the problematic to which it responds, and what questions has the PLENTY asked? As to the first two of these inquiries, the problematic seems to be a conjunctural one of the role of community in an era of “globalization.” As addressed throughout this dissertation, especially in the

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<sup>97</sup> Which, to reassert the discourse surrounding Michael Porter’s recent report and the general notion of global competition that circulates among policymakers and business leaders concerned about the Park (and the growing attention to “competition” from China and India in attracting global capital), needs continual work to be successful, cannot be taken for granted as a success, and is currently in a competitive war to stay successful. See (Research Triangle Regional Partnership 2004)

previous chapter, the PLENTY responds to questions of cosmopolitanism in a way that is reactionary to those discourses of globalization that open up the opportunity for strangers to meet in new ways because of the relational spacings that are both ontological conditions of place as well as geo-historical conditions of possibility put into place in the last 50 years in central North Carolina. In similar ways that Peter North (North 2007) has shown in his analysis of several complementary currencies in Europe and South America, the PLENTY is an answer to a certain modality of globalization (even if that modality can be characterized as misunderstood/epiphenomenal through the lens of critical geography and the answer to be less-than-desirable through that same lens's view on political praxis).

But as a observant participant (Smith, S. 2001; Thrift 2000a), it is most interesting (and, I believe, necessary) for me to stress the last question: what questions does the PLENTY ask? The PLENTY's occurrence means that it has already been an event of world-creation, even if that world has not clearly manifest. But to ignore the ways in which the PLENTY circulated in some capacity through some people's lives and opened up the possibility for them to think new thoughts about their relationality to the world would be dishonest and unfair. As noted above, people have indeed used the PLENTY to query their own conceptions about community and globalization, their understanding of what it means to be local, and their vision of the region as primarily (and hegemonically) structured by the capacity of Research Triangle Park to fix global capital in the place. If one is to inquire into the success of the PLENTY, one must be attentive to the very real (if only fleeting, if only mild and placid) ways in which people used the PLENTY as a means of

exchange: both as a way to communicate to each other and to themselves about community, economy and space.

And while the PLENTY will not be the tool that enlivens an alternative regional imaginary through new networks of relationality, perhaps it is enough that the PLENTY, momentarily, brought elements of other tools together in relation. Additionally, it is important to note that in the ways in which people who used the PLENTY also created (and continue to create) diverse community economies, such people found their diverse community economic actions incommensurably commensurate with the PLENTY. The PLENTY aligned but did not supersede or replace. The PLENTY attracted without subsuming. The PLENTY (momentarily) put such relations into relation, but without achieving a general equivalence among them. Perhaps its inability to do so points to the very real ways in which such diverse economic practices (and the modes of communiality that they engender) refuse the type of valuation that “globalization” (or a successful Research Triangle Park region) requires.

### *Community is disintegrating*

Perhaps it is at this point that we find the political (and ethical) value of the PLENTY (and all such localized community building initiatives)—in the very impossibility of their realization. But, as Nancy would posit, it is that impossibility that needs to be embraced as a mode of retracing the political (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1997; Nancy 2003). That is not to claim that the efforts of the organizers and participants would have been better left undone and that one should applaud their miscalculations. Rather, it is to take seriously the very difficulty of realizing

community in such a way and respond to that recognition with an urge that is something other than “try harder” (or, in the case of the PLENTY: get more members, have another meeting, send another email, write another article). Perhaps the urge should be at the limits of community itself: to use such an endeavor as a way to query (and queer) the sense of community.

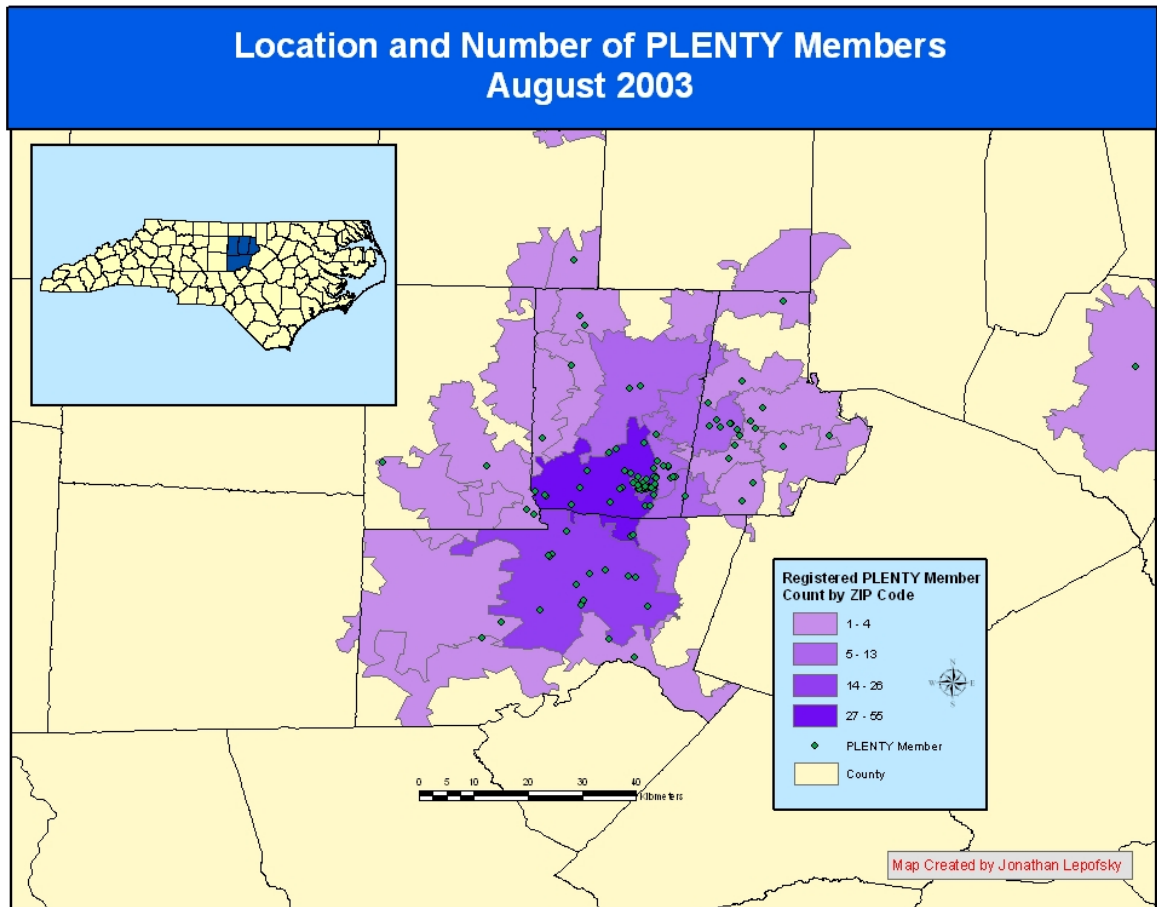
While this can easily become only a gesture towards a politics of refusal (encapsulated by the recently exalted literary figure of Barterlby the Scrivener (Hardt and Negri 2000)) and slide into an antipolitics that is also apraxis, it does not seem that in the current conjuncture it has to devolve into such deconstructive despair. If community can be understood, along the lines of Nancy, as “this shared but always irreducible and unavowable experience that consists of fragmented singular selves related to one another along trajectories of existence” (Hutchens 2005, p. 106), then one should look to the ways in which community development initiatives can open up the ways for continual recreation of the experience of being-with. The explication of any actualizations of such a gesture remains beyond the scope of this analysis but could emerge out of the questions that the PLENTY opens up. It requires much more sustained inquiry into the concepts that allow for the spacing of community as such and to see in the disintegration of community the very possibility for community to take place. As such, it seems the most pressing questions that the PLENTY asks are twofold, ontological and conjunctural: what is the event of commonness and what are the conditions of possibility of commonness? Any response will shed light on the constitutive aspects of community: its spacing, its sharing, and, what has fallen out of favor in intellectual inquiry but what might be of primary importance, its love. To



push for a response to these questions is to come to terms with the disintegration of community as its own futural event, but one that is not messianic of a future that is always to come, but pays fidelity to “instantaneous creations of new spacings of the world” (Hutchens 2005, p. 104-5). Community is disintegrating. In letting that happen, perhaps we can find the dis-integration of community.

## Appendix 1:

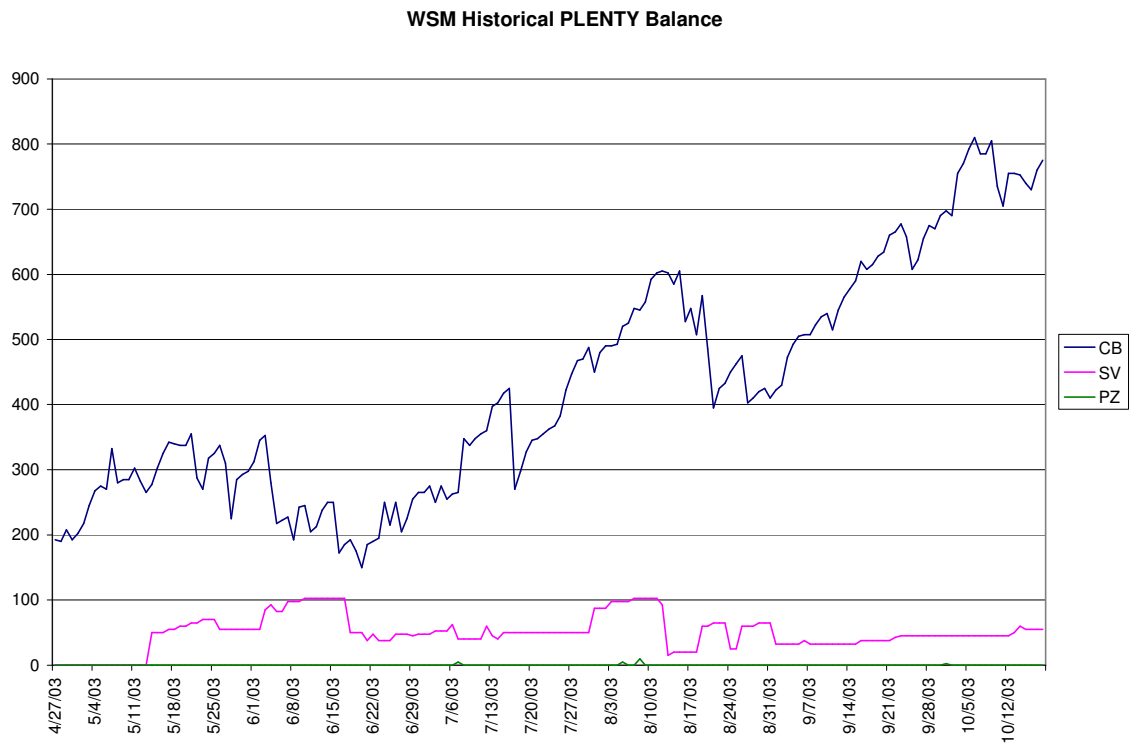
### Location and Number of PLENTY Members, August 2003<sup>98</sup>



<sup>98</sup> This map represents the number and location of PLENTY members after the rapid increase in membership during the first year. Since this time, only a few members have joined and such changes have made insignificant changes to the overall picture represented above.

## Appendix 2:

### PLENTY accumulation at Weaver Street Market April to October 2003



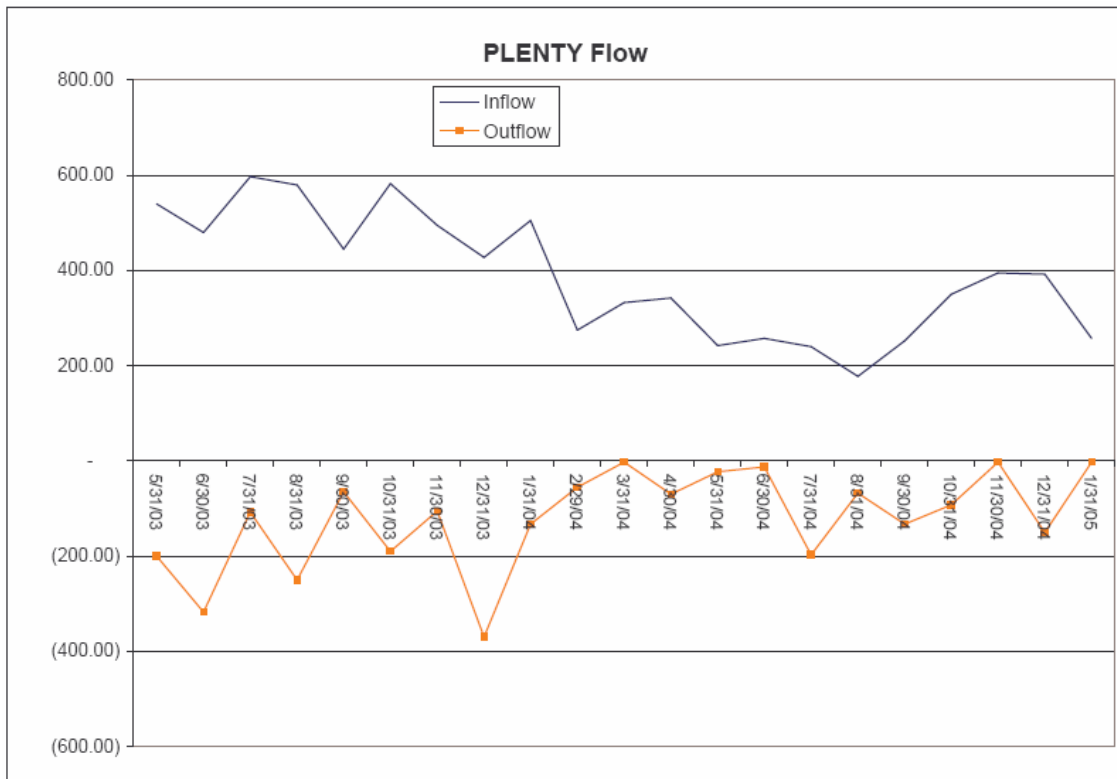
CB= Carrboro location

SV= Southern Village location (Chapel Hill)

PZ= Panzanella Restaurant (Carrboro)

### Appendix 3:

#### Inflow and Outflow of PLENTYs at Weaver Street Market May 2003 to January 2005<sup>99</sup>



Amount measured in U.S. dollars.

<sup>99</sup> The last time data gathered by Weaver Street Market's management in this form.

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