RITES OF THE SOIL:

EXPLORING THE RITUALIZED WORK OF A NONPROFIT COMMUNITY GARDEN

James Robert Alexander

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Doctoral Committee

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David Craig, PhD, Chair

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Lehn Benjamin, PhD

September 8, 2022

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David King, PhD

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Wendy Vogt, PhD

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DEDICATION

For and because of my family.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

There are days in our lives that function as a unique synthesis of the journeys that came before us, and a journey that lies ahead. The day I left Indiana to embark on my first, albeit very brief, official field site visit for my dissertation, it was a remarkably humid October afternoon. Earlier in the day, we had taken family photos on Franklin College's historic campus. It is the college where my wife and I had met in our freshmen year, and the college to which I returned to teach after receiving my graduate degree in theology. That day was nearly four years ago. We were all in our dress clothes, trying desperately to wrangle the kids at each location around campus for a handful of still moments during the muggy morning. Our son George, was only about eight months old, and lugging him around was like carrying a giant sack of flour. I tried to will myself not to sweat through my denim shirt. He stared at everything with a wide-eyed amazement I have come to miss in our children now. Mari was two and wholly ostentatious; she was a human bee darting around campus with her own sense of direction. Unbelievably, our oldest, Zuma, was six. An old soul since birth, she sighed with exasperation when we employed her to chase her sister down. And without fail, my wife, Katy, managed to have a good time in the midst of the chaos while simultaneously taking the edge off the anxiety and guilt I felt about leaving in the hours that were to come. Her gift to me has always been her uncanny ability to calm the tumult in my brain, with a look, a touch, an expression.

Soon after the photo shoot, I found myself at a Shell station, getting gas on the way to the airport, nervously chatting with the man at the next pump about how unseasonably warm it was for October. During that conversation, I categorized the

interaction under Ronald Grimes' ritual category of decorum (2013), or the expected social conventions of personal interactions; I was readying my mind to see all of my interactions for the next 48 hours through the theoretical lens I had adopted for my research. And soon, I was on an evening flight to Asheville, North Carolina.

I've offered a recollection of this day because there are moments in our lives that function as a unique synthesis of the journeys that came before us, and a journey that lies ahead. More importantly, those moments help us to think about the people that have supported us along our journeys, and look with eager anticipation upon the relationships that might influence us moving forward. I want to take time in this space to acknowledge the remarkable relationships I formed before and after that day. Regardless of the academic contributions that this work offers, I am thankful for the summation of these relationships and how they have positively contributed to my embattled sense of self.

I want to thank the staff and interns of The Lord's Acre/ Root Cause Farm for the time, attention, and presence I was offered during my numerous trips to the garden. I am particularly indebted to Gabe Whitlock, Ali Stone, Janice Brewer, Kevin Todd, Danny Szemple, Emily Chiara, Jessica Molina, Padma, Kelly, as well as Emma and Claire Childs.

I offer my most heartfelt appreciation to Susan Sides for making me feel so welcome at the garden and for taking a chance on a PhD student she had no reason to strike up a conversation with. She is too humble to know the extent to which her generous spirit, patience, and passion for community makes her a legend to those who have had the pleasure of visiting the garden; we are all fortunate she worked so diligently to breathe life into that piece of land.

Thank you to my dissertation committee for their continued support. My sincerest thanks to Dr. Lehn Benjamin for introducing me to qualitative research, and to Dr. Wendy Vogt for helping me find see my potential as an ethnographer. I would also like to thank Dr. David King for his encouragement for my studies and this project over the years. Finally, thank you to Dr. David Craig for chairing the committee, for challenging me academically, and for taking the time, year after year, to indulge my fascination with the topics of Christian agricultural movements, Dorothy Day, and Wendell Berry.

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Thank you to all of my students who have encouraged me over the years toward this goal, particularly to Kathryn Lauer who helped me transcribe a number of lengthy interviews.

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I could not have completed this project without the heartfelt care, love, and encouragement of my parents, Tim and Sue Alexander, my compassionate siblings, Megan Wegner and Mark Alexander, and my supportive in-laws.

I also want to thank my children, George, Mari, and Zuma for their willingness to allow North Carolina to steal me away for days on end.

I would have been lost without the steadfast love and encouragement of my wife, Katy Alexander, who never questioned the importance of this work or the long road to the completion of it.

Lastly, it is appropriate to give my thanks to the garden itself with a poem by Wendell Berry that reminds of that space (2013).

Sabbath Poem VII

The clearing rests in song and shade.
It is a creature made
By old light held in soil and leaf,
By human joy and grief,
By human work,
Fidelity of sight and stroke,
By rain, by water on
The parent stone.
We join our work to Heaven's gift,
Our hope to what is left,
That field and woods at last agree
In an economy

Of widest worth.

High Heaven's Kingdom come on earth.

Imagine Paradise.

O Dust, arise!

James Robert Alexander

RITES OF THE SOIL: EXPLORING THE RITUALIZED WORK OF A NONPROFIT COMMUNITY GARDEN

The field of ritual studies has often been relegated to the disciplines of religious studies and anthropology, and typically understood within a religious context. However, this dissertation applies the study of ritual to a nonprofit organization as a distinct organizational culture that engages in mission driven work that, at times, can also function as a series of deeply meaningful rituals; within ritual studies, this process of practical work taking on enhanced meaning is known as ritualization.

Utilizing Ronald Grimes' categories of ritual sensibilities (specifically decorum, magic, ceremony, liturgy, and celebration), this research sought to better understand how the work of The Lord's Acre, a nonprofit community garden dedicated to addressing the conditions of food insecurity, can similarly be viewed as ritualized activities. The study was conducted through the use of intensive participant observation and interviews conducted between 2018-2020 on site in Fairview, North Carolina. The research uncovered several important revelations.

First, the work of the garden often hinged upon the use of ritual language, spaces, and objects, and some of the rituals defied the clear categorization under Grimes' schema. Instead, ritual attitudes toward the work under observation became blends of multiple categories, such as celebratory ceremonies, thus helping to reify Grimes' theory.

Secondly, at times, the rituals undertaken at the organization resembled rites of passage popularized by Arnold van Gennep and also sustained periods of liminality, or communitas, popularized by Victor Turner, especially in the organization's attempts to build community through educating others about food insecurity. Finally, the research discovered that the practice of liturgy, conventionally thought to reside within religious nonprofit organizations, was active within the organization and thus may also be alive and well within secular nonprofit organizations.

David Craig, PhD, Chair

Lehn Benjamin, PhD

David King, PhD

Wendy Vogt, PhD

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TLA = The Lord's Acre

RCF = Root Cause Farm

Introduction: Back to the Ground

My first day of field research at the garden had an inauspicious start. I was running late. I had arrived at the Asheville, North Carolina, regional airport around 10:00 PM the night before, and after I gathered my luggage I proceeded to pick up my rental car. Because I checked in later in the evening, the clerk gave me the choice between a small Toyota Yaris, or driving a new Ford Mustang. Despite my better judgment, I chose the Mustang, a model I had always envied as a kid. As I raced to find my way to the garden the next day I realized how uncomfortable I was in the vehicle. Growing up, I had driven grain trucks, tractors, pick-ups and more, but I had never driven a muscle car. It terrified me. I tried my best to "have fun with it", picturing my father-in-law offering words of encouragement. Yet the twisting, winding roads in the mountains outside Asheville on the way to Fairview kept me ever cautious that an oncoming vehicle may careen around one of those curves a little too quickly and result in a head-on collision; I have always been a catastrophist. Every rev of the engine resulted in a few quick taps of the brake pedal. Still the morning was a beautiful one. I couldn't help but attempt to temper my anxiety about running behind schedule with the beauty of the green, lush mountains around me, peering out from behind the branches covering the country roads I was meandering through.

I had visited the The Lord's Acre years before during a conference at Warren Wilson College, and I found the scenery just as breathtaking then. The conference, led by Fred Bahnson of Wake Forest Divinity School, focused on ways to develop tangible projects interrelating Christian spirituality and the land at places of worship and institutions of higher education. The conference included a field trip to the garden, where

we were to engage in whatever work was needed and have a conversation about addressing issues of food injustice, and creating community. I had covertly been considering The Lord's Acre as the site of field research for some time, after reading Bahnson's memoir which detailed stories centered on the philosophy of providing free organic produce to food insecure families. When our field trip group arrived at the modest plot of land, surrounded by a makeshift fence made from sticks and branches, I immediately noticed a quote written on a chalkboard by the garden's toolshed. Although I can't remember what the quote said, Dorothy Day authored it. The Catholic social activist and subscriber to Christian agrarian philosophy was an individual I had been researching for some time. I knew I had found my field site.

The Lord's Acre is easy to miss; it sits in a small valley below the main road in Fairview, Highway 74. After turning off the highway and onto Joe Jenkins Road, a country road covered in red clay and rock, I was worried that the car might actually bottom out, so I slowed down considerably. I arrived at The Lord's Acre a little after 8:00 AM that harried morning, and was concerned about how the conspicuous black Mustang would look pulling into the garden which tends to espouse a very non-materialistic philosophy. I was greeted warmly by Susan Sides, the outgoing garden manager, from the other side of the fence with a handshake, her hands cold from the chilly morning weather. I apologized for being late, but Susan would hear none of it. She welcomed me over to the tool shed, where the morning reflection was about to begin and I nervously made my introductions to the interns, Gabe, Ali, and later Janice. Susan invited me to sit at one of the milk crates, which were arranged in a small circle in front of the tall tool shed. I quickly glanced out at the dew-covered garden to my right, which seemed

remarkably abundant for late October. I was embarrassed by how little I actually knew about how community gardens operated, what could and couldn't be grown and harvested this late in the year. My experience with agriculture had simply been much different during my childhood.

That morning marked my first formal visit to The Lord's Acre as a researcher and it came at the end of a circuitous path. Yet, perhaps that path is unsurprising given my personal background. Below, I will attempt to provide a portrait of my personal context to aid the reader in better understanding my own background and how it relates to the way in which I interact with my research, or my reflexivity (Babbie, 2013) ; indeed, this portrait will also help to explain my arrival at the Lord's Acre more generally. I'll reflect further on the importance of this intentionally reflexive posture in chapter three. Next, focus will shift toward my educational background, the methodological and theoretical considerations of my research, and finally an overview of the dissertation itself.

I grew up on a farm in Winamac, Indiana, located in the northwestern part of the state, the county seat of Pulaski County. Our farm was initially modest at its inception in the late 1970s. My parents grew soybeans, waxy corn, and popcorn, as well as ran a sizable swine operation. Dad's appreciation of the land, animals and animal husbandry, led him away from the family meat packing business and grocery store, Alexander's Meating House, which operated next door to our farm. I grew up in the 1980s, a tumultuous economic era for small family farms. Even at a young age, I was well-aware that farms are usually inherited and that my family's story of agricultural entrepreneurship was likely unique and thus all the more challenging. I was even vaguely aware of the times in which our family found itself in stringent economic

circumstances whether it was the result of market fluctuations in the grain market, or especially the result of small swine operations going out of business due to the proliferation of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) otherwise known as industrial scale livestock production facilities. Regrettably, our own swine operation ended in the late 1980s due to a combination of these factors.

As with any couple grappling with the struggles of small family farms, my parents' work ethic was nothing short of relentless. In time I came to recognize that such a work ethic was needed to remain competitive within a national culture that relied more and more upon the prevalence of industrialized agriculture. For small family farms, this typically includes a dogged pursuit of more land to rent, more equipment to buy, more loans to take out, just in order to break even. The greater the technological advances in agricultural production, both in terms of machinery and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) engineered to pesticides and herbicides, the greater the pressure to adapt to their implementation; this reassured landlords that crops would be raised efficiently, effectively, and with increasingly higher yields. Of course, my family was not immune to these pressures.

Despite the physical, psychological, and financial toll I could tell the work was having on my parents at times, I think fondly back on my youth, following my parents around as the tasks of the farm were completed. I vividly remember waiting for Dad to pull his combine into the large gravel lot between our house and my grandfather's grocery store just so that I could awkwardly clamber up the metal ladder and ride the rest of the way with him to park it on the hill where our farm was, and still is, situated. I remember being frightened to handle small piglets whose squealing and kicking I found

too much to bear; as a result of which, I intentionally dropped them thus frustrating Dad's attempts to corral them. I remember Mom suiting up in her long overalls to help move tractors and trucks to the fields we farmed all around the county. A favorite pastime of planting season was jumping to and from five-foot tall stacks of seed corn pallets that were strategically placed all throughout our long seed shed.

The sense of play I associated with our farm quickly became disrupted in the fall of 1993, when Dad was injured in a farming accident. After falling on top of a ladder inside of a grain bin, Dad severed his C4 vertebrae, and thus became quadriplegic at the age of thirty-six. It would be an understatement to claim that my family simply adapted to a new situation. Of course, adaptation took place, but the new reality in which we found ourselves required us to recast ourselves into something new; I liken the experience to a multicolored glass vase, that after breaking, was pieced back together. Perhaps stronger than its former self, yet paradoxically more vulnerable at the same time. After roughly six months of physical rehabilitation in Chicago, Dad returned home with no feeling below his shoulders, all the while learning how to navigate the world around him in a sip-and-puff wheelchair as well as manage over two-thousand acres of farmland with one full-time farmhand. Mom morphed into a home nurse. My siblings and I learned how to become Dad's hands and feet. We never formally dealt with the trauma of these transitions and Dad's injury, yet in retrospect I think we all threw ourselves into this new reality in much the same way my parents managed the economic crises of the 1980s: throwing ourselves into the work.

As extensions of Dad's new sense of embodiment, we had to train our bodies, our minds, and our spirits to become something new. We were no longer just ourselves, but

we subconsciously pledged ourselves as a family to Dad's new experience of the physical world that he was slowly becoming accustomed to. We take for granted the muscle memory we rely on to simply drink a cup of coffee. The family needed to learn to intuit, through trial and error, the subtle methods of feeding our father in ways that were comfortable to him. We needed to learn how to push his diaphragm to enable him to cough up anything that was congesting his lungs. We needed to learn how to transition him out of his wheelchair into bed. We needed to anticipate any physical barriers he might encounter while we were out in public and preemptively remove them. All of this learning was a kind of melding (although Dad might prefer welding) of consciousness, a simultaneous and empathic method of perceiving our lived reality and his.

Fortunately, his mind was completely intact, and he could verbally guide us through these new ways of knowing. The process was uneven and frustrating, especially for someone who lived most of his life working, learning, and teaching through the use of his hands. Yet, over time, he became more accustomed to these teaching methods. A couple of years after his accident, I remember indicating an interest in building a box car that I could race down one of the hills on the farm. Within a week, and with his guidance, we completed a plywood car that measured about five feet in length, had steering capabilities, and even included a welded push bar at the car's rear. As I transitioned into adolescence, Dad included me in more of the work of the farm itself. Over time, I gradually learned how to use tools, drive farm equipment, and more, almost exclusively through Dad's verbal tutorials and much practice. My father's condition was so well known throughout the county that hardly anyone looked twice when, at the age of

thirteen, I could be seen driving him around the county to inspect our fields in the family's wheelchair accessible van.

Despite the increased inclusion in the operations of the farm and the enjoyment I found in the work itself, it was a culture that I never fully felt a part of. Ironically, it was always work for me to play the part of a farmer's son. I consciously began to reflect upon the modes of being a farmer, or what it meant to be an authentic farmer in the minds of those in my community. Every summer spent on the farm was an annual workshop in these cultural symbols and I tried to immerse myself in them if only to make my family proud, knowing full well that I had no interest in taking on the management of the farm in later years. I studied and internalized the ways in which my Dad spoke with other farmers and I was happy to wield curse words with both leisure and precision in such conversations the way they did. I also learned that small-town farmers converse through gossip channels about the economic circumstances of their competitors in order to effectively build relationships with potential landlords in the race to farm more ground. Indeed, friendships and even family relationships could easily deteriorate if such tactics were not managed with care.

Yet when it came to the intuitive knowledge of the farm work, I would continually struggle. Deciphering the complex and vast symbols of farming in our small community, let alone on our family farm was problematic for me. I was constantly overwhelmed with trying to understand the "proper way" to handle certain tools, develop a sixth sense for what was mundane and what was dangerous, and navigating the language that farmers employ. For the uninitiated, a frustrating aspect about working on a farm is the propensity for farmers to talk at length about mundane matters, or what my

Dad would call "shooting the shit" but the near silence of farmers and hired hands to verbally dictate their plans for accomplishing any long-term project or task. Between the hired hands that my Dad employed, and my grandfather on my mother's side, a farmer whose stoic nature was the stuff of legend, I never really knew what was "going on" in a given day's work, despite my questions and hunches; I determined that the nature of much of the farm work was so intuitive to those completing it that few words needed to be spoken to those in the "know." In retrospect, and quite ironically, I have worked to uncover a culture that I was born into.

I felt a continual burden to "prove" myself at the most menial tasks on the farm, even something as simple as tracking down the appropriate socket for a minor repair; such feelings were augmented by the ease with which other farm hands employed by my father intuited such actions. For example, after pouring the concrete foundation for a new grain bin to be built at my grandfather's farm, there was more concrete left that needed to be poured. My grandfather instructed to cement truck driver to drive to our family farm, about ten miles away. Quickly, we got in Grandpa Jim's Silverado and raced to that farm, ahead of the cement truck. I had no clue what we were doing, and my questions were met with silence. When we arrived, in the span of five minutes, he had constructed a four foot square frame that was roughly six-inches high. When he had finished, the cement truck rolled up the driveway, and we carried the frame to the grain bins at the rear of the farm. I finally understood that the frame was to be used to form a concrete platform for a large dryer that was going to be installed on the north side of one of the bins. When the concrete was finished pouring, there was just enough to fill the mold my grandfather had built minutes before. After the truck left, I looked at my grandfather and

said, “How did you know how to build this, and how *big* to build it?” He replied with a hint of surprise by saying, “What did you think I was doing while we were driving here?”

Despite my efforts at self-promotion, or at least my failed attempts at appearing to be “in the know” I was frequently treated as the “gopher,” a term that meant I was used to “go for” tools and equipment that the more capable sages of the farm could use. My knowledge of the farm was thus limited to what occurred in the short term goals of the day, not the long term goals of the month or season. While my Dad was always happy to provide this context when time allowed, it was too much information to take in. Despite this, my understanding of symbols and meaning of farm work still grew and I internalized them as much as I could and there were times when I actually felt a part of the culture I was trying to imitate.

I quickly learned what a “hard day’s work” really meant, and the fulfillment of an exhausted body as an indication of achieving such a benchmark; a feeling my Dad often lamented about missing given his new circumstances. I quickly developed the habit of almost exclusively wearing blue jeans, no matter the occasion, because you never knew when you would have to get down on the ground to work on something. I realized, that while I was on “the hill,” a term that we used to designate the area where most of our farm buildings are located behind our home, I sauntered instead of merely walked. I took pride in callouses, busted knuckles, and grease stains on my clothes. And like other farmers, I took to carrying a pocket knife with me nearly everywhere I went. My Dad taught me the “farmer’s wave” the universal greeting for rural folk traversing country roads. While we were driving one day, he told me that all that was needed to greet another farmer was to keep one hand at the top of the steering wheel, and to lift your

forefinger and middle finger while gripping the wheel with the rest of one's hand. Skeptical at first, I made the motion to an oncoming pick-up truck, only to be offered the same sign in return. It felt as if I had arrived.

Indeed, it seemed that the times when I was acting on behalf of my father in his capacity as farm manager, were the moments in which I felt the most knowledgeable about farming culture and the most accepted. Of course, this makes sense because in order to accomplish some tasks, he relied on me to act as proxy and thus needed to detail to me the "proper way" of doing things. And with him by my side, I had an indisputable guide who could vouch for me among other farmers; yet to interact with these individuals separately left me lost. For example, one of our favorite activities was to go to the monthly farm auction where farmers could sell their old equipment for bargain prices. Teams of auctioneers in pick-ups would weave up and down rows of machinery with quiet herds of farmers shuffling along with them. As my father's proxy when bidding on equipment he would tell me how to signal a bid with a forceful wave of the finger in the air, how to indicate a loss of interest if the price went too high with the proper facial gestures, etc. We developed a system of communication in which I would stand in a position perpendicular to the van and the auctioneer's truck so that I could track Dad's cues to keep bidding or to back off, while also attempting to maintain eye contact of the auctioneer or his spotters who helped track the bids. The atmosphere was exciting and fast-paced. I recall the time when I bid on a vehicle at one such auction when I was fifteen. After getting the winning bid, the auctioneer, a friend of the family, announced to the crowd that the truck was my first vehicle. An insatiable feeling of belonging accompanied the cheers of the farmers around me as the turned toward me and clapped.

It was only during my graduate work that I began to reflect more fully on these experiences of inclusion, and feelings of exclusion, of signs, symbols, modes of being, in relation to my upbringing on the farm, especially in relation to my father's condition. Indeed, some shame accompanies the fact that I have never felt like I have fully crossed the threshold into the farming culture; some simply assume that the immersive nature of the small family farm equates to an inescapable mastery of its way of life, yet for me that was never the case. I have always felt more comfortable observing and recalibrating my interactions on the farm and with other farmers. When I mentioned this to Dr. Wendy Vogt, professor of Anthropology, and a member of my dissertation committee she simply exclaimed, "That's because you're an ethnographer!"

An interest in anthropology and ethnography more specifically has been a recent development in my academic study and career. As a natural consequence of pervasive existential questions throughout my adolescence and a natural curiosity about religious beliefs, much of my scholarly interests revolved around the discipline of religious studies and theology in my undergraduate studies. Afterward, I found myself completing a Master's Degree in Theological Studies at Vanderbilt and applying to PhD programs in religious studies with an intended focus in ritual studies within the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Frequently worried about the religious intolerance bred between these traditions, but inspired by their shared stories and values, I was convinced that exposing the richness in their ritual traditions to the wider public could help build interfaith relations. In the midst of those PhD applications, I was offered a position as an adjunct professor of religious studies at my alma mater, Franklin College. I eagerly accepted.

When I eventually began my PhD in philanthropic studies, I was intrigued by the sacramental nature with which Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement treated the land and the produce that they grew at their various farming communes. It was during this time that I began to notice the striking theological connections to agriculture that were being made between theologians, Father Vincent McNabb, Norman Wirzba, Fred Bahnson, prolific American author Wendell Berry and others. Soon, the appreciation for the land, and the work of farming, came bubbling to the surface and were thus emboldened by the spiritual dimensions I was discovering about the complex interplay between land, food, and community. Perhaps it was the fact that our first child had been born just prior to my first semester in my PhD program, but the perspectives of these authors who argued for a conception of time more rooted in being present with the land, with one's family, with the divine, was remarkably salient at the time. Most strikingly, each of these authors advocated or reflected upon how communities, specifically communities of faith, could and should connect with the land through a ritual or liturgical mindset. This emphasis did not center upon necessarily developing new rituals to strengthen that perspective, but *to see the process of knowing the land, growing food, and sharing with others as a ritual in and of itself.* Such perspectives on farming were largely absent from my personal background and I found them to be the invigorating academic and spiritual food that I savored. Toward the end of my PhD coursework, I recall being surprised when Dr. Dwight Burlingame, professor emeritus at the Lilly School of Philanthropy, mentioned that anthropological approaches to the study of nonprofit organizations were lacking in the field of nonprofit studies. It seemed odd to me that such an approach to the study of nonprofits was missing in the academy because I

felt like the tools of anthropology were uniquely suited to better uncover the distinct cultures of nonprofits. Thus, I found myself drawn to using my interest in ethnography to research nonprofit organizations because of this gap in the field and because I am drawn to better understand their nonprofits' unique stories, ways of being, missions, value-laden work, and their organizational cultures' hopes of making a difference in the context of their communities. Indeed, in her article entitled, "Ethnography: Tales from the Nonprofit Field" (2021), Erynn Beaton calls attention to the paucity of ethnographic accounts of nonprofit organizations and claims such an anthropological perspective has an important role to play in helping understand nonprofit organizations in five distinct ways with the goal of better understanding how things "work" within the nonprofit sector. Beaton states, "Ethnographic research has the ability to make substantial contributions to nonprofit studies. Drawing from the literature, I argue that ethnography can 1) deepen the analysis of how nonprofit organizing works, 2) bridge the research–practice divide, 3) challenge the Western ethnocentricity of nonprofit research, 4) bring the sector's periphery to the forefront and 5) enhance nonprofit management education" (2021, p. 3). There is a remarkable amount of utility in the Beaton's research objectives, and my research contributes to the first, second, and fourth objective on that list. Through my study of The Lord's Acre, I argue that the symbolic cultures of nonprofit organizations are widely overlooked by scholars and that investigating the intentional ritualization of undertaken by The Lord's Acre helps to bridge the research-practice gap by intimating that such practices are likely similar to the interior lives of other nonprofits. Similarly, it was precisely the small organizational structure The Lord's Acre as a

nonprofit on the periphery that provided me the opportunity to delve deeply and richly into its organizational rituals and offer voice to its pioneering work.

Thanks to the pioneering work of Trice and Beyer's *The Cultures of Work Organizations* (1993), the field of organizational studies offered an entry point into better understanding organizational rituals. Drawing extensively on the field of anthropology and the work of such scholar as Emile Durkheim, Arnold van Gennep, and Victor Turner, among others, the authors spent considerable time discussing the variety of cultural forms active within organizational life. Defining cultural forms as "concrete manifestations of culture" (1993, p. 77), the authors went to great length to discuss how such organizational expressions of symbols, language, narratives, and practices, all offer insight into the unique cultures of organizations by revealing the nature of the values held within them. In the area of practices, the authors associated organizational practices with rituals, taboos, rites, and ceremonies that carry practical purposes of the organization, as well as symbolic value. While rituals help to reinforce expected behavior within an organization, taboos are those practices that are forbidden, whether stated or not. Relatedly, the authors understood rites to be rituals that are "dramatic, planned sets of activities carried out for the benefit of the audience; ceremonials are systems of several rites connected with a single occasion" (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 80). Furthermore, the authors described six categories of cultural rites that are typical in organizations, including rites of passage (trainings), rites of degradation (firing and replacing), rites of enhancement (promotion), rites of renewal (annual events), rites of conflict reduction (bargaining), and rites of integration (social events), all of which included an expressive component of navigating social and hierarchical relationships within the organization itself (1993, p. 111). In an

article tracing the historical development of ritual theory between anthropology and organizational studies, Islam and Zyphur (2009) praised the interdisciplinary way in which Trice and Beyer integrated these disciplines creating the rites taxonomy discussed above. Relatedly, they claim that the study of rituals within organizations offers a helpful, alternative perspective to study "processes in organizations that might be overlooked in rationalistic, means-end approaches to behavior" (2009, p. 133). However, they correctly caution that the study of organizational rituals should resist easy categorization and dichotomies especially given the complex symbolism associated with such organizational activities. Islam and Zyphur noted that while Trice and Beyer created the six-part rites taxonomy as a starting point for ritual studies in organization, little has been done to refine or expand such that theoretical perspective (2009, p. 134).

In the field of nonprofit studies, there was (and still is!) a need for more scholars of ethnography, such as myself, to take our fascination with uncovering the symbols of discrete cultures and plunge with curiosity into the organizational life of nonprofit organizations. Along with a paucity of ethnographic perspectives on nonprofit organizations there was a similar lack of attention to the rituals associated with nonprofit organizations. As such, I was emboldened to take my fascination with ethnography and apply it to discern the rich symbolism of rituals found within a nonprofit organization. However, instead of focusing on the perspective of organizational studies, I chose to engage with approaches to ritual studies offered by anthropology and religious studies, particularly the work of Ronald Grimes (2013). While Trice and Beyer developed their taxonomy of organizational rituals largely through the lens of better understanding organizational relationship and hierarchy, Grimes (2013) developed a different taxonomy

of attitudes or sensibilities (ritualization, decorum, ceremony, celebration, liturgy, and magic) that accompany the enactment of rituals. Instead of conducting research with social relationships and hierarchy driving my understandings of the rituals I was observing within a particular nonprofit, I surmised that a focus on the attitudes cultivated by participants around particular rituals within an organization would allow me to more fully meet the culture of a nonprofit organization, and the individuals that enliven such a culture, on their terms through intensive periods of participant observation characteristic of ethnographic research.

During that initial visit to The Lord's Acre, I found an inspiring foothold in a research site that combined what I loved about my upbringing, the passion with which my family attended to that noble profession of farming, my academic interest in spiritual perspectives of community connected to the land, and an aspiring interest in ethnographic approaches to study the rituals of nonprofit organizations. As such, my research hinged upon two interrelated questions:

1) In what ways does the work of nonprofit organizations undergo ritualization, or take on distinct symbolic meaning for those who undertake it, whether that be nonprofit staff or volunteers of such organizations?
2) What attitudes or sensibilities are attached to such ritualized work by those who perform it?

The rationale behind such a study is that there is a striking paucity of anthropological perspectives applied to nonprofit organizations, which offers a unique lens through which to study such organizations. More importantly, the study of meaningful rituals, once thought to exist mainly in places of religious worship, has expanded in recent decades to

include secular understandings of ritual from the individual, organizational, and societal level, each with their own rich layers of symbolic meaning. Simply put, if nonprofits are where individuals seek to "make a difference" either in an occupation or through volunteer effort, it is reasonable to assume that rich understandings of meaning are found within the ritualized work that is undertaken in such organizations; hence ritualization may exist there.

After gaining entry into TLA as a research field site, I spent 2018-2020 making numerous trips to the garden and underwent sustained periods of participant-observation as a visiting volunteer at the location, as well as conducted formal interviews with volunteers, interns, staff, and board members.[1] I also assisted in both planting and harvesting produce at the garden, distributing food, engaging in educational programs with groups that come to tour the nonprofit, and more. My days at the garden consisted of an eclectic mix of intense work, active listening, lively conversation, and retreating to shady areas when observations became so rich that jotting my impressions down in my field journal became a necessity. In an attempt not to lose any of these experiences to the march of time, I spent hours after every morning and afternoon at the garden huddled over my computer typing, refining, cleaning, and expanding upon my written notes on the deck attached to my modest, one room, Air BNB. These observations and interviews have been analyzed to detect any themes relevant to the study of rituals within the garden space and attitudes that connect to such rituals.

[1] Whenever I detail my interactions with and observations of individuals who did not provide informed consent, pseudonyms are used.

I have organized my research into chapters that I believe capture the story of many of my site visits chronologically and thematically. In chapter one, "The Lord's Acre in Context", I argue that The Lord's Acre in Fairview, North Carolina was the product of two distinct movements, the community garden movement and the Christian agrarian movement. The former gained movement gained momentum in the earth 20th century and lasted through the 1970s and beyond; these fits and starts were born out of a mix of public and private motivations over the past century to respond to food insecurity during the Depression, World War II, and urban blight, among other social issues. The latter movement spanned Great Britain and the United States and began in the mid-19th century in response to religious concerns about the economic inequality and the strains on family and community life, generated by the Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, I argue how TLA was the result of a confluence of these two movements in response to the deepening food insecurity felt in Fairview, North Carolina following the Great Recession of 2008.

Chapter two, "The Rite Stuff", provides a theoretical overview of the ethnographic and ritual concepts I employed during my participant observation at TLA. Situated within my journey to complete a PhD in the midst of familial struggles, I detail how the concepts of rites of passage, thick description, ritual sensibilities, ritual guideposts, communitas, and ritualization became indispensable tools for unearthing the ritual life of TLA.

Chapter three, "Stepping In", was written to provide readers with two important insights central to orienting the reader to my research at the garden. First, I provide justification for and admission of how and why my struggles with mental health became

an inescapable lens through which I interpreted my experiences and observations at TLA. Second, an extensive section of my field notes is offered to provide an imaginative picture of the field site as I stepped into TLA for the first time as a researcher. Relatedly, ritual guideposts are provided to help readers orient themselves to the symbolic language, actions, spaces, programs, and objects I analyzed throughout my research. As such, the chapter is a way for the reader to step into my struggles with mental health and its reflexive relationship to my role as researcher, and follow me as I step into the garden in that role.

Chapter four, “Belief in Being Ready,” centers upon the importance to TLA staff and interns of a programmatic ritual known as “morning reflections.” This daily tradition of team-building activities, emotional check-ins, and task-choosing focused on the importance of every staff member and intern present and formed the philosophical foundation for the work of the garden by cultivating a mindset of intentional service and efficiency. I argue that the ritual represents a *celebratory ceremony* that was equal parts spontaneous and structured in its approach to community-building within the organization.

Chapter five, “Working with the Garden”, highlights that while the variety of tasks performed in the garden were too numerous and disparate to categorize ritually with much accuracy, the attitude with which these tasks were undertaken was another matter. I argue that following the intention cultivated during morning reflections, the disposition of the staff and interns transitioned not to work *in* the garden, but work *with* the garden; thus, I detail how the garden was simultaneously understood as a ritual space *and* a ritual actor. As a partner in the production of food I contend that the ritual work of the garden

was ritualized as a *ceremony* to encourage growth both in and with the garden as well as in and with those who tend it.

Chapter six, "Table-Sharing", emphasizes the ritual importance of preparing and presenting free produce from TLA for weekly distribution at a table next to the local food pantry, Food for Fairview as well as at the garden's own Share Market, where individuals were welcome to take any produce they found enticing, as well as drop off any of their own excess produce for others. Intended to provide the experience of a faux food market, I argue that the interns and staff at the garden ritualized the preparation and presentation of its produce to those in need through a *secular liturgy* that provided a momentary glimpse into a world in which food insecurity no longer strained the individual's ability to receive healthy food and a nourishing sense of community.

Chapter seven, "Welcoming Groups", offers an insight into one of the central programs of The Lord's Acre, namely educating visitors about food insecurity through group tours of the garden space. Far from simply offering an overview of the organization itself, I argue that welcoming groups to the garden was ritualized as a *ceremony* for the garden staff/interns and a *rite of passage* for those who visit the garden space. Like other rites of passage, the group tours were meant to transform individuals' perceptions of their status and responsibility toward their community; in this case, the garden itself functioned as a liminal space where this transition occurred.

Chapter eight, "Sprouts in the Garden", focuses on the garden's youth education program, Sprouts, where families and children came to the garden space not only to learn about its biological processes, but also connect with the garden's bounty and beauty. TLA staff consciously sacrificed structured programming and discipline by allowing

children to help set the educational agenda, making Sprouts was an educational program that was ritualized into a *celebration* that prizes sensory exploration and familiarity with the natural world.

Finally, chapter nine, "Stepping Out" highlights my exit from the field site as well as how the ritual programming of The Lord's Acre was meant, above all, to provide an intimate ethos of community, known as communitas, to those who decide to become involved with it. Popularized by Victor Turner (1969), the term communitas refers to when deep feelings of community are experienced between individuals when their social statuses are suspended during a time and/or place of sustained transition, especially in marginal groups that may be inclusive of those seen as inferior socio-economic status. As a space that welcomed individuals of every socio-economic background in the journey to provide community and nutrition to those who are food insecure, the true nature of the garden was rooted in the spirit of communitas. At the very end of this chapter, I offer the following claims about how this work contributes to the field of nonprofit studies more broadly. I will revisit the significance of these claims at the end of the dissertation, but they are worth highlighting here for the reader to consider as foundational claims throughout the text itself:

1) <u>Rituals are active within nonprofit organizations and deserve closer study in order to understand the symbolic cultures of meaning within such organizations.</u>
   -If the study of philanthropy is indeed the history of a culture's moral imagination (Payton & Moody, 2008) then nonprofit organizations should be understood as laboratories of moral development where a communal ethos is cultivated through

rituals of meaning within nonprofits for its staff and volunteers and put into action.

2) <u>More specifically, liturgical rituals are active within nonprofit organizations and deserve more examination.</u>

-Once understood to be relegated to spiritual practices within religious organizations, liturgical rituals are also an integral part of secular nonprofit organizations. Religious liturgies offer a hopeful glimpse of futures in which humanity is made whole. As such, mission-driven nonprofit organizations that envision a world devoid of the social issue that defines their existence (whether that be homelessness, cancer, food insecurity, domestic abuse, etc.) may well hold ritual programs that offer a glimpse into a world in which such existential issues are eventually overcome; and that hope likely propels participants within the nonprofit organization toward a reinvigorated focus on the work of its mission.

3) <u>Finally, building upon the claims made by Beaton (2021), ethnographic research is and should be embraced more fully as a research methodology when studying nonprofit organizations.</u>

-The scarcity with which ethnographic research is undertaken within nonprofit organizations by scholars makes practical sense given the time intensive nature of such immersive studies. However, understanding the symbolic, organizational cultures of nonprofits can help the those in the field better understand not just the work of the organization, but how meaning is cultivated (or underdeveloped) in

relationship to such work, by stakeholders within the nonprofit itself. Indeed, if nonprofit organizations are where people are drawn to find "meaningful work" and "make a difference" in their communities, intensive research into the interior lives of such cultures is needed to better develop the methodological toolkit of nonprofit studies and add to our understanding of philanthropic institutions more broadly.

Chapter 1: The Lord's Acre in Context

Nine months before I was behind the wheel of that Ford Mustang, I found myself behind my academic schedule in all sorts of ways. Toward the end of 2017, I was preparing to present my research proposal to my PhD committee the following February. Aside from working to finish up that proposal, I had been trading emails with Susan Sides about getting permission to come to The Lord's Acre to formally conduct my research. Without her permission, I would have to scrap the entire research proposal. Adding to the pressure was the fact that our third child, George, was also scheduled to be born that February.

Validation came during my college's Christmastime that year. I was back on the farm visiting with family when I received a call from Susan one cold morning. I rarely walk in my bare feet outdoors or indoors, but I remember the biting cold of my parents' wood floors on my skin as I scurried back to my childhood bedroom where my family of four (soon to be five!) had slept during the trip. I quickly shut the door in order to momentarily prevent any more requests from our two girls when I answered the phone.

Susan greeted me warmly on the other end. I reminded her of how we had briefly met the summer before during my first visit to the garden. After a few pleasantries were exchanged, she said, "Okay, so what's your research about?"

I took a breath and explained that I was interested in studying how nonprofit organizations use rituals within their work, and how people understand the meaning of those rituals. I sensed a pause on the other end of the line, and I gathered that she may have been perplexed by the use of the term "ritual" in the conversation. I pressed forward and tried to reframe the conversation somewhat, "I really just want to research

the different routines that the garden uses to do its work, as well as how people who work at the garden feel about those. You know, sometimes when people talk about rituals, they may think of a church or something, but routines or rituals for work can happen in really any organization."

Susan cut in and said, "I need to be very upfront with you about the fact that The Lord's Acre is not a faith-based organization." She went on to say that while the garden's name sounded like a faith-based organization, it was actually a secular organization that welcomed people of all different types of spirituality, or no spirituality at all. Susan then explained that the inclusive nature of garden is something that she and the board took very seriously.

I reassured her that I had no intentions of representing TLA as a faith-based organization. I went on to discuss my background with farming, my love for Wendell Berry, and how inspired I was by my initial visit to The Lord's Acre the year before. Sensing some additional rapport had been established, I went on to discuss how I hoped to work in the garden and learn from her and the other volunteers/interns about how TLA functioned with its various routines. And then, as simply as if she were inviting me over for dinner, she said, "Sure, we'd be happy to have you."

After our conversation ended, I allowed myself a brief moment to sigh with relief. Susan's comment about TLA not being a faith-based organization hung with me. I remember thinking that she would be surprised to learn about how much I knew of TLA at that point, that I was well acquainted with how TLA was born of both a long history of American community gardens, as well as a Christian agrarian tradition that began toward the end of the 19th century and an ocean away. While the most current version of The

Lord's Acre did not develop itself as a faith-based organization, the original organization had. Most importantly, each iteration of The Lord's Acre has struggled to battle the lived reality of food insecurity.

The History and Community Benefits of American Community Gardens

Community gardens in America have long been and continue to be, the product of a mixture of public and voluntary motivations. The formation of community gardens has usually included the leasing, use, or transformation of land, by a voluntary association, toward addressing a bevy of social issues, each unique in its own historical context (Lawson, 2005). During the Progressive Era, community garden projects erupted with the concerted effort of European immigrant workers by promoting the transformation of vacant lots into spaces that showcased aesthetic beauty and a determined work-ethic (Lawson, 2005). The arrival of WWI ushered in the age of Liberty Gardens, a movement of voluntary gardening initiatives, instigated by the U.S. government, in which average Americans grew and harvested their own food so that more commercially grown produce could be sent to soldiers overseas (Graham, 2011; Kurtz, 2001; Lawson, 2005).

Similarly, the beginning of the 20th century saw the emergence of the Nature-Study Movement, which successfully advocated for the development of school gardens as sites of learning for public school students (Trelstad, 1997). The gardens were implemented not only to produce more local food during wartime, but to also supplement the incomes of the students' families through the cultivation of a personal work ethic. Similarly, school gardens were a way to beautify the urban landscape of the industrial era while also teaching students to value nature and the interconnectivity of natural life (Trelstad, 1997); however, detractors of the movement contend that the emergence and

management of school gardens were subtle means of training students for an industrialized labor system, despite the child labor and education laws of the Progressive Era (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Depression-era relief gardens were coordinated by local voluntary organizations under the auspices of the federal government to pay unemployed workers to grow food that was later distributed to those in need (Williamson, 2002). WWII saw a resurgence of Victory Gardens to assist soldiers in America's war effort, in which household and community gardens raised a staggering 40% of produce for domestic consumption (Lawson, 2005; Graham, 2011). The well-coordinated, government sponsored National War Garden Commission's Victory Garden Program used propaganda to conflate the patriotic life with the work of the home garden as a means to boost national morale (Kurtz, 2001).

Yet, the 1960s witnessed the rise of suburbanization, and the rise of vacant lots within major American cities; as the wealthy moved away from the city, the intensive pockets of the urban poor neighborhoods were left to languish in dilapidated city ghettos. It was during this time that neighborhoods began to reclaim such spaces for the purposes of community gardening, realizing the potential benefits for building healthier communities in the process (Kurtz, 2001). While 1970s loomed with anxieties over environmental degradation due to the expansion of industrialized agriculture, the rising tide of urban community gardens gained even more momentum (Graham, 2011; Kurtz, 2001). Soon these spaces became sites of grassroots action to unite neighbors through shared work, communal health benefits, and even through forms of local political action for a variety of social justice issues. While environmental anxiety continues to occupy

the minds of many current community garden members, there has been a growing trend in young adults who see community gardening not only as way to build community with others, but also as a means to develop the skills necessary to produce one's own food (Graham, 2011). Across socio-historical contexts, community gardens have functioned as created spaces that are designed to be of social benefit to the community in which they exist.

Given the fact that community gardens have taken on such a variety of voluntary forms over their long presence in the United States, perhaps it is little wonder that they nurture the development of civic participation in many of its members. Due to the amount of resources and energy needed to maintain such plots of land, community gardens necessitate the coordination of many individuals and labor, toward shared goals. These social interactions provide opportunities for leadership among volunteers; the intensity with which leaders of community gardens approach their positions has been shown to have a positive correlation with their personal understandings of their own sense of political citizenship (Glover, et. al., 2005). However, both leaders and non-leaders within community gardens have been shown to become civically empowered and advocate for improvements in their neighborhoods (Clark & Manzo, 1988; Krasny & Tidball, 2009). Such advocacy can stem from an increased knowledge of local ecosystems and the community as a whole through the activities of civic agriculture. The implementation of community gardens thus fosters community development through active civic participation. Volunteers initiate garden projects for a variety of communal needs: to counteract the presence of drug cultures in urban environments, to lower recidivism, to restore ecosystems, to provide an aesthetic form of community therapy,

and to raise awareness of food security issues (Ferris, et. al., 2001). Community gardens also increase the physical exercise of volunteers as well as increase the rates of fresh produce consumption for garden members (Twiss, et. al., 2003; Armstrong, 2000). More than this, community gardens have been shown to increase the intangible community benefits of neighborhood pride and positive relationships with one's neighbors (Dow, 2006). Interestingly, the Christian agricultural movements developed historically in a close parallel to the growth of community gardens in the United States; yet the former arguably had its roots in 19th century Europe in response to the rising industrialism of the time.

Agricultural Movements in the Christian Communities

While Christian monasteries have long developed agricultural initiatives in pursuit of the spiritual life apart from secular culture, the rise of industrialization in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the plight of the worker in urban centers inspired lay agricultural movements that longed for a return to the land, and a return to work in God's Creation. Like monastic communities, these new movements sought refuge in the land as a statement against secular culture and to develop higher spirituality. Similarly Christian agricultural movements also produced their own sense of locally centered life through the implementation of everyday religious and agricultural rituals, on the land.

In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued *Rerum Novarum* as a means to take a firm stance on the proper uses of capital and labor while critiquing what he considered to be disturbing trends of the accumulation of wealth and abuses against the working poor. The encyclical discussed the dangers of wanton capitalism, individualism, as well as the

harmful gap between the wealthy and the working poor. He advocated that workers have the means to purchase their own land to make a living.

Inspired directly by *Rerum Novarum*, The Catholic Land Movement (CLM) officially began in Glasgow, Scotland in 1929 as a means for Catholic clerics and laymen to take an active stand against the perceived cultural dangers of industrialization by promoting an agrarian religious culture focused on a return to the livelihood of working on the land (McQuillan, et. al., 2003). In the eyes of the CLM, promoting a return to the life of the family farm meant the security of subsisting on the land, and hence a freedom from the perceived destructive forces of industrial economic progress.

The CLM was gripped by an anxiety over the fear that the world would continually understand humanity as a simple means of economic production, devoid of inherent dignity (McQuillan, et. al, 2003). The CLM viewed industrialization's proliferation of nonessential products through largely mechanized technology, as the negation of the ability of the worker to take pride in his work. Similarly, reliance on mechanization for mass production simply meant that the progress of technology comes at the cost of offering others the opportunity for employment (McQuillan, et. al, 2003). Relatedly, those within the CLM were perhaps even more concerned about the impossibility for families to thrive in the crowded urban environments of industrial areas (McQuillan, et. al., 2003). Families necessarily flocked into tenement houses where the possibility of contracting disease was greater due to the concentration of individuals within a single area. From the perspective of the CLM, industrialization created the conditions for a never-ending cycle of poverty, disease, and death within the family unit (McQuillan, et. al., 2003).

In response to such threats against the worker and the family, the CLM sought to re-establish agrarian communities throughout the rural areas of Great Britain, where small, local economies of family agricultural products and handcrafts could restore dignity to the worker and revitalize the health of Catholic families that would live and thrive away from the urban slums of industrialized cities (McQuillan, 2003). Most importantly perhaps, the CLM envisioned a return to "sacred time," when farm workers were held accountable only to a work day that moved with the natural cycles of Creation (McNabb, 2003). Working in Creation, on its time, was seen as a way to deepen one's relationship with the Creator by living a more intentional life which viewed the work day with liturgical significance. The CLM understood faithful work in God's Creation was a way to show honor to God as well (McQuillan, 2003).

Whereas Great Britain's Catholic Land Movement sought a return to the land to dignify the work and life of the family away from the presence of industrialization, a similar Catholic rural life movement in the United States encountered different issues. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Catholic rural farm families were already well established in the United States, but they had very little access to support from Catholic clergy, many of whom were located in urban areas (Bovée, 2010; Woods, 2010). While the industrialization of the United States figured prominently in the harsh lives of urban workers, the correlated rise of materialism and individualism in the United States had an equally damaging effect on Catholic religious communities in rural locales (Woods, 2010). The organization that would become the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) endeavored to bring a fuller sense of religious

community to those families who they believed were being marginalized by an increasingly ego-driven culture.

Founded within the same decade as the Catholic Land Movement, and well apprised of its presence in Great Britain, the NCRLC worked diligently to improve the religious and agricultural education of rural communities (Bovée, 2010; McNabb, 2003). Rural families in the beginning of the twentieth century often struggled with financial vulnerability, a lack of religious education, and access to health services which were mainly located in surrounding cities (Woods, 2010). More than this, industrialization and growing individualism within the United States signaled a growing tide of people leaving family farms for job opportunities within major industrial centers. Like the CLM, the NCRLC understood that industrialization was having a degenerative effect on the well-being of Catholic farming communities (Bovée, 2010; Woods, 2010).

In order to push against this trend, the NCRLC formed a tight network of Catholic social service programs and religious education initiatives to add more vitality to the struggling communities. Most importantly, however, the NCRLC worked closely with Virgil Michel's burgeoning liturgical movement[2] to educate rural farmers about the ways

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[2] According to Catechism of the Catholic Church published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the word *liturgy* literally means "work of the people" or "service done for or on behalf of the people" (886). Within the context of the Catholic Church, which is where the CLM and the NCRLC originated, liturgy refers to the central, sacred rituals of the Catholic Church most commonly associated with the celebration of Mass and the Eucharist for or on behalf of the congregation. In his book, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (2014), Ronald Grimes goes on to describe liturgy as "3. Following Christian theological usage, Christian sacramental rites. 4. Following Ronald Grimes and Roy Rappaport, a religious rite" (p.342). The last definition here is more common for scholars outside of a particular religious tradition/denomination.

Thus a *liturgical movement* is a social movement where the celebration of a tradition's liturgy, or central, sacred rituals, becomes a key component in energizing a group of individuals toward collective social action. For example, the NCRLC used the liturgy of the Catholic Church to strengthen the bonds of rural farming communities by reimagining their work on the land with an enhanced spiritual perspective especially by using agricultural products they grew within worship services.

in which their livelihood was tied to the sacramental worship of the Eucharist (Woods, 2010). Soon, the shared dignity of agricultural work took on a form of religious symbolism not before understood by rural Catholic communities. As they produced the wheat and flour to be used in the bread of communion, local priests worked hard to help farmers understand the soil as a meaningful sacrament of its own accord (Woods, 2010).[3] Relatedly, homilies and other writings were distributed by the NCRLC that tied the Catholic liturgical calendar to the growing and harvesting seasons of the natural cycle (Woods, 2010). Within a short amount of time, writers from the NCRLC began to reflect an invigorated liturgical character which understood farming not only as a livelihood, but a way of life. The collective energy, work, and celebration that went into the Eucharist in such rural settings reflected a deeper sense of spiritual unity and community against the free market capitalism that championed individual material success (Woods, 2010; Zwick & Zwick, 2005).

The liturgical and agricultural life envisioned by the NCRLC directly influenced and supplemented the activities of two different Catholic social movements: the Catholic Worker Movement and the American Grail Movement. The leading voice of the latter organization, Lydwine van Kersbergen, had begun correspondence with Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker Movement in 1936, and the two of them attended the NCRLC

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[3] According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church published by the USCCB, a *sacrament* is, "An efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit" (900).
2. (In Roman Catholic use) the consecrated elements of the Eucharist, especially the bread or Host.
3. A thing of mysterious and sacred significance; a religious symbol."
As with the term *liturgy*, *sacrament* is thus understood differently within particular contexts. Within the Catholic tradition, it can be a powerful means for divine power to work through material objects, such as bread, wine, oil, and water (depending on the sacrament). In a larger, secular, context, the term can mean a sacred religious symbol.

convention in Peoria, Illinois in 1942 (Woods, 2010). Van Kersbergen was appointed to the office of NCRLC vice president in 1940. She later established Grailville, an intentional farming community, run entirely by Catholic women, that revolved around a subsistence lifestyle, Catholic liturgy, and the understanding of the family as the fundamental unit of society (Woods, 2010). While the NCRLC was just finding its liturgical footing, it held Grailville up as an organization that was truly living out the principles of agrarian and religious life that it promoted (Woods, 2010).

The Catholic Worker Movement was acutely distinct from the NCRLC because the Catholic Worker Movement did not share an abiding distrust of the urban environment. In fact, that is where the movement's energy was most directed, and as a result, where its houses of hospitality were also located (Day, 1963). Both founders of the movement, Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day, were also close friends with Virgil Michel, who taught them that the liturgy could be an avenue of social transformation; both the NCRLC and the Catholic Worker Movement maintained that receiving communion entailed a responsibility to love generously in communion with one's community (Zwick & Zwick, 2005). Largely because of Michel, the Catholic Worker Movement attempted to intertwine the liturgy in the majority of its activities, including the establishment of its farming communes in New York and Pennsylvania (Day, 1963). Like the NCRLC, the Catholic Worker farming communes represented a subsistence lifestyle of community members from all walks of life, where the dignity of each worker was respected (Day, 1963). Even the most destitute visitor to the farms could find a warm sense of community and take part in the production of his/her own food, far removed from industrialized culture.

Interestingly, Day was also well-acquainted with a Protestant farming commune located in Americus, Georgia, founded by Clarence and Florence Jordan. Koinonia Farm was established in 1942, as an interracial religious community of Christians committed to lives of common property, nonviolence, and communal agricultural work (K'Meyer, 2000); the community was inspired by the Acts of the Apostles and the communal sharing of the earliest followers of what would become the Christian movement (Acts 2:44-45). Jordan's vision of instituting his vision of a racially harmonious Kingdom of God within a turbulent southern culture, did not go unnoticed. Koinonia Farm was frequently the target of violent backlash. Yet Jordan and his followers saw their communal life as an unequivocal and necessary religious response to a demoralizing secular culture (K'Meyer; 2000).

Aside from the aforementioned Catholic Land Movement, the other social movements described above have survived and adapted into more structured organizational forms. Yet, the use of agricultural activities to enhance notions of religious community in the Christian tradition have shifted away from sweeping social movements that focused on maintaining the dignity of the exploited worker, to more discrete manifestations in Catholic and Protestant church communities that practice gardening as well as more academic interest in the religious and philosophical intersections of agricultural life.

Contemporary scholarly Christian agricultural thought and practice has been heavily influenced by the works of Wendell Berry and to a lesser extent, Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba. Berry is best known for his insistence that industrialized agriculture separates individuals from a sense of community by making the consumption of the

world's resources too individualistic (Berry, 1978). Berry suggests that returning to a practice of farming that centers on knowledge and appreciation of the land, and not its exploitation, is essential for building healthy communities as well as healthy relationships with God' Creation (Berry, 1978; Berry 1981). Both Bahnson and Wirzba advocate that the development of faith-based community gardens is an important step toward forming more intentional communities of faith with others and with the divine (2012; Wirzba, 2011). They believe that growing, harvesting, and distributing produce to those in need will work to counteract the effects of individualistic food consumption, through creating a spiritual community dedicated to local food production (Bahnson & Wirzba, 2012; Wirzba, 2011). While these authors are well known in academic circles committed to the Christian agrarian life, there is little indication of how well known their work is in faith-based community gardens. Conversely, Bahnson's own inspiration for such community gardens came from journeying around the country, witnessing individuals of faith come together to grow food for others in localized garden initiatives. One such community garden that figures prominently in his memoir, *Soil and Sacrament* (2013), is The Lord's Acre in Fairview, North Carolina.

The Lord's Acre

The inception of the Lord's Acre Movement in the United States is well documented by historian Kevin Lowe in his most recent book, *Baptized with the Soil: Christian Agrarians and the Crusade for Rural America* (2016). In it, Lowe contends that much like the movements described above, the Lord's Acre movement was a way of revitalizing focus on community agriculture over and against industrialized agribusiness through overtly spiritualizing one's relationship with the work of the family farm.

Beginning in 1923 under the guidance of H. M. Melton, a Baptist pastor in Bluffton Georgia, The Lord's Acre referred to a fundraising plan for southern, rural churches to stay open by asking parishioners to donate the profit of one acre of farmland. Within a year, The Lord's Acre was a social movement that swept across the southern United States, and reportedly took root nationwide as well as internationally; the successful advertisement of this fundraising plan was Lord's Acre farm land's purported resistance to a pernicious boll weevil outbreak that occurred in the early 1920s, seen as a miraculous event by those inspired by the movement (Lowe, 2016). By 1930, James G. K. McClure, a Presbyterian minister who moved near Fairview, North Carolina, adopted the methodology of The Lord's Acre movement after developing a successful farmers co-operative, the Farmers' Federation. As an outgrowth of the Religious Affairs Division of the Farmers' Federation, the Lord's Acre Plan similarly encouraged parishioners of North Carolina churches to donate roughly an acre's worth of their agricultural produce or livestock to their local church; whatever wasn't used directly in terms of food assistance was sold and the profits would be deposited into church coffers. The purpose of this plan was to allow parishioners to use their crops or livestock profits in lieu of their tithing obligations, while also encouraging the financial stability of area churches during the Great Depression (Lowe, 2016). Thanks to McClure's connection with the Farmers' Federation co-operative, families used the organization as a platform to sell their agricultural products at the local level before donating the proceeds to the local church. Initially, McClure's promotion of the Lord's Acre plan was adopted by six churches in the area of Asheville, North Carolina. By 1935, and thanks in large part to the public

relations work of McClure's brother, former missionary Dumont Clarke, over 300 churches in the state had adopted the plan (Lowe, 2016)

While the Lord's Acre Plan was successful in North Carolina through the 1930s and 1940s, its importance waned in the 1950s once national economic pressures had sufficiently mitigated post WWII. In 2008, The Lord's Acre community garden was started as a memorial to the Depression-era farmers who gave their land and produce to local churches, yet food would be distributed to those facing food insecurity in the community due in part to the Great Recession; initially funded by two churches, the garden ministry was also led by descendants of Rev. McClure and other community leaders. Eventually chartered as a nonprofit organization, The Lord's Acre exists as a space to grow organic produce that is then donated to local food pantries to feed the hungry in its rural surroundings and is a stunning confluence of the history of community garden's in the United States and Christian agricultural movements. Although decided secular in its approach, The Lord's Acre was founded as community garden during a time of remarkable economic upheaval with the hopes of not only growing food, but cultivating community as well. While it is currently supported by religious and non-religious organizations alike, the organization does not recognize itself as a faith-based organization tied to any particular denomination or religious community. The Lord's Acre includes only a small handful of paid staff, but it is the vibrant hub of volunteers and interns from around the Fairview community and beyond who contribute their time and energy to ensure a hearty harvest throughout the spring, summer, and early fall. For example, the organization harvests and donates roughly 60 tons of produce each year on less than a quarter of an acre of land.

Yet aside from simply functioning as a nonprofit that works to address issues of food scarcity and accessibility in rural Fairview, The Lord's Acre works to create and enhance bonds of community in the area through its work. Perhaps most tellingly, the organization promotes the notion that hunger comes in many forms. Whether that hunger is felt as loneliness, a need for education, or the lack of affordable and healthy food, The Lord's Acre sees itself as vehicle for feeding individuals physically and spiritually by cultivating a space of inclusivity. The mission statement of the organization explains that, "The Lord's Acre is a diverse and open community of volunteers who grow and give away organic food. Using the garden as a platform, The Lord's Acre is a visionary model of cooperation which educates and inspires people to address the many types of hunger through caring service and the growing and sharing of food." This multilayered notion of community-building around concepts of food sharing and hunger with this particular nonprofit may actually be ritualized through its attempts to foster a sense of community with those who volunteer in and receive from the organization.

This multi-layered notion of community-building at TLA is easily recognizable within the various philanthropic roles it performs. Robert Payton and Michael Moody helpfully distilled the five roles of philanthropy from Lester Salamon and Ralph Kramer in Payton and Moody's influential text, *Understanding Philanthropy* (2008). Their description of these five roles is useful to note in their entirety:

> Service role: Providing services (especially when the other sectors fail to provide them) and meeting needs.
>
> Advocacy role: Advocating for reform, for particular interests, for particular populations, or for particular views of the public good.
>
> Cultural role: Providing a vehicle for expressing and preserving cherished values, traditions, identities, and other aspects of culture.

> Civic role: Building community, generating "social capital," and promoting and increasing civic engagement.
>
> Vanguard role: Serving as the site for social innovation, experimentation, and entrepreneurial invention. (2008, pp. 34-35)

For its part, The Lord's Acre arguably performs each of these roles with a high degree of overlap. TLA certainly meets the needs of its community members by providing produce to those facing food insecurity, while simultaneously carrying out a deep-rooted cultural tradition found within The Lord's Acre movement itself of building community through the sharing of food. During its group tours, TLA performs an advocacy role by facilitating discussions on the nature of food insecurity in the United States and the importance of combatting the socio-economic factors associated with it by highlighting its vanguard role as a space where food distribution takes place outside of the power dynamics of a capitalist system. Yet all of these roles are subsumed under the organization's commitment to develop community because it recognizes that so often, food insecurity is accompanied by, and at times a result of, weakened community ties.

Food Insecurity in Context

In the following section, attention will be given to national trends in food insecurity and reliance upon government programs for food assistance, during the Great Recession and onward. Following this, focus will be devoted to how these trends relate to North Carolina more generally, and Buncombe County, North Carolina more specifically in order to come to a fuller understanding of the issues regarding food insecurity for the population of Fairview.

Food insecurity for Americans has varied greatly since the Great Recession, which began in December of 2007 and lasted until June of 2009. According to the USDA, food insecurity refers to when "households were, at times, unable to acquire food for one or more household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food" (Coleman-Jensen et. al, 2020, p. 4). Consider that in 2007, 11.1% of American households and 16% of American households with children were food insecure (Nord, 2009). At the onset of the Great Recession in 2008, a 14.6% of American households were food insecure (2009), and a startling 21% of American households with children were food insecure (2009). While the relative strength of America's economy can be a strong indicator of the prevalence of food insecurity, the social issue is complex. Food insecurity can relate to the overall strength of the economy, employment opportunities, proximity to grocery stores, the number of individuals living in a particular household, barriers in transportation, seasonal changes, cultural barriers for immigrant families, systemic racism, social capital, prevalence of food pantries in a particular geographic area, and more. Thus, food insecurity is as much a social issue as it is the result of economic phenomena, and food insecurity itself is not always a constant issue in the lives of Americans. This much can be gleaned from recent food insecurity indicator questions developed by the USDA in a Food Security Supplement Survey. These indicators centered upon the following themes: potentially running out of food, food spoilage, inability to provide healthy meals, prevalence of skipped meals, undereating, were hungry but did not eat, weight loss, and whether or not family members skipped one or more days without eating (Coleman-Jensen, et. al., 2020).

Interestingly, 2011 saw the highest percentage of American households experience food insecurity (14.9 %). However, every year afterward prompted a steady decline in household food insecurity; 2019 witnessed the lowest levels of food insecurity (10.5%) since the beginning of the 21st century (Coleman-Jensen, et. al., 2020). Federal programs have provided a much needed food safety net for those in need, and these programs were heavily relied upon in the aftermath of the Great Recession. The two most prevalent federal programs include Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

SNAP offers monthly benefits to families, based upon family size and income, to buy the vast majority of food products; exceptions include tobacco, alcohol, and select other products (Coleman-Jensen, et. al., 2020). Historically, SNAP has been the federal food assistance program with the most federal expenditures, while the others play more of a supplemental role. As the Great Recession entrenched itself in American culture, the amount of U.S. households participating in SNAP reached its highest point in 2013, with a remarkable 15% of the population utilizing the federal program (Ganong & Liebman, 2018).

WIC is a much more targeted program than SNAP, providing nutritional protections to low-income "pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women as well as infants and children up to 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing supplemental foods, nutrition education, and health referrals at no cost" to participants within the program (Coleman-Jensen, et. al., 2020, p. 31). Eligibility for this program mandates that individuals must be at or below 185% of the Federal poverty guidelines; due to this

extremely low economic threshold, most participants or their family members are also likely enrolled in SNAP or other federal assistance programs. Predictably, during the outset of the Great Recession, participation in WIC by eligible demographics increased by 5% during the years of 2008-2010, yet began to level off as families decided to have fewer children during the recession (Hanson & Oliveira, 2012). It should be noted that downward trends in both participation in WIC and SNAP at times dramatically toward the end of the decade. SNAP participation declined by nearly 12.4% between the years 2018-2019, and WIC participation dropped almost 7% within the same time frame (Tiehen, 2020).

Regarding North Carolina more specifically, food insecurity has been a frustratingly persistent socio-economic issue with little forward momentum toward resolution. The USDA reports that roughly 14.8 % of households in North Carolina were food insecure during 2007-2009, at the outset of the Great Recession (2021). Understandably this rate increased to 15.1% during 2014-2016, yet only dipped down to 13.1% of North Carolina households by the end Recession in 2017-2019 (USDA, 2021).

Buncombe County, North Carolina, home to the city of Asheville and the community of Fairview, fares a little better than the state average. Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap calculates that approximately 12.7% of residents within the county experienced food insecurity in 2018, yet 75% of residents fell below the 200% poverty threshold and thus qualify for SNAP or other federal nutrition programs (2021). It is natural to assume that food insecurity within a given county, or even community, can easily be traced to a lack of grocery stores within a particular area. However, this would be an oversimplification. According to the USDA's Economic Research Service Food

Access Atlas, there are sizable low-income tracts of land to the south of Asheville, and northwest of the city that are between 0.5 urban miles from the nearest supermarket or 10 rural miles the nearest supermarket (2021). Within these particular areas, which by no means comprise the majority of the county, food insecurity is at least driven by a combination of a variety of factors: poverty, a lack of transportation access to supermarkets, and geographic proximity to such establishments. The topography within Buncombe County itself is remarkably diverse. It contains a variety of communities nestled within hills, mountains, valleys, situated along winding roadways throughout areas of the Blue Ridge Mountains. According to the ERS, the community of Fairview, the location of The Lord's Acre, is not home to low-income tracts of land and encounters no substantial obstacles to access to area supermarkets (2021). Of course, this could largely be due to the fact that a major US highway, 74A, runs through the heart of the community.

During 2011 and 2016, the town of Fairview conducted a survey of its residents to gather data on the perceived quality of life in the community, what drew families to settle in the community, shared concerns, and hopes for the presence of other service industries. Interestingly, food insecurity did not emerge as a topic of discussion in either of those studies even though they were undertaken as the Great Recession was well underway during that five-year period (Friday, 2011; Friday, 2016); both assessments seem to be largely driven by information gathered after survey distribution. The first assessment distributed 1195 surveys, while the latter assessment distributed 973 surveys, through random sampling. The community seemed to be evenly split on the prospect of attracting a larger grocery store to Fairview when both studies were conducted. The earlier study

was based upon questionnaires mailed to Fairview residents, with a 40% response rate (Friday, 2011) while the latter utilized the same methodology with a 35% response rate (Friday, 2016). It is possible that families contending with intersecting realities related to food insecurity, such as poverty, may have faced obstacles in either participating in or receiving the survey itself.

With funding from AmeriCorps and The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, The Lord's Acre undertook its own Community Food Assessment in 2011-2012 to better understand the resources and challenges Fairview families had when providing healthy food for their families. The assessment utilized a mixed methods approach, relying upon interviews, surveys, and community forums to collect and analyze its data. Interestingly, and in contrast to the town's own survey the year prior, The Lord's Acre determined that issues regarding food insecurity and access were top of mind to many residents within the Fairview community who took part in the assessment. The results of this assessment would empower the nonprofit to undertake its work for nearly the next decade.

Perspectives on Food Insecurity in Fairview: 2011-2012

The mixed methodology utilized in the aforementioned Community Food Assessment was unique in that the topic itself revolved chiefly around understanding the multidimensional perspectives on food insecurity within the community. Guiding questions embedded in this methodology focused upon accessibility barriers to purchasing and growing high quality food, the extent of hunger within the community, alternative sources of food, influences that dictate affordability and accessibility of high quality food, the lived experience of local growers, as well as ideas regarding steps that

were seen as important to take in order to address the food needs of Fairview residents (Farlow, 2012). While the surveys distributed through the assessment were not as numerous as assessments undertaken by the town of Fairview in 2011 and 2016 (only 330 surveys were distributed), the assessment included numerous community forums over the span of a year and 12 interviews with Fairview farmers. Additionally, and perhaps most tellingly, focus groups with families requiring food assistance through the local food pantry, Food for Fairview, as well as with food assistance providers in the areas were also conducted. Finally, interviews with counseling and social services staff at Fairview Elementary were also conducted (Farlow, 2012). Given the specific nature of this particular assessment, it is unsurprising that other community assessments undertaken by the town of Fairview didn't focus upon food insecurity within the area.

Regarding barriers to producing high quality food, gardeners and farmers discussed a number of different obstacles. Gardeners noted that they were largely resource deficient; respondents either did not have enough time to garden, adequate space, tools, or education to grow food for themselves and others. Farmers noted that economic and distribution issues related to land were some of the most prevalent obstacles. Farmers noted that there were too few restaurants willing to buy locally grown produce, and that an influx of local gardeners didn't create a competitive enough market for their produce. Also, the price of land and the inability to receive a tax-deduction for land under 10 acres were major economic limitations toward growing and distributing local produce, especially for aspiring farmers (Farlow, 2012).

Barriers for food assistance providers in distributing food to those in need were numerous. Providers noted that transportation was difficult for families in need when

they were unable to make the trip on distribution days; also, reaching the community's shut-ins proved to be a sizable hurdle as well. Also, the need to develop social capital between food assistance providers and other local organizations to minimize the gap in service to needy families was noted as was a perpetual lack of funding for food assistance providers like Food for Fairview and The Lord's Acre.

Finally, similar to accessibility issues facing gardeners, community members in the Fairview area largely noted a lack of resources as the most significant obstacles to high quality food. Many respondents noted that the price of high quality food was simply too high and other financial priorities took center stage, such as housing, healthcare, etc. Respondents also noted that transportation limitations impacted their food accessibility. For those who live far-removed from the main highway (74A) through Fairview, especially in the surrounding hills and mountains, travelling to food distributors is a challenge. Others noted that they felt as if they needed to travel outside of Fairview to find high quality food at an affordable price. This information stands in contradiction with the aforementioned USDA's Economic Research Service Food Access Atlas regarding food accessibility in Buncombe County (2021), which notes transportation was not considered a significant barrier regarding food access in the area. This inconsistency speaks to the value of the mixed-methods approach to the study which aided in providing a community perspective on how transportation can be a barrier to those in the Fairview community. Community members also felt as if they lacked the time and education to adequately shop and prepare food at home. There was a desire among respondents to have a better working relationship with food distributors in the area, particularly local farms and other food producers, to mitigate some of these concerns.

The statistics concerning food insecurity nationally, and the data collected by the Community Food Assessment through The Lord's Acre, highlighted the multilayered phenomena surrounding food insecurity, especially in the midst of an economic recession: access to food is remarkably exacerbated by deficiencies in economic capital, social capital, and human capital. While the economic issues surrounding food insecurity were, and still are difficult to address at the local level, as a result of its community assessment, The Lord's Acre resolved itself to improve community relationships to address gaps in social capital and human capital. After suggestions by respondents to the assessment, the organization decided to develop a variety of educational workshops and closer working relationships with other nonprofits and food assistance providers. Whether through educating gardeners, cultivating relationships with other local food producers, or inviting the community to freely take from the bounty of its garden, The Lord's Acre understood at its inception that communal accessibility to food was the key ingredient in building a stronger sense of community.

Over time, The Lord's Acre cultivated itself into a responsive nonprofit organization that created spaces, programs, and organizational rituals where produce and relationships with community members could thrive. In the following chapter, I focus on why I chose to study The Lord's Acre through the lens of ritual theory as well as the specific concepts through which I attempted to better understand the organization.

Chapter 2: The Rite Stuff

I have always been intrigued by rituals. They are so multifaceted, so stacked with meaning. Rituals serve innumerable functions for individuals personally and socially that their significance can rarely be discounted. Rituals provide meaning and mooring. Whether it's the self-introspection offered by daily meditation, the feeling of community garnered by travelling to the same relative's house for the holidays, or celebrating the end of Ramadan with one's community, rituals abound in secular and religious contexts, and the spaces between both.

Specifically, I like the universal nature of rites of passage, those transitions from one state of being to another, and major life transformations. Whether considering baptisms, bar mitzvahs, quinceaneras, graduations, marriages, promotions, funerals, etc., it seems as if every culture has multiple versions of rituals that end in someone moving from one way of being in the world, to another. And recently I've been considering how my PhD program fits in the mold of a rite of passage, much like any trek through the paths of higher education culminating in a recognition of a higher degree of knowledge and experience. In a landmark writing about rites of passage, anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1909) describe three distinct and interrelated phases of such rituals namely, separation, transition, and incorporation. Van Gennep described that communal rites of passage usually first involve a period of separation from the wider community, where the bonds of the ritual participants are reinforced among one another apart from society. This period is then followed by a period transition in which the group is educated in line with the content, rules, and expectations of their impending, new identities. Finally, the

group is incorporated back into the community with a new status or role complete with obligations.

Like most experiences of continuing education, my cohort's separation phase included orientations to the new educational experience, while we simultaneously began carving out time and space away from our ordinary lives to undertake the new educational endeavor. Our transition phase included all of the course requirements, qualifying exams, and dissertation writing, which for years forged so many of us into tight communal relationships of support, inspiration, and survival. And for so many, the incorporation phase concluded with the defense of their dissertation and the conferral of their doctoral degree.

My own rite of passage through my PhD program has lingered far longer in the transition phase than those of my initial cohort of other PhD students. In fact, several iterations of PhD cohorts have come and gone since I have begun attending IUPUI, back in 2012. It's not as if I enjoy PhD purgatory or take delight in moving slowly through this personal and professional transformation; however, life happens.

Since the beginning of my PhD program, my wife and I have had three, amazing children. I have also worked full-time as a lecturer at Franklin College, and eventually worked my way up to chair of the Philosophy and Religion department, and with it, the distinction of Assistant Professor of Religious Studies. In that time, my wife has also completed a bachelor's in nursing, and began her first job in the midst of a crippling pandemic, with which the world is still grappling.

A remarkable aspect about rites of passage is the sense of burden, doggedness, fatigue of re-correcting oneself on such a path in the midst of what else happens to one on the way toward the path's end. Of course the determination must exist, must be enacted, in order for the journey to end. None of the aforementioned experiences are meant to be read as excuses for not progressing faster toward the completion of my degree; instead I ask that they be seen as complex layers of life that impact the trajectory of finishing this dissertation, and by extension, my PhD.

Yet none of these "life layers" have been so dramatic as when my mother was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's and dementia in the fall of 2017. My father's accident and subsequent health problems have become so normalized within our family dynamic, that aside from the infrequent hospitalization, they were relatively well-managed. My mother's diagnosis was a shock, and a debilitating one to my entire family. In the summer of 2016, at the age of 59, we noticed Mom had been having more difficulty articulating words, was having increased difficulty with hand-eye coordination, and was becoming more disoriented. It seemed as if she always knew what she wanted to say, but her mind found it difficult to make the connection between her thoughts, and the appropriate vocal articulation. Of course, as time went on, her condition(s) worsened, and a new reality set in. Her deteriorating ability to drive meant that she could no longer drive herself, or my father, anywhere safely. And in terms of care for my father, new caregivers slowly made their way into my father's employment. My brother, sister, and I needed to quickly learn how to care for both of our parents in new, vulnerable, and intense ways, quickly realizing that any routines we would become accustomed to throughout one year would quickly dissipate and a new care routines would need to be

incorporated into our visits. Now, nearly five years later, those assumptions have turned out to be accurate. We are much more involved in the care of our parents than we ever have been before; and, like our father's accident nearly three decades earlier, these new challenges have made us stronger as a family, have made us appreciate one another even more. Yet, the ever-changing routines of my parents' care has led this student of ritual unmoored.

One ritual that Mom continues to exercise is care for her horses; it seems to anchor her, bring her a sense of peace, of duty, an aspect of her identity that is still hers, uniquely hers, until one day it may not be. We converted our old pig nursery into a makeshift horse barn when I was still in high school. It is hard to believe that we've always had at least two horses at the farm for well over twenty years. And since that time, the tenderness with which she has approached the horses we've had has been legendary. The loud, but gentle whistles she could produce through her teeth to call them in from the pasture, the way she gently caress the area between their eyes after letting them smell her hand, the way she laughed when the horses would consume entire apples in one or two bites from her hand.

I think of the progression of Mom's disease in the context of that horse barn, tracing back conversations we've had since the diagnosis and watching how her care for them has perhaps changed in style, but not in heart. A few weeks after her diagnosis, I remember cleaning the horse stalls when Mom came up to help. Already her spatial orientation had started to deteriorate in concert with her speaking ability. We knew things were hard, and would only get harder for her. While we talked, she said she was coping with the diagnosis, but was worried about what she was going to do after taking

an early retirement from real estate because of the disease. As she struggled to manipulate the pitchfork and pick up excess hay and straw from the ground, we talked of potentially volunteering in environments where the tasks weren't complex, but still meaningful. We talked about having more time for her to reconnect with old friends; yet my parents were both intent on keeping her diagnosis a secret for the time being in order not to scare off landlords, or frighten lenders at the bank. They worried that despite nearly forty years of successfully running a small family farm, the prospect of a farm manager who was quadriplegic and a co-manager with dementia and Alzheimer's continuing to lead such a business enterprise would inspire little confidence in old and new business partners. Not only this, they worried that no matter how close friends and family were, they would think of Mom in terms of her condition first and her personhood second. A reality for individuals with disabilities that my father knew all too well.

Now, four years later, trips to the barn are more frequent, and not because the horses need more care, but because Mom needs that space. She has taken to wandering up the hill, without warning, either because she just wants to see the horses, or because she isn't sure if she's fed them or not. We don't ask which. In a sense, I find it a cruel joke that she was once moved to tears for her inability to find her way out of the same barn that brought her so much calm and purpose over the years. Her hands sometimes struggle to find that area on the horses' foreheads to pet. Her struggles with spatial orientation make it difficult at times for her to lock eyes on horses in front of her, and her speech is more inconsistent than ever. Instead of calling the horses (Lucky and Velvet) by name, she just calls them both "baby." And when she looks for them out in the pasture and whistles for them, the search is more prolonged for her even though it isn't for the

rest of the family. Yet, it is one of the great joys of her life to share her time with the horses with her grandkids, especially ours, Franklin "townies" who have long been fascinated by any chance to interact with creatures of any size. We all know the horses belong to Mom, and she belongs to them.

As I mentioned, our Midwestern upbringing pushed all of us, the whole family, to plunge ourselves into the work of adjusting to catastrophe and thus co-create a new reality of meaning, purpose, to get by. However, my "bottle-it up" approach to personal crises proved to be ineffective as time pressed on, and professional and familial pressures mounted. Struggling to make sense of Mom's diagnoses, I remember wrestling to contain panic attacks fused with rage and tears, gasping for air. I recall closing my eyes, and seeing a shadowy silhouette of myself crouched in a ball, rocking back and forth in the corner of my family's living room. In time I came to grips with the fact that perpetual sense of catastrophism, along with the unique tragedies that had befallen my parents, had resulted in deepening anxiety and numbing depression.

I disclose all of this because a new and creeping life layer has presented itself to me in recent years, and it has an indelible imprint on how I conduct research, how I write, how I move through this dissertation's completion. There is a distinct possibility that unless I find a way to work to manage this increasingly complex life, including but not limited to my new responsibilities as weekend caregiver to my parents and my own mental health issues, and complete this dissertation soon, my mother may lose any cognitive connection to understanding that I am completing a PhD program. In short, I am working as hard as I can to move from the transition phase of this rite of passage to its completion before Mom forgets I am on this path at all. There comes a time when the

transition phase dissolves itself into the phase of incorporation, finally being conferred the title of Doctor Alexander, and that time must come soon.

So, as we move collectively through my rite of passage, one that understandably involves the study of ritual theory, a brief overview of the concepts from ritual theory that I employed in my research is warranted, along with the methodological rationale for choosing these concepts. These concepts include Clifford Geertz's notion of *thick description* as an interpretive ethnographic method, Victor Turner's development of the concept of *communitas*, Ronald Grimes' criteria of *ritual mapping* and ritual *sensibilities*, and finally an exposition of the term *ritualization*. Each of these concepts (and the criteria within them) were chosen specifically because I felt as if they might be the most effective tools for me to take into the field of research. As with any trip, you can only pack what you think you may need, and this was true for my initial forays into my research at The Lord's Acre: I had researched the location through extensive reading, and had an idea of what might help me navigate the journey, and proceeded accordingly.

Clifford Geertz: Thick Description

In order to ethnographically plumb the depths of the symbolism within a particular culture, especially the meaning associated with an organization's rituals, I turned to the concept of thick description popularized by Clifford Geertz in his landmark essay, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (1973). Situating himself against researchers of his time who believed scientific, empirical observations of nature could equally be applied to explain complex human social interactions and reduced to generalizable conclusions, Geertz contended that the only way to truly understand a culture is through embedding oneself in a particular location, to study in a

village, not study a village, and that properly ethnographic accounts offered interpretations of complex, and symbolic, social phenomena. The difference between thin and thick description lies in the distinction between observing what is happening in a certain event, and analyzing what *is symbolically being communicated* through that event within a given social context. The "thick" layers of meaning and communication that could be offered in a simple wink, as offered by Gilbert Ryle, set the stage for such analysis. Geertz wanted to push anthropologists and ethnographers to develop a skillset away from detached observation and toward developing theories of cultural interpretation, which he viewed as necessary to anthropology; he believed culture to be a context of rich symbols that begged for explication.

Geertz provides a useful definition of culture to unpack in his essay, "Religion as a Cultural System" (1973), in which he argues culture is, "…an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (p. 89). This definition advocates the importance of thick descriptions within particular cultures by discussing that symbols are not only communicated throughout time, but symbols themselves can take on a multiplicity of forms, ritual or otherwise. Most importantly, such symbols have an indelible imprint on individuals' attitudes towards life. Understanding any culture well must necessarily involve attempting to grasp the interplay between embedded symbols and the subjective attitudes of those living in such a culture by studying within in it. This may seem like an obvious research method, but it emerged in contrast to research

methodologies within certain academic disciplines that developed, wide ranging, generalized theories of human phenomena after studying specific historical communities.

One of the founders of the discipline of sociology was somewhat guilty of such generalizations when discussing religion and religious rituals. After investigating missionary accounts of Aboriginal tribes and analyzing the use of totems within such traditions, Emile Durkheim developed the theory that the particular totems of each Aboriginal clan were actually symbolic representations of the clans themselves in his famous text, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1915). In effect, Durkheim argued that the clans worshipped symbolic representations of their own community, yet that these totems were regarded as something sacred, and necessarily different, than the communities that worshipped them. These totems encouraged a kind of social cohesion for the community that worshipped them together. The ability for religion to function as an institution that compels social cohesion was a ground-breaking theory that has come to be regarded as *functionalism*, or the theory that society needed the function of social institutions not only to survive, but to legitimate itself (Bell, 1997).

The totem's symbolic function of the community's god is in fact a reflection on the perceived moral authority of the community; for Durkheim, the idea of a divine moral authority exists through the perception of society's sheer ability to enforce conduct through social pressure. The individual's moral judgments are directed out of fear or motivation of this social pressure. Durkheim's elaboration of *piacular rituals* in his argument helps to add credence to this functionalist approach. A piacular ritual, which focuses on rituals of collective mourning, is when individuals feel it is incumbent upon them to make some sort of sacrifice within a social ritual, which may simply present

themselves as expressions of loss and grief. Such collective sacrifice within rituals helps to reinforce harmony within the group, or society as a whole.

While intrigued by such theoretical explanations of religion, rituals, and symbols, I found Durkheim's conclusions interesting but problematic and it seems as if Geertz met me there as well. Durkheim used his test case of second-hand accounts of Aboriginal culture to make an argument about religion in general; as if religion functioned as a source of social cohesion in such early communities, Durkheim argued that religion and its rituals must logically function the same way for humanity in general.

While generalized theories about human phenomenon can be useful, they can also mitigate the unique perspectives of the individuals, groups, or communities that inspire them. I appreciated the richness that thick descriptions of human interactions could provide toward developing theory, reifying theory, or abolishing theory while working hard to allow cultures to speak for themselves, albeit through the interpretations of an ethnographer acknowledging his/her own biases and reflexivity in the process. The concept of thick description thus prepared me to be open-minded while at the same time hyper-aware of symbols and meaning that The Lord’s Acre might reveal to me, without preconceived theories clouding the collection of such data. I am indebted to Ronald Grimes for providing important guideposts in aiding the process of thick description in his text *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (2013).

Ronald Grimes: Mapping the Field of Ritual and Ritual Sensibilities

A ritual theorist who is best known for analyzing public ritual performances in New Mexico, Grimes provides loose categories for consideration when engaging in

ethnographic accounts of rituals. In Grimes, I also found a scholar who wrote openly about the difficulties of analyzing ritual without allowing preconceived theories to interfere with his interpretation of what he encountered as an ethnographer, while also attempting to be sensitive to broad theoretical categories to pay attention to as he detailed his own observations, and thus developed some useful guideposts for other students of ritual to ponder. These guideposts are meant to inspire closer examination and reframe ritual observances, not prescribe their meaning. These guideposts which help to "map the field of ritual" (Grimes 2014), include the following:

Ritual Space: This category focuses on the observer's understanding of the place in which rites occur as well as the symbolic significance for the "placement" of such activities. Also, this category concerns itself with the portability of a ritual space, the objects that may mark the space as ritually important, its ability/inability to be replicated elsewhere, as well as understandings of places outside of a ritual space (Grimes, 2013).

Ritual Objects: This category concerns itself with those material items that figure the most prominently in how a ritual functions as well as the importance with which those objects are regarded by insiders and outsiders, their number, physical characteristics, and the "ownership" or "communality" associated with such material items; this category also focuses on the importance of the placement of such objects as well as the stories that surround them (Grimes, 2013).

Ritual Time: This category pays special attention to the duration of particular rites, the way they may coincide with sacred calendars, natural seasons, or specific times of day, as well as how understandings of mundane and sacred time may be communicated through such activities. These understandings of time communicated

during the rite may focus on stories from the past, or on idealized visions of the future (Grimes, 2013).

Ritual Sound and Language: This category emphasizes the role that the spoken word, mimicked sound, natural sounds, silence, music, and literature play in the functions of particular rituals, as well as how, when, and by whom these forms of sound production and language are utilized in rites (Grimes, 2013).

Ritual Action: This category is concerned with differentiating between the kinds of action within rites, as well as meaningful and arbitrary actions, symbolic gestures, the goals or affectations associated with particular actions, and the senses and body movements that are emphasized in ritual settings (Grimes, 2013).

While each of these categories is unique in terms of mapping a field of ritual studies, they also retain the potential of overlapping one another considerably through the data collection process. Thus while I am perhaps most concerned about ritual action when addressing my first research question, it is essential to consider the other aforementioned ritual categories to illicit a full picture of the ritual phenomena I hope to observe (Grimes, 2013).

A taxonomy for considering the layers of rituals was also developed by Grimes, and framed as six ritual sensibilities, or "embodied attitudes, that may arise in the course of a ritual" (2013, p. 35). Understanding the importance of a ritual activity to an individual, or within a collective group, also involves capturing the moods or sensibilities associated with the ritual activity by the participant(s) that perform it. Indeed, Ronald Grimes cautions that not every ritual should be understood as connoting a sense of the

sacred, or eliciting feelings of the divine (2013). These modes of ritual sensibility were invaluable in my observations of routines within The Lord's Acre, and my attempts to develop thick descriptions of the organization's culture. Characterizations of five of such sensibilities under consideration are provided below[4]:

Decorum: A sensibility of *politeness* that occurs in relation to particular socially constructed rituals and socio-political expectations of cooperation. Examples of decorum include socially obligatory modes of greeting and leaving, hygienic standards, stock phrases and gestures repeated by others in a given culture, etc. (Grimes, 2013).

Ceremony: This mode of ritual sensibility moves away from face-to-face interactions found in decorum, and instead focuses on the individual's expected role in a communal event that signifies some larger purpose or righteous cause; in a sense, it subsumes the individual into a larger group experience, so the individual is *conscientious* of the way in which he/she is expected to operate. As a result of which, failure to abide by the conventions of ceremony renders the individual more susceptible to criticism (Grimes, 2013).

Magic: A sensibility that is characterized by a sense of *anxiety* associated with either an individual or collective rite that intends to effect a particular end. Grimes notes how such rites usually include a statement of declaration which precedes an imperative

[4] The only ritual sensibility that is not discussed here is Grimes' use of the term ritualization. Like the term ritual itself, ritualization has a bevy of different definitions. For Grimes, ritualization is an innate, biological component of animal life (including humans) where we engage in certain stylized actions subconsciously. For instance, when describing this sensibility, he details the "inciting ceremony" of ducks that attack each other (2013, p. 36). It is thus a baseline form or ritual sensibility that I did not believe to be useful when studying the organizational culture of The Lord's Acre. Most importantly, however, a distinct interpretation of ritualization also offered by Grimes (2014), Catherine Bell (1997), and Barry Stephenson (2015) was found to be much more useful and I will discuss it below.

command, especially in healing rites. However strong the language may be in such rites, it belies the uneasiness of desire or hoped-for results (Grimes, 2013).

Liturgy: This mode of ritual sensibility is characterized by a sense of *reverence* in relation to an action of cosmic necessity. Grimes notes that liturgy is not always strictly liturgical in the religious sense; that is, liturgical sensibilities can take place outside the confines of religious ritual. Unlike the declaration/imperative voice associated with rites of magic, liturgy is more interrogative and receptive of the sacred precisely because it stands reverent before it. Instead of attempting to manipulate the divine, it is a spiritual exercise that awaits the sacred to provide a sense of wholeness (Grimes, 2013).

Celebration: The last form of ritual sensibility under my consideration, celebration, is characterized by a sense of festive spontaneity that celebrates the present moment as a confluence of past and present. Different from magic in that it does not attempt to manipulate a desired end, and distinct from liturgy because it is not monotonously formalized, celebration exists as a form of playful response among participants. Grimes notes that celebration usually takes the form of birthdays, dancing, singing, and feasting (2013).

Not only did I choose these modes of ritual sensibility to assist me in developing a thick description of the rituals of The Lord's Acre, but I also believed them to be useful in parsing out the various attitudes of the participants that can be found in one ritual. Too often I believe scholars make the mistake of assuming a collective disposition of participants in a ritual, whereas I believe the same ritual can incorporate multiple moods or dispositions within it, thus furthering complex understandings of how rituals are perceived by their participants. In an attempt to reframe his taxonomy of ritual

sensibilities, Grimes encourages others to see the list as ritual layers that may or may not coexist with each other. For example, one ritual may have a layer of decorum, another of magic, and yet another of liturgy. And with that layered understanding, Grimes intends for the categories to be used flexibly for consideration in one's research, stating, "However neat the boxed-in modes appear on the page, the scheme is still makeshift, even ramshackle, so I don't glibly apply the modes. I edit and tinker with them, inviting you to do the same; either that or invent your own" (2014, p. 205). Next, focus shifts to an anthropological concept developed by a long-time conversation partner of Grimes, Victor Turner.

Victor Turner: Communitas

The concept of communitas was initially introduced by Victor Turner to describe a deep and distinctive phenomenon of social relationship between individuals, a kind of spiritual communion that is flooded with egalitarianism (Turner, 1969). Turner adopted and then adapted the term from Paul Goodman who used the word in reference to community town planning. While a sense of community is a necessary characteristic of communitas, Turner strove to divorce the sense of community from the notion of community as simple a geographic "area of common living" (Turner, 1969, p.96). More specifically, Turner believed this intense feeling of camaraderie is present among a group of individuals who are sharing in an experience of collective transition "in betwixt and between" versions of their past and future selves (Bell, 1997).

Turner was inspired by the aforementioned Arnold van Gennep's description of the stages of ritual transition, otherwise known as *rites of passage*, when developing his thoughts on the links between periods of transition and the formation of community. Van

Gennep's understanding of rites of passage rituals includes a three step process of completion which I will discuss in more detail than my earlier description at the beginning of this chapter. These stages include: A pre-liminal phase or separation from one's community, liminal phase of transition, and then reincorporation into a new community, or a return to the world with a new sense of status (Turner, 1969). The rite of full-immersion Baptism in the Christian tradition displays this theoretical concept well: First, the individual is immersed in water to symbolize death to one's old life or way of being. Next, while in the water they enter into a liminal state when they are neither their old self or new self. And finally, when they are pulled out of the water by the Christian leader, they are reincorporated back into the old world, or born again, with a bold new identity within the Church. While the above is description of a life transition salient with religious symbolism, Turner noticed that van Gennep's three step process is also present in other life transitions for individuals and groups, including changes from childhood to adulthood, the rituals of installing political officers into new positions, or any movement into a new social or spiritual status (Bell, 1997).

However, what attracted Turner was the shared intimacy he found between individuals who existed in a state of liminality with one another, especially during his time studying the Chihamba of the Ndembu in Zambia, who were transitioning between periods of illness and health together within a tribal community (Turner, 2004). Turner noticed that such stages of liminality promoted a cohesiveness that is not dependent upon the established social roles or social structures of a given society. In fact, the communitas of liminality thrives upon the stripping away, or the leveling of social status, an inversion of the social order. Whether potential initiates into a Greek organization

(Bell, 1997), a group of Christian neophytes before baptism, graduate students working toward a common degree, etc., liminality is a time of radical egalitarianism that is resoundingly anti-structural (Turner, 2004).

Turner believed that society itself moves between an ongoing dialectical process that involves shifts from the structure of ordinary life with its practical, social, religious, and economic hierarchies and a need for egalitarian anti-structure, or communitas, back to structured existence. Turner explained:

> "From all this I infer that, for individuals and groups, social life is a type of dialectical process that involves successive experience of high and low, communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality. The passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statelessness. In such a process, the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable…In other words, each individual's life experience contains alternating exposure to structure and communitas, and to states and transitions." (Turner, 1969, p. 97)

Thus structured relationships through social hierarchies signal one of kind of human interrelatedness, but the anti-structure of communitas signals the other means of human interrelatedness within society, but in opposition to the structures of society. Turner found that if the essential element of communitas is that of anti-structure, communitas can potentially manifest itself within elements of society that understand themselves to be in perpetual or temporary opposition to the structures of society. Hence, Turner developed three possible sources of communitas within society.

Liminality: As it has been discussed, liminality is a time of transition for groups when a collective sense of fellowship develops in the absence of conventional social signifiers, prior to the completion of ritual where new roles are awarded or there is a return to a

particular social status (Turner, 2004) While such experiences of liminality are ultimately fleeting, Turner believed that monastic and mendicant orders of the world's religious traditions offer a lifestyle of continual liminality, a unique kind of anti-structure that forms communal bonds away from the expectations of societal norms (Turner, 1969). Such orders include their own unique socio-religious obligations of egalitarianism that mirror a family life. Promotions to new positions within the community rarely, if ever, take place, and all work is shared for the common good of that particular community. Here, "transition has become a permanent condition" in a perpetual state of anti-structure to the secular world (Turner, 1969).

Marginality: Turner also believed that social movements that openly critique the structural nature of society may offer manifestations of communitas. Such movements or individuals exist on the margins of society because they are seen as dangerous or polluting forces that may upset the equilibrium of structured society. Turner uses the example of Millenarian movements as well as the Hippie movement to provide an example of movements whose staunch anti-structuralism was the enduring force of the respective communitas of each (Turner, 1969). However, Turner maintained that any social movement that manifests communitas cannot endure long before either dying or transitioning into its own organizational hierarchy.

Inferiority: Related to marginality, communitas can manifest itself among those who are seen as oppressed by social structures, or are seen as outcasts that do not conform to social norms; as a result, they are understood to be examples of weakness within a society (Turner, 1969). Such individuals may include those within indigenous cultures, women,

children, the poor, members of minorities, as well as specialized subcultures within society (Turner, 2004).

Prior to his death, Turner extended his insights into the sources and manifestations of communitas to include individuals who engage in religious pilgrimages (Turner, 1974) as well as those involved in modern theater productions (Turner, 1982). Both circumstances involve a suspension of established social roles into a new form of community that endeavors toward a shared goal during collective training and travelling. Turner's widow and research partner, Edith Turner, published a new collection of writings that explore the presence of communitas in the turbulent transitions of non-violence movements as well as within locales encountering the destabilization of natural disasters (Turner, 2012). On a more mundane level, Edith Turner describes the context in which communitas can develop through the efforts of a group united in the collective activity of work.

The "work" of communitas is a communal activity that is devoid of established social structures often present in organized employment where there are clear hierarchies of importance among employees and employers (Turner, 2012). The "work" of communitas is a shared fellowship toward a common goal that involves a unique flow of activity that does not feel like conventional work, because it is precisely unconventional in its practice (Turner, 2012). It is an activity that liberates workers from the burden of performance measurement and thus makes them more productive. Edith Turner describes the communitas of work in the following statement:

> "What is this 'work'? In fact it is not work at all. Work with communitas gives the workers pleasure- it is an activity that also pleases those who

> need it done. People find communitas in the comradeship and fellowship of work, and also whenever they find a chance for their ordinary humaneness to flourish amid the pressures of life…A real flow of work reigns when the workplace is free from involvement with social structures and moral status. This is the concern of employers. The communitas of work flourishes when stress about status flakes off and nobody thinks about rank." (Turner, 2012, p. 55)

I was attracted to the concept of communitas because it is a social phenomenon that can easily manifest within community gardens for a variety of reasons. Most community gardens are usually run almost entirely by volunteers and leaders who are deeply committed to working the land. The absence of over-arching hierarchy in the practice of gardening creates the context for the communitas of work, described above, where the fellowship of work toward a common, collective goal of maintaining the garden through its transitions exists. Similarly, the discipline of gardening is an extended liminal ritual where the maturation of plants for harvest, from the time of sowing seeds, is a time intensive process that lasts for months. During this time, volunteers work together to nurture and maintain garden plots until the ritual reaches completion when the fruits of the harvest are collected. The practice of gardening itself is not only an intensive ritual of liminality, but an anti-structural practice that defies the norms of industrialized agriculture in which the agricultural product and the consumer only meet at the time of purchase. Instead, community gardens may regularly share produce with one another as well as with those on the margins of society (or those within Turner's subcultures of *inferiority*) to foster a fuller sense of community. And based upon my earlier research into the Lord's Acre, I had a distinct feeling that I might find traces of communitas present within the work of the organization for reasons that will become apparent in later chapters.

Ritualization

Finally, we come to perhaps the most important tool of ritual studies that I employed in my research at The Lord's Acre. Simply put, ritualization takes place when an everyday task is symbolically transformed into something that distinguishes it from such ordinary acts and communicates specific meaning; in function it is the same, but treated qualitatively different by those who participate in it. Barry Stephenson offers two well-known examples of this process from the Christian tradition (2015). He offers that the taking of the Eucharist is on one level the consumption of bread; feeding oneself is a very pragmatic act, yet the taking of the Eucharist is much more than simply ingesting bread for sustenance. Similarly, the act of baptism is symbolically more than an instance of being washed. Below consideration is given to two different, yet distinctly interrelated definitions of ritualization offered by Stephenson and Ronald Grimes respectively:

"…ritualization refers to a process of stylization and formalization in which instrumental behavior becomes symbolic and communicative." (Stephenson, 2015, p.74)

"My usage of the term 'ritualization,' also used by ethologists, is modified so it refers not only to the aggressive and mating behavior of animals, but also to activity that is not culturally framed as ritual that someone, often an observer, interprets as if it were potential ritual." (Grimes, 2014, p. 193)

Focusing on the definition offered by Stephenson we get an insight into what may be occurring within the interior lives of those who undertake ritualization. Namely, when an individual or a group develops certain everyday habits in distinguishable ways, for

specific purposes, and those purposes can communicate certain meaning that is created and sustained by those who complete it.

It might help to return to an earlier example to elucidate the term a little further. Over time, feeding horses for my mother pushed past the pragmatic action of simply providing sustenance to her livestock. The act of feeding them was ritualized into something else, as did the space where that occurred. To be sure, she has always enjoyed tending to the horses. But as the years progressed, that particular ritual became a stronger part of her identity, it took on symbolic meaning. And despite Mom's inability to perform that ritual as independently as she once used to, the meaning of that space, of that act, is something she created. To the bystander visiting our farm for the first time, they would simply observe a woman depositing hay in troughs and speaking to her horses as she also reached to feed them carrots and apples.

This leads to Grimes' definition of ritualization, which focuses less on the interior symbolism of ritual acts created and sustained by individuals and groups, and more upon the potential for an observer to note that something different is potentially happening. If the bystander in the previous paragraph spent any length of time with my family, even a weekend would suffice, they would note that feeding horses is special for Mom. It is a chore on the farm, but it is the furthest thing from a chore for her *at the same time*.

Understanding ritualization on the part of the researcher is to suspect and notice that there may in fact be rituals that are masked as everyday activities within a particular group of people. Moving into studying at The Lord's Acre, ritualization provided a lens through which to view my participant observation, as I attempted to map the field of

ritual and be attentive to the ritual sensibilities present at the garden. All the while, I used these tools to produce adequately thick descriptions of the organization's culture and looked for traces of communitas growing out of the rich work TLA was engaged in.

Situating Nonprofit Ritualization at The Lord's Acre: At the Crossroads of Baggett and Bender

There are two notable ethnographies about the construction of meaning through ritualized work within nonprofits that I believe will help highlight the unique contribution a study at The Lord's Acre can yield. Each of these studies contain similar themes associated with my study of The Lord's Acre. These include: 1) ethnographic methodologies 2) focused upon ritualized work and language within nonprofits 3) that also center upon the motivations and attitudes of participants as well as 4) nuanced understandings of the presence of religious themes within such settings.

The first is Jerome Baggett's *Habitat for Humanity: Building Private Homes, Building Public Religion* (2001). Remarkable in its scope, this text offers explicit attention to how public builds of Habitat Homes completed by individuals from a variety of denominational affiliations (or non-religious backgrounds) as well as ceremonies honoring new home owners, are intentional religious rituals with largely scripted language highlighting Christian sentiment. Baggett contends that one of the central tensions of Habitat for Humanity (HfH) as a nonprofit paradenominational organization[5] is its struggle to pursue an Christian focused mission of evangelization through

[5] Baggett defines such organizations in the following way: "Briefly stated, these are typically ecumenical agencies, grounded in religious values and drawing upon church-based constituencies for support, that seek to have an impact on the public at large through social service provision, political mobilization, and consciousness raising." (2001, p. xii).

homebuilding when so many volunteers who engage in such work on behalf of others in need see the organization as an isolated experience to put their values into action, religious or not. The author uses the term "real religion" (2001, p. 98) a comment made by a volunteer about the satisfaction of putting one's own values into action, to describe this rationalistic choice to engage in Habitat builds. Baggett offers clarity on this tension in the following excerpt:

> Because so many perfectly legitimate reasons exist for wanting to get involved with Habitat, the religious tenor of the organization may become watered down as its emphasis shifts to the common denominator uniting everyone's participation: the secular, rationalized activity of house building….That coalescence of the secular and sacred, however, means that Habitat's ministry can become inundated by supporters with mixed or principally secular motivations. (2001, p. 200)

There are a number of very important themes to keep in mind from Baggett's description here. First, the ritual ceremonies and home builds that Habitat enacts, as well as the language around those activities, are done with the intention of ritualizing that work as religious in nature. Secondly, this aim is complicated by two distinct, yet intertwined phenomena, namely the mixed motivations of those attending the builds and the transactional nature through which they are attended. Simply put, Habitat for Humanity struggles with its identity as a faith-based organization, when actions of a multitude of its volunteers are not based in, or event attentive to, dimensions of faith and are instead focused on an outlet for enacting their own values.

It is important to note, that Baggett notes that such building activities can even foster a sense of communitas because the socio-economic backgrounds of

volunteers are temporarily suspended in the midst of the "ritualized public drama" (2001, p. 37) of the builds that they are engaged in. Although brief periods of communitas are elicited in such experiences there exists a struggle to generate a sense of community outside of such brief activities associated with the organization.

In shifting to *Heaven's Kitchen* by Courtney Bender (2003), we're drawn to see a much different type of organizational ethnography. This account follows Bender's participant-observations of God's Love We Deliver (GLWD), a secular nonprofit (with a strikingly religious name like The Lord's Acre!) that focuses on cooking and delivering meals to individuals with AIDS in New York Center in the mid-1990s. A much smaller case study than Baggett's profile of Habitat for Humanity, the author narrows her focus to the way in which volunteers at GLWD add their individual religious meaning to the quotidian acts of kitchen work (thus enacting ritualization) and through the way in which volunteers used language with each other when discussing their religious affiliations. And aside from HfH, GLWD does not orchestrate overtly religious rituals with the hopes of carrying forward an institutional message centered on the Christian tradition, or any tradition for that matter. However, like Baggett, Bender elucidates how religion itself is practiced through seemingly nonreligious tasks:

> Those who talked about how they brought in religious practice, including Emily, Anita, and Cynthia, articulated a conscious desire to connect the sacred to their work. Not incidentally, Anita and Emily explain this intentional action as "spiritual." In so doing they draw attention to their own agency in developing this meaning in the kitchen. Volunteers who acted this way, and who thought consciously of how their work was

> religious or spiritual, did not expect those around them to share their own personal ways of thinking about these connections. (2003, p. 63)

Like Bender and Baggett, I cannot deny that individuals may have come to TLA to live out their religious values through the nonprofit work of the garden. However, there are some additional connections between both studies that are useful for this current project. Like the staff at Habitat for Humanity, staff and interns at TLA did cultivate collective rituals for themselves and visitors to the garden. Like God's Love We Deliver, TLA frustrates our simply characterizations of faith-based organizations within their inherently secular character.

However, unlike Habitat for Humanity, TLA found no inherent problems with the multiplicity of motivations through which their staff, interns, and volunteers engaged with the work of the organization. Religious or non-religious, political and apolitical belonging had no bearing on the identity of the organization or its functions, in fact it was quite the opposite. Diverse perspectives were encouraged in the organization's unabashed commitment to an inclusive sense of community. Indeed, it was this cultivated intention toward community-building that characterized so much of the organization's work, in and outside of the garden. And like building homes and working in the kitchen, this "everyday" work of the garden underwent ritualization. In many ways, my study of The Lord's Acre finds itself at the intersection of these accounts of rituals and religious sentiment in nonprofit organizations.

Yet what distinguishes my account of The Lord's Acre from these texts is how *the staff and interns of a non-religious organization can approach its work with an attitude that ritualizes its functions with such meaning, that at times the work can take the form of, and blend the boundaries between, ceremony, celebration, rites of passage, communitas, and even liturgy*. This last ritual sensibility is especially important, and perhaps even controversial, for a secular nonprofit organization to intimate. However, this skepticism should be muted in the wake of considering how the work of nonprofit organizations can be approached with the attitude of generating experiences that provide a hopeful glimpse into potential realities in which the existential longings of those in need are realized, much like religious liturgies themselves. Indeed, while individuals that volunteer with nonprofit organizations can frequently use such spaces to express their religious ideals through philanthropic work, staff at secular and faith-based nonprofits alike can approach their programmatic work in ways that render notions of what distinguishes what is profane and secular obsolete.

Chapter 3: Stepping In

In this chapter, I want to share a glimpse into my initial field notes at The Lord's Acre to help the reader develop an imaginative picture of the garden and the individuals I came to know over the course of a couple of years. This became a productive visit to TLA because I came to understand how the beliefs of the organization were truly embodied in the practices of work within the nonprofit, albeit quite subtly. Through these reflections, I also provide a glimpse into the insecurity I felt as a newly minted researcher, stepping into the field of research for the first time, so by extension, the reader can step into the garden for the first time as well. Before doing so, I want to take a moment to discuss the heightened self-reflexive nature of my field notes in the remainder of this work. I spend considerable time discussing my insecurities in the field, not simply as a consequence of my neophyte status as an ethnographer, but as an individual who grapples with self-doubt as a consequence of my struggles with anxiety and depression, born in large part out of the tragedies my family has grappled with, which I mentioned in the beginning chapters of this work. These insecurities were an essential perspective to the construction of my observations at the garden. For example, the trepidation of feeling "accepted" as part of this organization throughout my research was highly reminiscent of my struggles to feel accepted by those working on my family farm as "one of them." These insecurities led me to fill silences in the garden with awkward conversation, resulting in my gradual realizing I had transgressed particular boundaries in certain spaces and rituals. Similarly, my preoccupations with my mother's condition caused me to exert enormous pressure on myself to complete my degree before her familiarity with this accomplishment, or my identity as her son, completely eroded; understandably, the existential nightmares of my parents' physical vulnerabilities coupled with the guilt of a

father/husband researching far from home, created a unique cocktail of anxiety and depression throughout this particular research project.

In the second edition of *Writing Ethnographic Field notes* (2011), Emerson et al push back against the understanding that reflexivity refers mainly to understanding one's socio-political biases when representing another culture. Instead, the authors argue that the purposeful sifting through and editing of field notes, the intentional connections that are woven together, and the thoughtful analyses of social relationships within ethnographic research are part of the reflexive process as well. As such, my mental health was a tool through which my research perceived, constructed, and reflected upon my observations. Including these insights into my mental health throughout my field notes was a conscious choice. Aside from being integral to my research, I have decided not to edit them out to help normalize the presence of a researcher's mental health within qualitative methodologies, especially given the prevalence of graduate students that grapple with conditions related to mental health (Bekkouche, et al., 2022). Finally these insights into my mental health will help the reader gain clearer understanding of my role as ethnographer in the garden, while at the same time gain greater access into the lived philosophies in that space, including the ways in which my presence and participation in the space were fully appreciated.

We'll journey back to my first forays at the garden described briefly at the beginning of Chapter 1. This chapter is at the same time a way for the reader to step into the garden of TLA, as well as stepping into my reflexive, ethnographic methodology. Following this, we'll stand back and ritually map the garden, using this initial experience

and my research on the organization to begin charting the practices, objects, spaces, and phrases which will undergo further analysis.

Field Notes-10/7/18- The Lord's Acre- 8:05 AM-11:00 AM

I am greeted warmly by Susan Sides from the other side of the fence with a handshake, her hands cold from the chilly morning weather. I pass between a large bulletin board with flyers detailing the organizations with which TLA partners, and a large gathering area of wooden benches, arranged in a semi-circle, around a large hickory tree. I recall that this is where a group of volunteers and I met the day we volunteered at the TLA as a part of a conference years before. The makeshift wooden-slat fence surrounding the property is a welcome sight for this, as I come back to the garden as a researcher this time. The fence consists of narrow wooden boards, worn down and weathered, arranged vertically around the majority of the garden, which measures a little more than an acre. The air is cool and the surrounding, green hills, are shrouded in a deep, green color all their own. I walk with Susan through the small wooden gate, complete with a wooden archway all its own and I am awestruck by the myriad of glistening plants, wet from the morning's dew, all arranged in tidy, lengthy rows. The property inclines gradually toward the highway I just turned off of. I notice the tool shed to my right, the garden's walk in refrigerator right next to it, and a series of small wooden buildings, no taller than my shoulders in the middle of the property, set somewhat apart from the neat garden rows. I would come to find out later that this was the children's garden, an educational space where any visiting family could explore without fear of damaging any of the other crops. At the very back of the property, I take note of the small cabins that are reserved for the summer interns, as well as one sizable but

dilapidated RV, and a silver Airstream camper, both sitting next to one another under the shade of a small tree grove.

As we walk I shared my experiences getting to TLA through winding roads around Fairview and remarked about how busy the traffic was (surprisingly) especially because I thought I was taking back roads. Susan soon introduces me to one of the interns, Gabe Whitlock, and I offer a little information about myself and clarified to Susan and Gabe what my objectives were for the day, especially in regards to my participant observation; I clarify that I might need to step away from work in order to take notes.

I felt like it was important to do this, to set a kind of boundary for me as the researcher, to give myself time and space to make my jottings. They were more than understanding, but Gabe seemed somewhat suspicious of my presence. He is tall, lanky, and wearing a large beige sweatshirt with a hood and multiple holes in it. I learn that he and his partner lived in the Airstream trailer at the far end of the 1 ½ acre garden (check on the actual size). Soon afterward, Ali, another intern, come walking up from the intern housing, next to Gabe's trailer, and introductions were made near the wooden tool shed where she met us. Ali is shorter than Gabe, and she wears a long sleeved gray/green shirt with pants; her hair was tied in a pony tail that was fed out the back of a black ball cap she wore, presumably to keep out of the way as she worked. She seemed more silent than Gabe, but was very inviting.

Susan remarked how we had been in correspondence for over two years…it was then that I learned that Susan would eventually be leaving TLA with the anticipation of a grandchild; I wondered if someone like her could ever really walk away, or if her role

would be more diminished. As my contact person, this new revelation struck me as sad and inconvenient for my research. Susan mentions that Ali would be taking over some of the programming responsibilities of the garden and Janice, an employee that was hired last January, would be the garden manager. I wondered how the transition of leadership and planning would unfold. This prompted the thought that perhaps focus could be given to how rituals/routines may shift in such a period of transition, and how that might be good for the organization, or good for the research.

I am informed that Janice, the last intern, would be late because she had experienced a flat tire the Friday before and that she needed to have it repaired, but that she would be along shortly. Susan then explains to me that the staff usually paused before the beginning of work for the daily reflection, but that when the activity took place varied at times; I make a mental note that this might be the first indication of ritual activity I might have the opportunity to witness, and I'm excited.

A brief discussion is had about whether to wait for Janice, the new assistant manager and the individual that would succeed Susan, to begin the reflection, but ultimately Susan mentions this would be a good time for me to discuss the purposes of my research. I offer a quick synopsis to the group again, and then asked for them to expound upon why they reflected each morning; we all move to sit on milk crates that are soon arranged in a semi-circle outside of the toolshed.

Ali explains that during morning reflections, the group find something to reflect upon, whether it was a song under consideration, or poem, which is then followed by discussing personal reactions to it. Gabe mentions that there are times when they will form a human knot with their arms (he lifted and twisted his arms together to

demonstrate) that they then must get out of, or that they just ask questions of each other. When I ask why they engage in such reflections, Gabe speaks up again and explains that it's a better way to know their cohort, a way at tugging at something deep inside of themselves that others don't know, that it improves their connection to one another by understanding themselves intellectually and emotionally. He goes on to explain that the routine is centered upon the group dynamic, that the staff is about building relationship, and that if it starts with "us" then it would extend to the volunteer's they interacted with; in short the daily activity sets the stage for the work they undertake, and it gives a foundation for leaping into the unknown. This is an interesting point because Gabe seems to be pointing to the idea that the work of the garden itself was somewhat of a gamble, a venture into the unknown, and that the firmness of the relationships he had with the rest of the staff/interns helped them to weather the challenges of the unpredictability of agricultural production.

Ali chimes in after Gabe's comments to offer her thoughts in connection with his. "They" (the organization) root down to relationships. She says, "People over production," which struck me as very much in line with the Personalism that fed Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Ali moves beyond the garden and becomes more abstract and wonders aloud, "What is causing hunger?" She mentions that solutions to hunger lie in community/relationships and that connection in the team (meaning the staff/interns) encourages others. Gabe broke in again and offered what I took to be mantra of the organization, "Everyone is hungry for something" and "Everyone has something to give." I mention that I would like to learn more of these sayings and Susan tells me that they are

posted on the welcome board as people come in. I make a mental note to snap pictures with the camera on my phone before leaving.

Discussion transitions quickly back to more logistical considerations about the work of the day and whether the sweet potatoes will need to be harvested twice. Susan seems to redirect the conversation and I pause to notice that she rarely interjects at all in conversations like the one above. She is the manager but she doesn't handle people, she seeks creative input and takes the time to joke. She pokes fun at Gabe and recounts hearing about a story in which a tractor Gabe was driving, tugging a hay wagon full of visitors at nearby Hickory Nugget Farm, died unexpectedly. He laughs as Susan explains how she heard the story from her son.

Susan mentions that Flying Cloud Farm, which is operated by the sister-in-law of Fred Bahnson, donated 74 bushels of organic produce, that was about to go bad. The notion is that TLA will find a way to redistribute it or use it for compost. Ali mentions that she has made a ghost pepper cheesecake that she wants us to try out. Discussion moves back toward sweet potatoes and that a lot should be harvested for Bounty and Soul, a nearby nonprofit organization in Black Mountain, also focused on food distribution to those that are food insecure.

Janice arrives in silver Toyota Prius and we make introductions as she walks up to the tool shed. She is shorter than Ali, with black hair tied in a ponytail, in a beige shirt and pants. She, like Ali and Gabe before her, is welcoming but reserved and seems to calculating how she will respond to my inquiries. She asks if we can do a reflection because she has one planned, but the decision is made to wait until later to do the reflection and to sample Ali's cheesecake at that time as well. Susan wants us to sort

through the good vs. rotten produce provided by Flying Cloud. I offer to help Gabe sort through the turnips at a "sorting table", a raised table with wire meshing over the top, approximately four feet by eight feet, next to the large refrigerator in a type of wood hut next to the tool shed; we begin to move toward it. I inquire about how they will distribute the extra food and I am surprised to learn that they give all of their produce, and even donated produce, away for free.

I can tell as Janice passes by us, she's listening to my conversation with Gabe. In an attempt to interject some clarity into the philosophy of the garden, she mentions that TLA tries to re-conceptualize the roles of giver and receiver. "We don't need anything from them…We want to do away with the stigma of giving/receiving," implying the power dynamic of indebtedness that can occur when offering assistance to those in need. She describes a story in which a woman who had been taking produce from the garden, once discovered, would come and empty out her change purse out of a feeling of obligation; however it took her time to realize TLA doesn't require anything in return. So she eventually came offering some of her produce to share with others. Janice mentions that there are different types of currency: sharing produce, time, or developing relationships and all have value at the garden.

Gabe chimes in and discusses how the giver/receiver system is so monetized with so many expectations. He says that they want to take money out of the gift economy. Gabe says, "Plus there's more of a value on the person that's created it…whole other layer of value…embodies their presence within it." He seems to be intimating that it is the sharing of food that carries relationships forward and it is the presence of the individual who shares it and works with the food that adds layers of value in ways that

transcend monetary consideration. Discussion shifts again about the importance of redistributing food through a variety of organizations to see who can use it.

For some reason, I mention that, “I hope I’m not disjointing anything.”

Gabe replies, “No-we enjoy having you here.”

Janice replies,” It’s another kind of currency.”

I am not sure how to interpret the last comment aside from the fact that I feel more accepted given my curiosity and fascination with the philosophy of TLA. I hear various birds chirping, the road traffic on Joe Jenkins Highway, smell the sweet cool air, and hear the clipping of Susan’s hand shears on another part of the garden.

It is during this time that I decide to establish a firmer entry point with Gabe after we begin talking about my own background in agriculture. I discuss growing up on a farm that has grown mainly monocultures of soy, waxy corn, and popcorn, into a four thousand acre operation. Curious, he inquires how larger, industrialized agriculture works in regards to managing that much land in one location. I mention that no, it isn’t in one central location, but spread throughout my home county. We talk about how in retrospect I understood that that type of life wasn’t for me, that I was more suited for the academy, but that I have a respect for the work despite my ethical reservations of the environmental impacts of industrialized agriculture. I then discuss my love of Wendell Berry and his text *The Unsettling of America*, which cautions against how the technological advancements of farming will lead to less focus on the land and the worker. Gabe agrees wholeheartedly, and seems more accepting of my presence.

At this time, I am becoming overwhelmed at what there is to know about TLA. Just sorting turnips seems overwhelming to me. Gabe and I sort through the turnips to see which ones have been ravaged by maggots on the white bulbs, we look for deep grooves and holes, and toss the bad ones into the wheel barrow. I discard much more than he does and that is probably an indication of my privileged background- which sees food as more disposable, although I find myself trying to adjust my mindset, reflect on my habits in the moment, truly saving the ones I think I can. The few that I save I try and join in an already banded group by shoving the green stems up in the rubber band; I make a mess of it. I am reminded of my frustrations on the farm growing up, how I desperately wanted to act and move with an intuitive knowledge, a wisdom, that so many others seemed to have, but seemed out of reach to me.

I sense a different kind of intuition at TLA, on a smaller scale farm. That intuition comes from understanding born out of repetition, precision, routine, ritual. I place the rubber bands on my right hand wrist (they'll stay on there for the six hours or so, long after I return to Indiana) from the turnip bunches I have discarded. One difference I notice is a lack of hurriedness, the allowance to slow down, to learn, a looser sense of time that one cannot find in more industrialized agricultural settings. My anxiety during such an upbringing may have stemmed from the fear of having to learn on the fly, or have come with the assumption that as the son of a farmer, I should "know all this stuff already, so why are we wasting time reviewing this?" To this day, that sense of anxiety is still hard to shrug off.

A truck pulls up and Susan tells me that it is a good friend of hers, Roy, who was a founder of TLA and once on the board; she thought it would be good for me to speak

with him so she invited him to TLA this morning. He parks by the tree at the entrance to the property, and is clad in denim. He has long white hair, pulled back in a white pony tail. As we make introductions, I notice his handgrip is strong. He repeatedly mentions that he won't be able to talk for long and I reassure him that any time he can spare would be appreciated. He seems apprehensive of me, at the thought of an "academic" researching the organization. Roy explains that aside from helping to found TLA, he offers a lot of carpentry assistance. He motions to the tool shed that he helped to construct. Roy describes himself as a radical leftist, who is concerned about racial equity. He goes on to describe his interest in long terms solutions, and the work of TLA as changing the conversation about food, about needs of the community. He discusses how charity is great, but that it doesn't get to the real issues of a community and offers the familiar example of people drowning in a river and instead of pulling them out, one should find the cause of why people are slipping into the current to begin with. I nod as I recall how often this same metaphor has been used to discuss the short-term relief of charity and the long-range solutions posed by philanthropy from my graduate studies. Roy claims, "What we can do is limited, but it's real" in reference to TLA food distribution and education about unjust food systems.

However, Roy has some misgivings about the ways in which community is approached at TLA. He mentions that there was a push to put up a sign at TLA regarding inclusivity, but that there was opposition by the board about that idea because there was a concern about pushing people away… "people that we want," Roy says. The tensions seem to center around potentially pushing people with a more conservative mindset away by taking a side on a particular social issue, which then might mitigate the potential for

starting relationships with and building community for people who may be in need but have different political persuasions.

Roy goes on to discuss the different programs of TLA. He discusses the larger social movement of Gardens that Give, a social network of community gardens around North Carolina and beyond that are hoping to change the conversations we have about food insecurity through their own efforts. He mentions a more regional enterprise, the Buncombe County Food Initiative, in which the TLA participates, which highlights that Western North Carolina is a region that is plagued with food insecurity. Along with the produce table at Food for Fairview he highlights the Free Market, where people can come and take whatever produce they want from the garden or contribute their own for others to take.

He's more relaxed now. The more he notices how entertained I am by his stories, and how we share similar convictions, especially in regards to the environment, he's much less apprehensive toward me. He almost seems surprised by the ease of the conversation. Given the former discussion of charity, I tell him that his activism is a form of philanthropy. He's curious about the relationship between activism and philanthropy. I briefly discuss Payton & Moody's various roles of philanthropy (2008), and I tell him that the way in which he's bringing awareness through his advocacy about climate change is raising awareness for the public good. He smiles and seems more satisfied with his efforts.

Discussion shifts back toward TLA. He mentions that TLA is notable for its ability to grow community. The air is becoming noticeably warmer, but the picnic table where we are sitting still feels cool. I glance at the surrounding green mountains and

notice the clouds are wisps hovering near them. Roy discusses how the TLA allows a context for people to be together and share things together that you don't get elsewhere. Drawing on his own experience, he explains how men in construction have a difficult time being vulnerable with one another, but at the TLA, people really want to serve, and when you can serve together, hearts get engaged. "When hearts get engaged, hearts learn and grow."

Toward the end of our conversation, Roy mentions that changing the name of TLA is for donation purposes. According to him, the rationale was largely driven by the notion that corporations won't donate to TLA or people because there are a lot of transfers to the Asheville area who are not religiously inclined, and that the garden's name may give individuals the wrong idea about the values it espouses. He mentions that he lives "just up the mountain" and I wonder which mountain is his. Susan comes out to bid him farewell as we move back into the garden together and I thank her for inviting Roy to chat with me.

We walk back to the sorting table where everyone is congregating (Gabe, Ali, Janice), and Janice turns discussion toward how they may move to reporting their impact on the community by discussing not how many people were served, but how many servings of food are provided by TLA, in order to humanize the numbers for grantors. We're waiting for Ali to bring out the cheesecake she's made with ghost peppers. I'm a little nervous about a cheesecake being made here at the garden because the interns live in one room cabins, and the only working oven is in a camper that sits on the property. Soon, she comes toward us from the cabins holding a small cheesecake, maybe ten-inches in diameter that she places on the sorting table. They joke about how they need to

start a tradition of taking turns making different pies and then come up the idea of creating shirts that say, "Pie Hard!" in reference to the popular Bruce Willis franchise. We laugh, and there seems to be a greater sense of community now than I felt before. Before Ali poses for a picture with her pie, she places a couple of ghost peppers on top of the pie for decoration. Ali slices up the pie with a metal knife, and then the four of us share one paper plate (split into quarters) as our serving dishes. I think to myself how I shouldn't be surprised at this move given the ethos of sustainability that seems to be woven into the soil here. Ali distributes the forks and we enjoy a sense of fellowship, communion. The pie is creamy, tart, and sweet, with a gradual sense of biting heat at the end. I remark about how delicious it is. Ali mentions that it's the blend of the dairy that tames the peppers. As we eat, Susan mentions abruptly, as if she's been thinking about it for a while, about why it's good that I am there at TLA, that my presence, "...helps us see ourselves through the eyes of others" and that we can take the time to talk about topics with one another, whereas it seems as if some of those conversations are hard to have without being prompted here. Maybe this is the currency I bring to the TLA, at least for today. We discuss that interns are educated in the ways of TLA through a manual that they are given as well as the expectation that interns will rotate responsibilities leading group discussions/exercises. I make a note to track down one of these manuals as soon as I can.

After the cheesecake, we transition to Janice's group activity. I find myself being nervous as I pull up a milk carton and we all settle again in front of the wooden tool shed. It feels very much like the nervousness that would accompany an ice-breaker during orientation week in college. I pull up a milk carton, sit with my back towards the

entrance of the garden, and set my notebook down as Janice explains the activity. We are all handed a piece of light-brown paper and asked to fold the paper into three equal sections, length-wise. I hold the accordion-like paper in my hand as she explains that we are going to take turns drawing a monster's body one section at a time. For the first section, she explains, we'll focus on drawing a head. We all reach for colored pencils on the ground in front of us, and work on the top-folded section of our papers. I am completely unsure of what the point of this activity is, but I start to notice the crew around me start to chuckle at themselves as the creativity unfolds. As for myself, I draw the head of a long-necked creature with a purple colored-pencil, whose nose resembles a pig as well as a horse, with parted tufts of hair, and eyes that look to the side, perhaps belying my own suspicions of the activity. Next, Janice tells us to pass our papers to the right, and we begin working on the folded middle section, without knowing what the head looks like on the paper we receive. We continue this way until finally the legs of our respective creatures are drawn after another round of passing our evolving art pieces. With each round, everyone is chuckling more and more. Janice instructs us that if we feel so moved, to name and write down the story of our creatures once we are done. We unfold the papers to reveal our amalgamated creations, and laugh at our collective creativity…that we all contributed to the creation of something, other-worldly. Everyone, except me, sets to naming and writing the stories of the creations they've inherited. It dawns on me that the activity, in its perceived absurdity, is building the exact kind of community that has been described to me during the day. It's like Victor Turner's notion of anti-structure, in a way, because it's a time and space where the conventions of what it "means to be nonprofit" are completely turned upside down. The

nonprofit insider would not see such work as productive, however it is integral in the sharing of creativity, of trust, of laughter. I ask if I can keep the creations, and the group is very happy to oblige.

The group quickly transitions into other logistics for the organization. Who will attend the Nonprofit Pathways workshop trainings on behalf of the garden? When will the End of Year Party be, now that Ali and Gabe are transitioning out as interns? There's concern about the removal of a large tree next to TLA in case a house is built on the property that has just been purchased, adjacent to the garden. Susan takes more of a lead in the discussion and mentions that something needs to be done with the turnips, radishes, and squash as donations before they go bad. Perhaps they should be given to Bounty and Soul? Discussion then moves to the need to dig up the remainder of the sweet potatoes for donation as well.

We stand up, and stretch, growing stiff from sitting on milk cartons. We pull out wheel-barrows, small pitchforks, and hand scythes and move to the back of the garden onto what looks like an eighth of an acre of sweet potatoes. I feel that sense of anxiety again. How am I supposed to know what to do? I listen as someone describes the need to sheer the green vinery off the top of the soil with the scythes, and place them in the wheel-barrow. I quickly gather that as some of us are doing this, others will use the pitchforks to unearth the sweet potatoes, and learn that some may be rotten at this point. I am told I can tell because they'll be juicing out if they're rotten. I set to work in a hurry with my scythe; I know I am trying to prove my worthiness to them. It reminds me of time on the farm, when I would hurry to and at a task, fumbling along the way…in my expediency to show what a pro I was, I would inevitably look foolish.

I try and calm myself, work less frenetically, because I am already getting winded. I reach down with my left hand, pull up the vines from the ground like I am holding the roots of hair growing from the soil, and slash with my hand scythe using my right hand. I walk clumsily along the clumpy, red clay, toward the wheel barrow. I look back and see that Janice, Ali, Susan, and Gabe are moving mindfully… that's the only way to describe it. Hardly speaking, they anticipate each other's actions. They move systematically down the rows, working slowly, but effectively, both cutting and digging up sweet potatoes and tossing good ones into rows next to the patch. I move back to the section I cleared and grab a pitchfork. I plunge it into the ground, breaking up the read earth, and unearthing large, and gnarly sweet potatoes, hidden like gems in the clumps of dirt. As I dig my hands in the ground to retrieve them, my white shirt and my hands "get soiled" quickly. The ground feels wet and glorious in my hands. I start to breathe, and enjoy the work. I note again the change of pace from being raised on a more industrialized farm, albeit a small one. The impending pressure was palpable at times…and work seemed so focused on maintaining machines that worked the ground, not working in the ground itself, at least not like this.

I observe how the large produce I am pulling from the ground are the largest sweet potatoes I have ever seen, and I recall a comment made by Gabe earlier in the morning about how people only take produce that looks attractive…and these aren't that. But they are hearty. I move more easily between cutting and digging, piercing the ground with the scythe, handle up, for easier retrieval when I need to bend down again. I keep reminding myself to do good work, not fast work, I'm trying to move in sync with the crew, to tap into the harmony I feel that they have established between themselves.

The art activity we completed just thirty minutes prior seems even more poignant now. Sharing in those activities allows for more sharing in the work, not just in terms of the work that needs to be done logistically, but in terms of the work as community-building. It seems to be all unspoken, all organic.

Too soon, it's time for me to leave. I apologize for having to leave them with so much work yet to do, worried that my departure will signal that I am not committed to the work, that I've lost interest; a natural consequence of my struggles with mental health. I don't get that feeling from them at all. I wish Gabe good luck and tell him that I hope to speak to him sometime soon in an interview. I am told that Ali might take a job at TLA in the spring, and so I tell her and Janice good-bye, with handshakes, and mention I look forward to seeing them in the coming months. Finally, I tell Susan goodbye, and am heartened by her sense of presence as we depart, grateful for her hospitality during this research experience. I lay my tools on the ground, carefully, and walk quickly to my obnoxious rental car, concerned about the time I'll need to get back to the regional airport, drop the car, change, and get ready to travel home in the next two hours. I try and clean my shoes as best I can before getting into the rental, afraid of additional cleaning costs upon drop-off. Already, I bemoan the sense of transitioning into a more hurried pace of existence.

Mapping Guideposts

The purpose of providing such an extensive section of my field notes is to help the reader imaginatively step into the field site before delving into the specifics of the garden, its practices, and its people; this will inevitably help to draw connections to my mapping of ritual guideposts suggested by Grimes above in the previous chapter. Yet

first it is important to come to an understanding of two of the key phrases of the organization, both components of the organization's ritual language.

TLA is not simply an organization that doles out fresh produce to those who are hungry and are thus food insecure. Instead, it is more accurate to describe TLA as an organization that exists to dole out nourishment, in a variety of forms, to those who are hungry in a multiplicity of ways. The common mantra at TLA, "Everyone is hungry for something and everybody has something to give" is deceptively simple, repeated consistently, and pregnant with meaning. It is important to break down this statement into its various components to set the context for an adequate thick description of the organization as a whole:

"Everybody is hungry for something…"

TLA understands that those who are food insecure may also be suffering in tandem with a lack of community. The organization recognizes that when communal bonds are tight, the needs of the individual are seen and resources can be gathered to address food insecurity, at least temporarily. However, when social bonds are loose and social capital is low, it can be increasingly easy to hide one's needs from view and correspondingly more difficult to mobilize social connections to alleviate food insecurity. From an ideological perspective, TLA sees the lack of community and access to food as two sides of a coin perpetuated by income disparities, racial and healthcare inequities, environmental degradation, and more. These larger, macro-level social concerns are the centerpiece of group tours to the garden. School groups, community groups, and area nonprofits frequently come to tour TLA. However, before venturing into the garden, a group discussion surrounding the intersection of the aforementioned social issues and

food insecurity takes place through guided discussion. TLA understands itself as a microcosmic representation of what it means for community to engage in difficult conversations about what it means *to be in community*. The growing, harvesting, and sharing of food is used to address food insecurity, but TLA uses food as a means to grow and sustain relationships with those in need with the hope that organization can also fulfill the need for community that such individuals may also grapple with.

"….and everybody has something to give."

Due to the understanding that income inequality contributes heavily to food insecurity, TLA has maintained a firm philosophical conviction that community relationships must be cultivated without the specter of market interactions. The field notes presented above were my first glimpses of just how seriously this conviction is held within the organization. The story of the woman who had been "stealing" from the garden that had been retold to me multiple times over my years with TLA had become mythologized as an instructive story about the ethos of the garden itself. Once the woman's "thefts" had been uncovered, her initial response was to empty her purse of whatever money she had to compensate for the produce she had taken. Yet, the currency most valued at TLA is the presence of those interested in community; this is the inherent reciprocity, the alternative currencies, involved in exchanges at the garden. Every individual who comes to TLA can offer something, but what is offered should be given with the intent of contributing to a sense of community. Danny Szemple and Jessica Molina, both former interns at TLA described the importance of this phrase in the following way:

Jessica Molina

> "So, uhm, yeah, that's why I feel like the community that it creates is so important. Everybody wants to be helpful, everybody wants to feel needed you know and I think that's what The Lord's Acre also provides, that, uh, just that space to feed that need to be needed, that need… you know. Susan says, everybody is hungry for something. I think it's so appropriate because you know at The Lord's Acre you grow food to give it away for the literal hunger but everybody goes to The Lord's Acre to fulfill a hunger of some sort. "

Danny Szemple

> "Susan [Sides] also has that thing, The Lord's Acre banner, I don't know if it's her thing specifically, but everybody is always using these expressions so it's hard to know where they originate, but I think this is a Susan one about how everybody hungers for something and everyone has something to give. And so there is this really reciprocal understanding that everybody is coming to this space seeking something and everyone has something to give and my own values and the work that goes with folks in crisis, just struck me that the idea that everybody has something they can bring to the table and it's uhm, a really powerful thing, it's a really great motivator to understand my work and what I am generally called to do with my gifts and my time really."

Such comments connect remarkably to the uncovering of theories of gift-giving offered in Lewis Hyde's seminal text, *The Gift* (2007). In his chapter entitled, "The Bones of the Dead", Hyde examines a variety of anthropological understandings of gifts as a means by which, through their continual transferal and refusal to be commodified, the meaning of the gift is magnified as is the potential for community. Consider for example, a family heirloom passed down from generation to generation. The significance of the object is increased as is the familial bonds which circulate it. To commodify the gift, however and transform it into the object of a commercial transaction would essentially dually end its journey of meaning (that meaning would belong to the buyer), as well as the any hope for continuing and increasing the familial heritage associated with that object. To put it

simply, gifts magnify in importance through movement in others, and through movement in others, community itself has the potential to magnify. Hyde highlights the tension between capitalistic transactions and the importance of gift-giving for the sake of community in the following:

> In the present century the opposition between negative and positive reciprocity has taken the form of a debate between 'capitalist' and 'communist,' 'individualist' and 'socialist'; but the conflict is much older than that, because it is an essential polarity between the part and the whole, the one and the many. Every age must find its balance between the two, and in every age the domination of either one will bring with it the call for its opposite. For where, on the other hand, there is no way to assert identity against the mass, and no opportunity for private gain, we lose the well-advertised benefits of a market society – its particular freedoms, its particular innovation, its individual and material variety, and so on. But where, on the other hand, the market alone rules, and particularly where its benefits derive from the conversion of gift properties to commodities, the fruits of the gift exchange are lost. At that point commerce becomes correctly associated with the fragmentation of community and the suppression of liveliness, fertility, and social feeling. For where we maintain no institutions of positive reciprocity, we find ourselves unable to participate in those 'wider spirits' I just spoke of – unable to enter gracefully into nature, unable to draw community out of the mass, and finally, unable to receive, contribute toward, and pass along the collective treasures we refer to as culture and tradition. Only when the increase of gift moves with the gift may the accumulated wealth of our spirit continue to grow among us, so that each of us may enter, and be revived by, a vitality beyond his or her solitary powers. (2007, pp. 49-50)

Susan's refusal to take the woman's money for taking produce from the garden was in a sense denying infraction of a capitalist system in a space where the economic transaction for food may have stalled the building of community, let alone pointing out the harsh socio-economic conditions the woman was living and thus denying her personhood. Instead a reciprocal exchange in some form is encouraged, but not required, to enhance community at the garden. Hence, volunteering, donating additional produce, engaging in critical conversations about social issues surrounding food insecurity, or in my case,

offering outsider perspectives to help those in the organization reframe their understanding of TLA, are all methods of offering something back to the garden in a gift economy outside of a monetary system. This both diminishes the societal pressures of proving one's worth through the provision of one's wealth and encourages participation in the garden through the sharing of alternative currencies so that everyone is afforded *the opportunity* to give something back. In Marcel Mauss' seminal work, *The Gift* (2002), the author goes to great lengths to describe that regardless of the culture, there is no such thing as a free gift, that there are socio-cultural demands on giver and receiver. In a forward to a reprinting of *The Gift*, Mary Douglas goes on to describe the important dual obligations of both agents in the gift exchange:

> It is not merely that there are no free gifts in a particular place, Melanesia or Chicago for instance; it is that the whole idea of a free gift is based on a misunderstanding. There should not be any free gifts. What is wrong with the socalled free gift is the donor's intention to be exempt from return gifts coming from the recipient. Refusing requital puts the act of giving outside any mutual ties. Once given, the free gift entails no further claims from the recipient. The public is not deceived by free gift vouchers. For all the ongoing commitment the free gift gesture has created, it might just as well never have happened. According to Marcel Mauss that is what is wrong with the free gift. A gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction. (Douglas, 2002, p. ix)

Of course, the same is true at The Lord's Acre; the creation and perpetuation of community in solidarity is the paramount concern of the organization through a multilayered understanding of what it means to give and give back. Not only was the food offered, *but so was the opportunity and the time* to consider what ways of giving back to the garden are possible and comfortable for the receiver. What flummoxed the woman in the story is that the giving *could occur outside* of a capitalistic system of

exchange. Indeed, the belief that everyone has something to give is both a recognition by the giver that the receiver also has power to contribute to the creation of community, but only if they are provided the space and creativity to consider what such a contribution could and should be, whether that be through work, one's presence in the garden, more produce, etc. And following the potlatch symbolism, these continual means of giving, without capitalistic pressure, have the potential to grow the community by being seen as something *that is passed on to others*. In fact, I recall Susan thanking a group of volunteers for their work in the garden because it was the work of their hands that would touch the lives of others. At the end of the day, it is this focus on personal relationships and community-building that orients TLA in its work.

"People over production."

This second major component of TLA's organizational language was another oft repeated mantra, *people over production*. In everything that TLA does, the ideological focus is on preserving, nurturing, and sustaining the respect for people, regardless of their life circumstances. This means that instead of being a garden focused on producing large quantities of food for distribution at the cost of forging relationships within and with those outside the organization, TLA frames its growth of produce as a means to care for and grow relationships between those it serves and with those who serve it. Instead of thinking of efficiency in terms of the amount of time spent relative to the production of quantities of garden crops, efficiency is understood in terms of working well and attentively within the garden for the sake of those who will interact with, or will benefit from the garden's produce. More than this, interns and the staff at TLA focus their energy on building relationship through conversation with one another about everything

from personal issues to issues of social injustice. Whether such conversations take place around the hickory tree with visiting groups to the garden, at work with volunteers in the garden space, among families that come to the garden's educational programs, or around the tool shed during morning reflections, attentiveness to one another is integral. Gabe Whitlock and Janice Brewer offered their perspectives on the importance of this phrase in separate interviews:

Gabe Whitlock

> "Yeah, so like Susan has said this before, like, well, people over production, kind of thing, I am sure you have heard that before, which comes like, we've said that to certain folks that have been here and they are like, oh that means I don't really need to work, and we are like no that's not what we are saying, it's another way of saying that let's be efficient, the attentiveness to like the conversation we are having is as important as like actually producing something because in a sense they are both a product of something, the conversation, like basically like conversation, the product of conversation is a relationship built, or in some cases, destroyed, you want to look at the flip side of that coin."

Janice Brewer

> "We have this philosophy that we mentioned a lot in our groups and when people come that we're nonprofit, that we're not a production farm, and we value people over production. So we are focused on the growth of the interns, the growth of the people who come to the garden, and participate in the organization, uhm, and we are valuing other people's, especially our interns, other people's feedback. Giving them autonomy to make decisions, or make a decision as a group instead of just one person always making the decisions….So that can, like train our interns, to act as a garden manager maybe they start a garden in the future, similar to ours, and it goes back to one of our core values of wanting to change the way that we relate to each other and have a space, a brave space, where people can come and have conversations and build relationships…"

Ritualized Language as Bounding the Garden Space

The two aforementioned phrases are examples of ritual language that have become mythologized among staff and interns at the organization; these spoken words function to bind the garden as a ritualized space. What do I mean by this? These phrases in particular enact attitudes towards the garden as a specific kind of space where the ritualization of work takes place. The words do more to set the boundaries of the garden than the wooden and wire fences do, because they enact a meaning in the land where growth, in a multiplicity of contexts, occurs. These phrases offer a lens to see the garden differently. The onlooker sees a garden where food is grown. The participant, knowledgeable of the meaning of these phrases, instead sees a garden where food is grown with the intention of growing community relations. That is, if ritualization is truly when an individual or a group develops certain everyday habits in distinguishable ways, for specific purposes, and those purposes can communicate certain meaning that is created and sustained by those who complete it, then these dual phrases of ritualized language at the garden serve the practical function of bounding the space as a location where food is grown as well as bounding the garden as symbolically serving the purpose of cultivating community relations through non-monetary, reciprocal relationships.

The ways in which different areas of TLA have been routinely referenced as "space" instead of "place" and the meanings that this designation carries will be explored later in a subsequent chapter as will other forms of ritual language. It is sufficient to say, however, that the two phrases here help to offer a philosophical underpinning to the work that is ritually undertaken at the garden.

In Table 1, a detailed ritual map has been constructed from Grimes' criteria for mapping ritual guideposts (2013) after two years of research at The Lord's Acre. In the next section, I will examine each of the ritualized actions/work routines listed below and allow them to serve as the fertile ground for unearthing evidence of other ritual elements, including language, objects, and spaces. I will provide a brief overview of each ritualized action at the garden. Each will receive its own analysis along with a focus on the ritual sensibilities I believe are active within them.

Aside from calling attention to my struggles with mental health as a means to better understand the constructivist approach I take with my field research, I also want help the reader better understand the way in which I frame my analysis of each of the ritualized actions at the garden. Instead of initially noting my conclusions about the ritual sensibilities that I believe are present in the activities I have chosen to highlight before detailing them further, I have written these chapters with the intention of encouraging the reader to walk with me through my field notes, my constructivist analysis, and finally my conclusions about the ritual categories that can be applied to the work of the garden. This writing move was a deliberate one, because I believe it will aid the reader in understanding the organic processes through which I came to my conclusions by walking with me to uncover the salient themes and experiences that led me to such analytical understandings. As such, the study of each ritual action described below will remain very much a mystery to dig up, examine, and appreciate in their fullness and complexity with me, much like the sweet potatoes highlighted earlier in this chapter.

Welcoming Groups

Frequently, TLA is contacted by area nonprofit groups, colleges, and high schools as a destination for field trips. When TLA hosts various groups, this serves as an opportunity for interns and the staff to have a sustained conversation with the group about the organization's history and mission under the large hickory tree, as well as discuss the root causes of food insecurity in the United States. This typically transitions into a group tour of the garden as well as a period of collective work in the garden on a variety of tasks with the dual purpose of maintaining its garden beds and produce as well as focusing on more sustained dialogue about food insecurity or other social justice issues. Finally, the group transitions back for closing conversations about how their perspectives on growing and distributing food have changed during the short visit. Interestingly, in one of the group visits I observed, the sharing of an interesting herb, spilanthes, with visitors elicits a strong, comical reaction that helps to transition the group to the closing of their visit by providing a unique sensory experience.

Food for Fairview Table/Share Market

While two distinct events, that occur at two separate locations, I lump the two activities as one because their preparation and execution are nearly identical in function. Recall that Food for Fairview refers to the local food bank, located directly adjacent to the Fairview elementary school that distributes food on Monday afternoons. TLA provides a table at that location where those who finish meandering through the food pantry can take as much produce as they want while they wait for their pantry food to be loaded up. Similarly, the Share Market Table is a table set up around noon on Thursdays

at the garden, where free produce is displayed near the hickory tree. Instead of taking food out into the community, this is a way in which TLA encourages individuals to come from the wider community to come and enjoy its produce in the hopes of cultivating deeper relationships with those who visit. People are also encouraged to bring some of their excess produce to this event to share, although it certainly isn't a requirement. However, it is the ritual preparation and presentation for both events that will take on further analysis in a forthcoming chapter.

Sprouts

This refers to TLA's youth program, where families and their children can come engage in learning about the natural environment and develop curiosity about the garden and its natural processes. Typically, the program involves sharing a story at or near the garden's hickory tree, transitioning into the garden or the adjacent herb garden for a loose group activity, and then back to the hickory tree to close out the activity or discussion. It is very similar to the structure of hosting community groups, yet it is different in very unique ways.

Working with the Garden

The ways in which the garden is planted, maintained, and harvested are too innumerable to delve into because each plant or crop is attended to differently, and in some cases, the ground itself is treated quite differently depending upon what is planted there. However, I will detail some of the routines and, most importantly, the attitudes with which such work was undertaken. These will include bed preparation, bed maintenance, pathway clearing, watering, and more.

Morning Reflections

It makes the most sense to continue analysis of morning reflections that was highlighted in this chapter. This transition will underscore the prominence of how the ritualized phrases highlighted above relate to the interpersonal relationships that must be forged by the staff and interns in this important routine because it establishes the context for each day's work.

TABLE 1-Mapping Ritual Guideposts in Relation to The Lord's Acre

Ritual Language- How the Spaces are Prepared, Enacted, and Bounded through Language

Important Phrases:

1. Everybody is Hungry For Something, Everybody has Something to Give
2. People Over Production
3. Claiming this Space/Holding this Space
4. Words of Affirmation and Thanks
5. Calling In vs. Calling Out
6. Welcoming Space (Promotion Inclusivity)
7. Don't Step on the Beds/Kneel on the Beds

Ritual Actions/ Work- Most of the rituals are largely sensitive to the needs of guests, not rituals that the guests must always conform to. The work seems to be ceremonious for those involved most heavily in the garden, but more celebratory for those who come to it, or interact with it from outside the space.

1. Morning Reflections- Greetings, reflection, connecting, chore choosing
2. Welcoming Groups-Oral history, discussion, sensory tour, volunteering, reconnecting, sharing spilanthes
3. Food for Fairview Table/Share Market- Harvesting, cleaning, weighing, arranging, presentation, conversation, food distribution
4. Sprouts- Hickory tree lesson, move to garden spaces (herb and large garden), back to hickory tree
5. Prepping Beds/ Clearing Pathways/ Planting

Ritual Spaces

1. The Garden and the adjacent herb garden-That which encourages play, that which encourages inclusivity, that which marks growing rituals (orange sticks- present tense, metal signs- stories of the beds)
2. The Tool Shed
3. The Hickory Tree
4. Food for Fairview Table/The Market Share Table
5. The Herb Garden

Ritual Objects

1. Tools
2. Benches
3. Tables/Table Cloth
4. Baskets
5. Training Manual
6. Gloves
7. Marker Boards
8. Produce

Ritual Time

1. Morning Reflections-Intentional time allocated almost every day to ready staff/interns to work within the garden space with the appropriate attitude.
2. Preparing Food (Food for Fairview/ Share Market)- Intentional time cultivated to adequately clean and prepare produce to have aesthetic appeal
3. Working with the Garden- A focus on the efficiency of using time so as to maximize the potential of the produce in the garden through maintaining, planting, and harvesting in the garden space.
4. Welcoming Groups-Intentional time allocated to discussing issues of food insecurity, touring/working with the garden space, and reflecting on changed perceptions
5. Sprouts-Intentional time dedicated to exploration and interaction with the garden space without an enforced agenda.

Chapter 4: Belief in Being Ready-Morning Reflections

The title for this chapter is inspired by a song that Ali had shared during a morning reflection on Friday, June 14th, 2019. The song, "I Believe in Being Ready" (2019), from the folk group Rising Appalachia, was what she played on repeat after attending the previous night's board meeting which was centered on TLA readying itself to take a firmer stance on racial equity issues following the cultural conversations surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement that summer and the death of George Floyd. Furthermore, the organization was actively considering what research and programming might need to take place for such objectives to be an organization more committed to racial justice. I had flown into Asheville as the board meeting started, and by the time I made it to the board meeting, racial equity facilitators were deep in conversation with the board and staff of TLA.[6] I could tell that my presence had disrupted the flow of the conversation, like a child who wanders into the kitchen with curious ears when parents are discussing issues of profound importance. By this point, Janice had become the garden manager and Susan had transitioned out of that role, while Ali had become the garden's program coordinator, and Gabe stayed on as the garden's groundskeeper. Instead of working for pay, he worked out a bartering deal with TLA's

[6] It is my understanding that up until this point in the organization's existence, most attention was concentrated around providing access to organic produce and exploring the root causes of food insecurity nationally as well as within its own community of Fairview/Asheville. To my knowledge, the board meeting that doubled as a training with racial equity facilitators included some of the first concrete steps by the organization, spurred in large part by the civil unrest following the death of George Floyd, to imagine ways in which it could integrate racial equity work within its current programs as well as envision programs it could develop in the future. Because I was late to this particular meeting, I did not have the proper context to report on what intentional dialogues occurred prior to my arrival and thus only feel comfortable describing a summary of the actual meeting.

board to function as the organization's groundskeeper in exchange for a place to park his RV where he and his partner lived.

Because of this apparent wrinkle my tardy presence had made in the discussions, I made a point to quickly introduce myself at an appropriate time, and largely sat back and attempted to be a fly on the wall. Aside from changes related to racial equity, I also caught wind of a potential name change that TLA was considering, one that might not give off the impression of the garden being a faith-based organization. In a short amount of time, the meeting wrapped up and I looked forward to hearing more from the newly-minted staff about their thoughts on the meeting during morning reflections.

Having experienced a morning reflection before, I was eager to dig deeper into the analysis of its ritualization given Grimes' categories. However, I quickly learned that the routine included multiple layers of symbolism regarding notions of efficiency, spontaneity, buy-in, intention, formality, and team-building that were key to developing an attitude toward work in the garden. Understandably, some of these concepts might seem to be counter-intuitive to one another. However, the ritual proceeded so organically, that I was pushed to refine Grimes' categories of ritual sensibilities, and actually combine two categories based upon my observations; instead allowing the categories I came to the garden with to determine my analysis of the experiences, I understood then the need to allow the experiences themselves challenge and reformulate the categories themselves. Below is an excerpt of my field notes from that day followed by a conceptual analysis of my observations that argues morning reflections at the garden were best understood as celebratory ceremonies, a synthesis of Grimes' ritual categories

of celebration and ceremony, where a microcosmic sense of community was developed together and then extended to the work of the garden itself.

Field Notes-6/14/19-The Lord's Acre-7:05 AM

I am late because I got lost in the mountains on the way from Troyers' AirBNB where I had rented a room for the short trip. As I pull in and get out, I realize how startlingly cold it is. A new intern, Nick had just pulled in as well. I walk over to the gate (I always think it is further down the fence line than it actually is) and stroll in. The scene is as picturesque as always. Blue sky and sun. I keep trying not to think of the cold. Reflection time again. Many of the interns are already sitting in a semi-circle around the entrance to the shed. Another new intern, Emma, before introducing herself, mentions that they think there are enough milk crates while I search for one on the side of the shed…then someone tells me to "take the throne"…the red plastic chair; this makes me feel odd because it marks me as someone different. I introduce myself…very clumsily, as always, and the group goes around and introduces themselves…Emma and another woman, Jill, are full season interns while the rest are just interns for the summer.

There is brief commentary on the board meeting from the night before. Janice recounts a little of the conversation that was had last night about the hard work of addressing racism, and then asks everyone present how that makes them feel. Ali mentions how she was "ready" to work on racial equity, and Janice felt like that was very inspiring…she was stirred by that word. This made Ali want to play the song "I Believe in Being Ready" by Rising Appalachia on her drive home…she listened to it multiple times. We decide to listen to the song as a group for our reflection. The lyrics of the song are grounding, and pull everyone into a solemn state of introspection.

I believe in being ready
I believe in being ready
I believe in being ready
For the time is drawing near
Brothers, sisters please get ready
Brothers, sisters please get ready
Brothers, sisters please get ready
For the time is drawing near
Oh there'll be signs and wonders
Oh there'll be signs and wonders
Oh there'll be signs and wonders
For the time is drawing near
We'll turn round and just start over
We'll turn round and just start over
We'll turn round and just start over
For the time is drawing near
I believe in being ready
I believe in being ready
I believe in being ready
For the time is drawing near
I believe in being ready
I believe in being ready
I believe in being ready
For the time is drawing near
For the time is drawing near
For the time is drawing near

Kory, a summer intern, who like me is in his mid-late thirties, balances his young daughter on his knee. He mentions that the song reminds him of a Zen saying, "I'd rather be a warrior in a garden than a farmer in a war." Everyone seems to nod in solidarity.

For clothing…everyone is wearing long sleeves, except me. Nick in shorts and a blue jacket with fishing hat, Kelly in long sleeves and jeans…Kory in black sweatshirt and red bandana and jeans, Emma in long a long-sleeve black shirt with black pants and boots, and Ali in white and gray flannel, with an embroidered hat and boots. Janice is in her overalls and jacket. Me, I'm in my blue jeans, ripped at the right knee, mowing shoes, and white t-shirt; I try to conceal my shivering as I realize how badly I misjudged the day's temperature.

Janice moves to intern training. I gather that they had a reading assignment, lesson three, about the proper way to harvest. I begin to understand that they are in a perpetual back and forth between harvest and planting and this pushes back on the traditional notions of planting and harvesting I have from growing up on a small farm that engages in large scale industrial farming where there is one season for planting and harvesting when farming monocultures like soybeans, popcorn, and waxy corn..

Discussion moves to the questions from the intern handbook (which I procured!). Someone asks when is it appropriate not to leave leaves on the ground when harvesting. It's decided that one needs to watch for plants that are more susceptible to disease. Emma mentions that lettuce and scallions are not as susceptible to disease as other plants. I notice throughout the morning that Emma interjects information, wisdom, frequently. True to the nature of these reflection times…it doesn't seem combative…and Janice doesn't try to control the conversation. A hold over from Susan's time it seems. Janice keeps saying "Thank you" when Emma offers something.

Discussion shifts to what methods are more efficient when harvesting. Kory talks about perhaps having backpacks, or front packs to make that time more efficient when gathering produce. Janice mentions maybe making an Eagle Scout project out of it.

Conversation moves again to a question from the intern handbook regarding the law that protects the growers and gleaners. Janice reviews with the group that it's not a legal concern to give food to people if it is not for sale, because it's not inspected for food safety. This covers TLA from any legal liability when people take produce, but also when people donate to TLA. During this discussion, Janice plays with a snap pea and a pea pod.

There is a question from someone about how long compost is supposed to be active before use….the answer is 120 days so that the heat can kill all the bacteria. Jill asks the question about whether manure is used. Janice says not typically. Kory's daughter asks, "Dad, what's turkey manure?" Her presence with the group seems welcome. This will be a good indication of what's to come with the Sprouts program. She interjects a lot, talks to Kory while others talk, acts like a kid. Kory knows when to walk away with her then bring her back. People are not upset by her interjections or offer sideways glances; they adore the curiosity she brings.

A joke is shared about rabbits pooping after Emma explains that they eat their food twice. Later I determine it's because Emma has a background in animal science. She mentions that she used to work on a farm where the rabbit cages were suspended above a garden space where the manure could fertilize the ground. People joke about hanging rabbits in baskets/cages and swaying them around, while walking around a property, so they can fertilize the garden.

Janice discusses how do to know when a bean is ready. Green beans want to be picked when they are long, not babies, perhaps 8-10 inches. She says, "Get them before they're too mature …watch for the white." Janice also mentions that they don't want to taste too fibery, that's when they are too mature. She passes the snap pea and peas around for people to inspect and tells the story about while working on a raspberry and strawberry farm how the farmer told her to keep tasting the produce to make sure that it is good, which is met by smiles with those present. This seems to be an important element to the work…continually interacting with the produce, tactilely, through taste, through

sight, to determine when it is ready to be plucked. Rotten or ready. You need to know when to move on…for the health of the plant.

The point is made to harvest what is past its prime so that he plant doesn't put too much energy into the other aspects of the plant. If a plant is flowering it is important to pick off so that the plant doesn't put that energy into it…or into produce from the plant that is past the prime. There's more discussion about increasing efficiency in the plant, a kind of pay it forward efficiency; you work to be efficient so that it sustains the plant, paying attention to what the plant needs in terms of harvest means being engaged in reciprocal relationship with the produce.

The discussion moves toward cutting implements. One knife looked like it was more blunt, the other more angled and sharp. Janice motioned in a straight stabbing motion with the latter about the proper way to use it…when cutting squash. Then she mentions that sometimes it is important to wash the knives between use for different varieties to maintain the integrity of the plant and prevent contamination.

Focus turns back to high-efficiency when working in the garden. Why? "Because the more efficient you are the more energy can be put toward other things/people," Emma says. Kelly chimes in and makes the claim that focus on the efficiency on the plants and harvesting leaves more time to focus on relationships with others. Janice mentions that he garden is an incubator, or a training ground for relationship-building and says, "You have to have these systems in mind." Emma, synthesizes the conversation and offers that their work is a paradigm shift, that as a nonprofit, they are not motivated by profit, but are interested in maximizing efficiency in order to maximize the quality of the produce.

Jill quickly recounts a story where a representative from Bounty and Soul, a local nonprofit that partners with TLA, came to get some food and he seemed to be in a hurry, saying things like, "Give it to me…yes we can take it." This made Jill wonder about what to do with all of the excess food…especially when there are people who need it. She felt guilt over the potential of wasting good food. To me, this brings about a constant state of mindfulness even in a garden like this about complacency with food excess and getting the timing right for distribution. Someone makes the comment that everyone deserves fresh produce.

Readiness and Ritualization

The song shared by Ali that day was ultimately about her preparation to engage in the hard work of racial equity, but I couldn't help but consider how fitting the lyrics connected to the intention approached with morning reflections and the dynamics of preparedness and community-building that saturated those discussions before entering into the work of the garden. The field notes above highlight that dynamism well. For example, the discussion on efficiency was far more than a tutorial on the importance of maximizing the time one works; instead the conversation focused on how harvesting produce reduces stress on the plant itself, allowing it to thrive more fully. By being efficient with one's time in the garden, especially when harvesting, meant the quality of the relationship between the plant and the soil, the plant and the harvester, and the plant and the food recipient could be maximized. More than this, knowing how to take and cut from a plant, and continually testing and tasting the produce was a way to give back to the plant by being attentive to *its being*, checking its health, knowing when to harvest and when not to.

With every morning reflection I observed, certain stages occurred within the ritual. The milk crates would systematically be removed from a stack on the side of the tool shed and arranged in a semi-circle by participants just outside the opening to that shed as they arrived, hence ritual objects also constructed the ritual space. I observed Susan, and during later visits, Janice, as garden manager sit on the milk crate nearest the marker board, another ritual object, with the day's activities scrawled on it. After a brief period of chatting, the conversation would move toward focus on the individual who was tasked with preparing that morning's reflection activity. As I have mentioned before, this responsibility largely shifted among the staff and crew of interns so that everyone would have an opportunity to lead. Once the reflection activity would wind down, discussion shifted to the tasks of the day noted on the marker board. Feedback was continually sought by the acting garden manger from the staff and crew about how to best accomplish those tasks. Rather than functioning as the storehouse of wisdom about such matters, the garden manager would seek out the wisdom of those present. And instead of delegating tasks to those present, the garden manager would encourage participants to choose what they wanted to do from the list of tasks. This encouraged buy-in from those present because individuals were able to choose based upon their strengths or interests how to best serve the garden space.

The morning reflections, despite their relaxed nature, pushed individuals to be mentally ready and mindful to engage with the ritual space of the garden in ritual ways with an intention in relationship-building. This relationship-building also occurred in the midst of the conversations happening as well. Notice that despite Janice's role as the garden manager and her gentle leading of discussion pulled from the internship manual,

the space created by those milk crates was a space in which everyone was invited to offer ideas about how to best enter into the garden. Morning reflections created a nonhierarchical space to share ideas, ask questions, and provide insight with the intent of honoring others' contributions while standing in solidarity with the work that was about to be undertaken. Thus morning reflections functioned as a time to be ready with one another and for the work of the garden.

There was at least one intern at The Lord's Acre who exhibited a light consternation regarding the need to "get to work" and to bypass social conversations; however, the importance of the morning ritual at TLA could not be denied. In my interview with Emma Childs we discussed morning reflections and her occasional frustrations with the ritual:

> Me: Can you speak a little more about the reflection time, and what's your perspective on that, is that something that happens every morning and I've been a part of it, last year, and before….this year, I have kind of witnessed it in different ways. What's the purpose of it do you think? Why start out every day like that?"
>
> Emma: I mean I think direct counter to the way we are often asked to start our days. So like immediately jump in to a task or to not greet and acknowledge the people around you, uhm, but I think in sitting down our eyes naturally wander to what's happening in the garden space and to each other, just to look at each other's faces and talk about potentially related to work but other than work in a task-oriented way immediately. It's funny because reflection sometimes drives me crazy like some days, I cannot believe we're doing this again, even if it is really rich and full of thoughtful discussion, there are days when I am like, we have so much to do, why are we sitting around in a circle!?! But I think that is exactly why we are doing it. And it's such a good reminder to check myself. Like what kind of energy am I bringing with me…I mean it would be easy to say, on busy days, this should not be a priority, but Susan and Janice, I think, believe it is a priority because it, again, it's a different narrative, and probably, causes us to consider how we are entering the garden.

When rituals are undertaken and suffused with a particular kind of meaning which is sustained by those who create it, simple routines undergo ritualization. Instead of simply talking with one another and reviewing the work that needs to be done in the garden, morning reflections were meant to ready the individual and the group as a whole to be attentive to each other and the garden space. Like Emma, other interns and staff, who had been active with TLA at different times throughout the garden's tenure, shared their perspectives on how the morning reflections were important for building intentional relationships with one another and the garden space itself:

Gabe Whitlock

> So every morning if there wasn't inclement weather we would get started sometime between 7:30-8:30, uhm, and generally when the summer hit it would be 7:30, just because we would want to work (Me: before it got to hot). Uh-huh, yeah. So we would get started and we'd be over on the milk crates, and we'd generally lead with some type of discussion or reflection, from some member of the crew, each member would take a different day and then it was like that person's responsibility on that day to have something prepared to speak about. And usually, like the reflections should have been limited to ten minutes, that was like the ideal, and we couldn't handle that and it would generally last at least a half an hour…And most of it was just because we were really like, high strung on crew dynamics, and making sure like, everyone is comfortable with each other, and not that you should feel deep personal things at the reflection, but mostly it was just a time to like, if you had anything on your mind of significance that might put you at risk of, you know, like, being in a bad mood or something or hard to work with or something, to lay that out, and say look, there's some, named or unnamed, there is something happening in my life and I am going to be silent today, and I am not going to say much, or maybe say something like, I had a really happy thing happen and I am just really excited, and I want to tell you all. So, it was just like, working through those dynamics.

Ali Stone

> Yeah, I feel like that was pretty integral to developing…so I think it is important for a team, the four of us really, plus our summer interns to be a community within ourselves, so have this core community, I think if there

was any big disconnect between us then that could be shown and felt throughout the work that we were doing. And we are trying to create and develop and draw in a type of community on a bigger scale right where we are living, so I think that uhm, yeah Susan had created something really important and really beautiful to be able to connect within that core group of people, who are seeing each other and working with each other every day….Uhm, yeah, I just felt very welcomed and honored in that time and space and that was carried out throughout the rest of the day I think.

Kevin Todd

Um, well I think that we were always, before we started our work, we'd always meet together as a garden crew every morning. It seems so simple, but sometimes we'd share poems, or we'd just check in with each other. But, that sense of connection I think really helped, um, helped the community because we were...The Lord's Acre is giving more than just produce to the community; it's giving itself. If it's not connected in the very most internal places of it as an organization, then that gift of itself would be not what it is, so just the very subtle, informal ways that we would connect as an intimate garden crew I think made a big difference in the way that we would affect the community.

Janice Brewer

Yeah. Uhm, we have this philosophy that we mentioned a lot in our groups and when people come that we're nonprofit, that we're not a production farm, and we value people over production. So we are focused on the growth of the interns, the growth of the people who come to the garden, and participate in the organization, uhm, and we are valuing other people's, especially our interns, other people's feedback. Giving them autonomy to make decisions, or make a decision as a group instead of just one person always making the decisions.

So that can, like train our interns, to act as a garden manager maybe they start a garden in the future, similar to ours, uhm, and it goes back to one of our core values of, uhm, wanting to change the way that we relate to each other and have a space, a brave space, where people can come and have conversations and build relationships…because growing food is not our only goal, building relationships is also a goal. Helping people see the value of themselves and the value of the work they do in the garden and that they can carry that into their future is also a goal."

Emma Childs

> A lot of times it would be just, someone would share something that they heard, or read, it was not necessarily related to the garden or even to a topic of conversation but it was a place to hear those things that people thought were important so I think it was very much a place that gave weight to things that people needed to share around others to have value. Otherwise they might think it only mattered to them or that the part of them that connected to it only mattered to them. Until they got some response from other people."

However inclusive and affirming this particular ritual was during the times I observed it, there was also a nascent set of boundaries that one needed to be careful not to transgress. In fact, as I mention in later chapters, I became interested in noting when boundaries were transgressed at the garden during its various rituals. Relationship-building was so central to the function of the garden that any words or actions that seemed to impede it were met with resistance. For example, during one morning reflection, the staff and interns were thinking over a visit from a local Asheville nonprofit, Green Opportunities that specializes in providing job training for those in marginalized communities. A field trip to TLA was organized to help participants have a better understanding of the issues regarding food insecurity as well as the importance of providing healthy foods to those in need. At one point in the visit, the group transitioned into a period of working in the garden, where lively conversations about race, food insecurity, community, and economic exploitation abounded. The following morning, we spent the reflection time largely considering the enormity of these discussions when it was clear I had transgressed an important boundary in that ritual. Below is an excerpt of that experience from my field notes.

Field Notes-8/16/19-The Lord's Acre-7:30 AM

Today's morning reflection time is spent going over the chapter on community work in the internship manual, which begins on page 29. It seems as if every Friday is devoted to a different chapter for interns to think through, and complete homework assignments in. However, it is clear that pretty much everyone has read the chapter, but not done the homework or watched the videos. The chapter revolves around different philosophies/terms regarding effective community work, including toxic charity popularized by the text of the same name by Robert Lupton (2011).[7] Emma mentions that much of this is information that she already knows, which I am sure she does. The group discusses the issues of toxic charity and Janice transitions into discussing the problems with the savior mentality of those in nonprofits. She discusses the need for individuals to see that people have resources already that can be used, not to see them as a type of individual in a perpetual state of lack. Instead, the focus needs to be on how individuals have gifts, and resources of their own to contribute, a type of self-uncovering of their worth and a mindset for those in nonprofits to see them through.

The discussion then transitions to discuss the importance of listening, and Kelly likes the quote by Larry King on page 35 of the manual, which focuses on the need for self-growth through listening. We discuss the perils of pretending while listening, and that real listening is when people allow themselves to be transformed about someone's perspective, instead of empathetic listening with your agenda in mind.

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[7] Lupton's central claim in *Toxic Charity* is that charity can become toxic when charitable enterprises focus less on developing relationships with individuals in a position of vulnerability and addressing the causes of inequity, the inequities persist and dependency develops. More about this term will be discussed below.

It was as this point that I ask Emma to reflect on the conversations that took place yesterday, starting with the large group setting that seemed somewhat chaotic. Emma looks somewhat overwhelmed thinking back through the deluge of conversation. She tells us that it was very complex and that she was unsure of her role as a mediator in that conversation, especially because the group was predominantly black and she's white. She claims that there didn't seem to be respect for one another's contributions, or self-awareness while others were speaking. Emma mentions that, on the other hand, moderated conversations have traditionally been the spaces where white female teachers have leveraged most of the power, so that added to her hesitance as well to redirect the conversation. We reflect on how sometimes conversation in different cultural/ethnic groups can look so different. At the end of the discussion, Emma apologizes for talking too much and transitions into a comment that she hopes for more relational building in the future with the group.

We move onto the discussion question on page 33 regarding hierarchies (What values and hierarchies do we assign?), and Kelly mentions that the group seemed to be really focused on the lack of community discussion, that we value money more than we value community, that we value working hard and monetary means primarily. As we recount the conversation from the group, I somewhat interject a comment I heard one of the participants from Green Opportunities make ("I'm talking fish fries, barbeques, we don't have that anymore!") and this seems to make Kelly lose her train of thought, very visibly. I realize I am talking too much and begin to jot in silence. It feels as if I am catching somewhat stern glances from Emma, although I am not sure how intentional

they are. This seems to be a nonverbal boundary, in a sense. Emma and others are always very careful to walk-back if they start speaking before someone is finished….

It can be easy to dismiss Emma's glances as frustration because I had unintentionally interrupted Kelly's train of thought. However, I notice an awareness that she displays earlier in the field notes of offering too much to the discussion during the morning reflection, likely conveying a fear of dominating the conversation and how conscious I note others are about not interrupting someone's thought. After this brief interaction, I began to see discussions during morning reflections and the work of the garden in a different light. Too much involvement by one person within a conversation limited the ability for others to provide their contributions to the discussion and could potentially make relationship-building more difficult, especially within the context of morning reflections. Thus, listening was just as important a tool at relationship-building in the morning reflection as offering your own perspective about the subject of those reflections. Too much verbal interaction by a few altered the balance of the group dynamic. The intention with which people entered into this ritual every morning moved far beyond the ordinary expectations of respectful conversation or the normal quid-pro-quo of everyday talk.

Morning Reflections as Celebratory Ceremony

The morning reflections I observed form a unique confluence of Grimes' notion of ceremony and celebration (2013). Recall that ceremony is a ritual event where individuals play prescribed roles in a group dynamic for a larger purpose and are

conscientious about how to act to the extent that stepping outside of such expected roles can procure criticism from those within the group. My inadvertent incursion over the boundary of the morning reflection and Emma's own self- awareness at her perceived control of the conversation helped me to reorient my understanding of the ritual as a routine with understood roles and expectations. While conversation and feedback were always sought in the routine, it was always better to sit and offer too little than offer too much to the conversation in that shared space; the former disposition allowed space for others to grow in relationship whereas the latter did not. This is why I received a non-verbal rebuffing in the form of Emma's stern glance. I appreciate Grimes' characterization of ceremony in the following excerpt:

> Ceremony invites the participant to surrender idiosyncrasies and independence for some larger cause, for which one is willing to fight, die, or pay homage. This cause is not only considered righteous, it is legally enforced and therefore binding under direct threat. Nevertheless, participants are expected to give themselves to it not only willingly but even joyously. Whereas decorum is usually regarded as secondary, or at least unofficial, importance and is a means of expressing one's character and recognizing other participants in the occasion (Goffman, 1967, p. 54), ceremony has imperative force. Ceremony symbolizes respect for the offices, histories, and causes that are condensed into its gestures, objects, and actions. (2013, pp. 41-42)

When offering this category, Grimes had in mind ceremonies such as the Pledge of Allegiance, where there is a rich social history and power that accompanies a particular ritual and individuals are expected to conform to their respective role within the rite for a cause rooted in socio-political drama. The morning reflection does not seem to rise to such a serious level, but it does distinguish itself from the face-to-face interactions of everyday decorum--the expected handshake or the apology for passing in front of someone gazing at the contents of a shelf at the grocery store. However, the collective

intention and expectations woven into the activity of the morning reflection was a decidedly symbolic and counter-cultural way of approaching the work of the garden.

Yet at the same time, the morning reflection was a time of communal, playful, spontaneity, where much like Grimes' notion of celebration, creative responses from participants are encouraged (2013). There were alternating roles of leading the morning reflection and the form of the reflection activity was usually a mystery to those present until the activity was underway. The unspoken rule was that everyone present should be game to engage in the activity or discussion to deepen our understanding of each other and the work at hand. Whether reflecting on the poems of Mary Oliver, writing a collective message to a former intern who was studying abroad, discussing our vivid dreams, contemplating the lyrics of Appalachia Rising, or making art together, those moments before entering into the work of the garden were saturated with creativity. And this seemed more than necessary to be ready to work a plot of land teeming with its own creativity.

More than this, actively considering the important presence of one another created an ethos of trust and reciprocity, in the midst of an unknown activity, that plumbed the depth of what it meant to be in relationship to one another, and to enjoy the work that was about to be undertaken. The morning reflection acted as a form of resistance to the cultural narrative of throwing oneself into work to maximize the quantity of the tasks accomplished, and instead formed a counter-cultural practice that emphasized the quality of the work as correlated to the quality of the intention behind it. Note as well that the conversation focused on the negligence that can accompany toxic charity. In *Toxic Charity* (2011), Upton argues that top-down charitable giving only exacerbates socio-

economic power dynamics and such giving is hardly focused on building relationships; this is in large part because meeting the immediate needs of the vulnerable is less intensive than cultivating actual relationships. By focusing on the dangers of toxic charity, the morning reflection became an exercise in building relationship with one another through the active consideration of what it means to build relationships with community members.

Aside from my field notes on morning reflections, I also traced emerging themes while coding interviews with staff and interns at the garden who discussed what the ritual meant to them personally. The themes arising from these attitudes and reminiscences about the morning reflection ritual can be found in Table 2. I've attempted to synthesize those themes and define the morning reflection in the following way:

The morning reflection functions as a celebratory ceremony. Morning reflections are a counter-cultural ritual that invites individuals to give of themselves in a largely spontaneous, creative, group activity that honors the value of each person through mutual sharing and intentional relationship-building, so as to create a space where a microcosmic sense of community can be continually revisited, readied, and extended toward the work of the garden.

TABLE 2-Coding and Emerging Themes from Morning Reflections

- **A. Focus on the importance of the personal being valued, in the midst of the group, the person is held up/ leadership shifts**
- **B. Necessary tension of work/reflection as counter-cultural**
- **C. Growing relationships, growth of people**
- **D. Growth of people/relationships as gift for the community**
- **E. More than food**
- **F. Mystery- A ritual that is expected, but the presentation of which is unexpected- it is this uncertainty that brings them in, helps to create the space**

Emma- C. Depth/ A. Necessary for the people/ A. Weight to what needs sharing around others to have value/ A.Ease of the personal being important

Claire- B. Counter-cultural/ A. Eyes naturally wander to what's happening in the garden space and to each other/ A. Look in to each others' faces / B. It's a different narrative, and probably causes us to consider how we are entering into the garden/ B.Tension of getting to work, but pausing for reflection, connecting

Janice- C. Spending equal time in the garden as they do checking in with one another/ A. We value people over production/ C. Growth of people/ E. Joint-decision making, feedback/ C. Wanting to change the way we relate to each other/ C.A space, a brave space, where people can come and have conversations and build relationships/ C. Food is not our only goal, building relationships is also a goal/ A. Seeing value in themselves and the work they do [sharing something] bringing their own ideas/ D. to relate to one another- agency in the sharing of the self, for the community

Kevin- D. The connection of reflection as gift to the community/ E. "The Lord's Acre is giving more than just produce to the community;/ D. it's giving itself."/ D. The subtle, informal ways, affects the community E. More than growing food/ F. There's something bigger that's happening

Ali- E. Really good balance [activities]/ F. Unexpected activities, and leadership/ E. Interesting space that was created/ A. Inexplicable
Trust, not scary, open, inviting / A.I felt welcomed and honored

Gabe-B. Work reflection tension/ C. Debrief/ A. Comfort level/ A. Offering what was on your mind/ A. Permission of silence/ C. Dynamics

Chapter 5: Working with the Garden

Almost two months to the day after I had attended the garden's June board meeting, I began a week-long stay at The Lord's Acre during August of 2019. However, I learned in the interim that the name change alluded to during that last visit had come to fruition. The Lord's Acre had changed its name to Root Cause Farm.[8] While I was not privy to the delicacies of this decision, I came to find later that it was the product of months of considerable consternation and debate. The board had ultimately decided on moving forward with a name that was less religious sounding because it was afraid that too many people may associate the garden with an organization that espoused a particular set of religious beliefs that may be geared toward evangelism. In the interests of promoting the image of a nonprofit that encouraged people of all political, religious, or non-religious backgrounds to come to it, the board decided on a name that was unmistakably secular. Some faith-based community organizations from Fairview were reportedly less than thrilled with this transition. Yet the name Root Cause Farm elicited a renewed focus on educating others about the root causes of food insecurity through sustained conversation and in order to encourage more discussion about such issues in the garden space, a decidedly secular name was warranted in the mind of many.

Following discussion of the morning reflection, I want to offer accounts of the cultivated intention toward the garden that such a routine manifests itself in the actual work within the garden space. Below, I offer excerpts of the garden work I engaged in

over the course of three successive mornings and how they interrelate to one another. The first focuses upon the initial steps needed to prep a garden bed, from weeding, breaking up the ground, and securing a solarizing sheet to kill any harmful bacteria in the soil. The following morning I focused on harvesting tomatoes while the solarizing sheet was trapping heat and readying the soil for planting. The third excerpt centers on the meticulous arrangement of organic ingredients needed to make a productive garden bed and the planting process itself.

What I garnered from these experiences was surprising. I had assumed that once I began working in the garden, I would easily be able to draw out the ritual categorizations of each discrete form of work; such assumptions were entirely misplaced. Instead I discovered that the work of the garden was highly individualized at times and more reactive to the needs of the day. However, as I paid attention to the symbolic language that accompanied work in the garden, I began to notice that the garden itself was treated like a fellow participant, a fellow worker. Most importantly, observed that the positive attitude intentionally cultivated between those of us working in the garden was the same attitude that was brought to the work in and with the garden in the form of a ritualized ceremony.

Bed Prepping: Part 1

Field Site Visit- Root Cause Farm- August, 13th, 2019- Mid-Morning

After I finish an interview, Janice asks what work I would prefer and asks if I have any restrictions regarding my back. She offers that I can either sit and pull out weeds or stand. She remembers that I mentioned the long car ride and a stiff back

yesterday. I tell her to use me however I can be of help and she tells me I can use the stirrup hoe to clear and weed the pathways before prepping a bed for beets and kale.[9] Janice shows me the flats on the north side of the tool shed. We'll plant a mixture of beets and kale because, and Janice explains it, the plants are very similar and that is easier on the soil, and better then for the plants. I'm grateful that I didn't forget gloves. I chose a pair with white fabric but blue rubber on the palms and fingers. They feel nice, snug, and tight; I punch one hand into the palm of the other like I am getting ready to fight someone. Pretty much totally out of place in a garden that promotes peace and inclusivity.

When I make my way over to the west side of the garden, where we were yesterday, Emma offers me a small yellow flower (spilanthes) that reminds me of a yellow raspberry gummy candy that my Mom likes. She tells me that it is a special plant that helps individuals who have oral pain. She's taking one because she's afraid she has chipped a tooth after biting into an olive that had a pit in it. She apologizes because she says she'll be spitting for a while because the flower induces saliva to flow as well. She pulls back a little bit, indicating I don't need to take it if I don't want to, and I tell her I want to try it. She tells me to chew it for a little while and it will induce a sense of numbness for a couple of minutes. I put it in my mouth and begin to chew. Almost instantaneously, it feels like my mouth is being attacked by a horde of small bees but the stings are blunt and numbing. The taste is very bitter, and it is overwhelming to the point

[9] A stirrup hoe is a gardening implement that resembles a typical garden hoe, but at the bottom there is a metal piece that resembles the shape of a stirrup found on a horse saddle. The inside edge of this stirrup contains metal teeth, and the stirrup itself swings at the bottom of the hoe. The stirrup swings back when it strikes the ground, and the teeth pull the earth and any weeds it encounters.

of nausea; after a moment I start saying things like, “Whoa! Oh, my God!” while laughing and starting to spit. Emma smiles, turns down the row as she gets back to work and says, “Yeah, swish it around a little bit.” I do and my whole mouth feels as if it is asleep, as if it is a leg whose circulation has been cut off, but I am still able to talk, albeit uncomfortably. After a short while, she says, “Okay, you can probably spit it out now, it’s been over a minute.”

I try to maintain some kind of composure while babbling on about how unexpected that experience was as I still process the effects. Before I begin weeding, I help the crew pull up fine netting that was placed over a bed by first removing the metal pins that helped to secure the plastic tubes on either side of the covering which held it down. Then, we picked up the plastic tubes. Soon after, Emma rolls the netting up. As I begin with the stirrup hoe, I notice there are less weeds for me to address today than yesterday. I move through them rather quickly. I feel the red earth crunching under my feet. The hoe itself is clanging in a kind of rhythm as it swings back in forth with each swipe to the ground, as the dirt is pulled up. I find I am breathing in rhythm with the movement of the implement and that I’m sweating now. When I need to, I lean over and pull up the larger weeds by hand, and any others that might be near the bed, where the use of a stirrup hoe would disturb the integrity of that soil. The motion means my back is not as tight as before. In any instance, I am careful to shake out the soil from the weeds back into the garden bed itself as I’ve been encouraged to do, and as I’ve watched others imitate.

As I move down the side of the bed where Janice is at, I hear a discussion about the cabbages, and how poorly they’ve grown. There is some concern that perhaps they

were over-weeded, over watered, or perhaps when they were planted that had rooted to much already. Janice motions Kelly to come over and take a look. She uses the time to educate her about those possible reasons. It seems that if the roots aren't planted early enough, they don't connect with the soil. I notice that they have been casting small cabbages out into the walkway at the end of the bed. I asked if they'll be used and Janice says, yeah, but not for market. She tells Kelly to take some and Kelly said that she'll make some sauerkraut out of them. To which Janice replies, "Yeah!"

Janice is always replying exuberantly to the interns and to me. If she approves of an idea, or wants to offer encouragement, she cheers. More on this "posture" later. I need to give myself permission to write after loading up a full wheelbarrow of weeds, but I have a guilty conscience that wants to see the work get done, and to ensure that I won't be seen as some kind of slacker. When I tell Emma I'll be back after doing some writing, she tells me, "Thanks for all you're you're hoeing." I can only tell her she's welcome. .

I recall that as I was using the stirrup hoe, Kelly had joined us with a hand spade to weed, after watering the beets on the east side of the garden which I know she enjoys based upon my interview with her. Prior to this, Emma had thanked her for doing so. This is something I have taken notice of here. There are almost no deprecating words being spoken. Ever. If there are, it is someone making a comment about themselves, but even then, as in the case when Janice was under the false impression that Emma was doubting her abilities as a teacher, she said, "There's that self-doubt again!" This must be part of the mantra of people over production. The importance of making the individual feel valued is always evident here. Janice's exclamations are part of this too. The encouragement of feedback, of sharing in a creative exchange, all of these are words

that help to create the ritual space. These ways of communicating are intentional, habitual. There are not demands, but encouragement. Not anger, but positive redirection. People grow here, not just plants.

My hands smell bitter from the gloves, a mixture of dirt and sweat from my and previous hands. All of the implements and tools can be understood as ritual objects passed down to participants. By the time I return, the bed has been weeded. The ground needs to be broken with the U-Bar, which I readily accept doing. [10] Emma tells me I can do the whole bed. I remember using it at the same place in the garden during my first visit here, years before. I strike the center of the tool with my left foot, holding onto both poles on each side of it as it sinks into the ground, and I pull back, and break the ground up. I notice grubs and crickets crawl out after the initial dig. As I work down the bed, I smell death and decay. I work up a great sweat while getting into the rhythm and conversing with Kelly, who has joined me, about her time in Italy and her fondness for sparkling water. I take this time to discuss what is off limits at the garden. Kelly tells me the only thing she's noticed is not to step on the beds, a continual theme I need to come back to. I need to pay attention to this during the groups in the next couple of days. Also, she mentions that sometimes kids will pull parts off of plants that they're not supposed to. I discuss how I feel guilty sometimes taking time to write when there is work to be done, and Emma says "We support you!" (Again with the positive words!) The restriction talk happens before the talk about Italy.

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[10] A U-Bar is an implement that consists of two long handles, about 4 foot in length, set shoulder-width apart, and connected to either side of a metal piece that resembles the bottom of a pitchfork, that is about two-and-a-half feet in length.

As Kelly takes a break to get some water, I have to tell myself to slow down and have fun with this work. I take more time with the U-Bar, standing with both feet on it and gradually leaning back with both hands and falling back. I take time to enjoy it, but be efficient. As I finish, I tell Emma I would love to break up beds in an entire garden. Sweat is dripping off my nose and it feels great.

Next, Emma tells me it would be a great help if I could water the bed and then, perhaps when she is done with her task (not sure what it is) we could cover the bed. She tells me that the plastic is used either to trap heat or to trap moisture. The black side is used to trap heat, which is more typical for colder months. She shows me how to water the beds, how much to soak them. I ask if I should keep the nozzle from the spout turned up as she has, and she says it doesn't matter, but it is better for the bed to be gravity fed with water as opposed to soaked the other way. After she turns on the water at a spigot near the beds, I try to be conscious of the water flowing through the hand nozzle. It is powerful, and spreads out like a flower on the ground. I gently move it from side to side, offering a good blanket of water over each portion of the bed before moving on. It seems meditative in a way, there's a rhythm to it, as if I am conducting. The motions are careful and I close my eyes to feel the water, the motion, the swaying. When I reach the end of the bed, I make circular motions back over the bed so water doesn't flood the walkways and is used where it will be needed most. I am more conscious of preserving the resource for its purpose. It's like I am preparing something special. I jot down the bed preparation process thus far:

How to Prep a Bed:

1. Uncover the netting which is held down by plastic poles along the side of the bed and long, metal, u-shaped pins in the ground. The netting is used to reduce the prevalence of pests in the garden bed.
2. Roll up the netting
3. Weed the bed and the pathways. Return extracted soil from the weeds and the pathway back to the bed to prevent soil erosion
4. Use the U-Bar to break up the bed.
5. Water significantly with the spout turned up so that he bed is watered by gravity, not by deluge.
6. Secure the moisture in the bed by placing a plastic tarp over it, thus keeping it from drying out. This process is known as solarizing. Helps to warm up and kill all the harmful bacteria that might be in the soil before the next crop is planted.

Analysis

Maintaining the integrity of the soil was paramount during these activities. Removing the weeds from the pathway with the stirrup hoe and from the garden bed kept the soil from diverting its nutrients anywhere else than to the plants that would eventually be planted there. It's also notable that the common practice of weeding at the garden included shaking any soil from the roots of the weeds and returning it to the garden bed; these small acts helped to prevent soil erosion and actively saw the soil as a resource that should not simply be discarded. The same can be said for how I was instructed to water the bed. Dousing the bed with water directly from the hose nozzle could have induced

more soil erosion and oversaturated the ground. However, turning the nozzle upward allowed gravity to more evenly distribute the water as it arched out of the hose as I moved it back and forth over the soil. The attitude of efficiency, which was noted in the last chapter, had also taken root in me. Yet, at the same time, I found myself trying to enjoy the work while keeping up a well-managed pace. Using the U-Bar to break into the bed, and falling backward with it to break up the bed and better expose the soil to the coming water and work of the solarizing sheet, helped me feel more connected to the ground itself. A more detailed reflection on my reaction to the spilanthes and the encouragement bandied about between the interns and staff will occur later.

Harvesting

Field Site Visit- August 14th-Root Cause Farm- 7:30 AM

I arrive shortly before Janice and Kelly, but Emma is tending to the winter squash on the west side of the garden, on the other side of the gravel road, and I go over to talk to her about that produce. They take ten weeks to grow, so they won't be ready until the fall. Soon, Janice, Kelly, and Ali arrive. We all sit around and chat for a moment. Janice mentions that she had been up early because of a nightmare she had about a shooting that happened. We're all stunned speechless. Janice tries to keep a positive attitude and Ali asks, "This was last night?" And Janice says, "Yeah."

Emma mentioned as a side note that she noticed that a drip had some holes in it, probably from squirrels looking for water when the weather was dryer, but she had cut the line and fixed it. The discussion about more harvest occurs because the organization, Bounty and Soul, will be by later in the morning to pick up their produce. Janice wants

the rest of the celery to go. Everyone's wearing either boots or sandals, and honestly either of those seem better than the soggy shoes I am wearing, after they had been left outside during a morning/evening shower during the night. I also notice, for some reason, my belt buckle is undone. I get self-conscious of this and tug my green hiking shirt over my fly to conceal it.

Janice is working through the produce list, trying to determine what needs to be picked and how much. Then Emma reminds us that some needs to be saved for Green Opportunities on Thursday to harvest. Janice adjusts her list a little bit to reflect this. She focuses on harvesting leeks, garlic, parsley, peppers and basil. She suggests tackling the herb list after the morning group leaves. Now, everyone is choosing what they want, again. I get green tomatoes. Everyone takes turns choosing about two crops they want to harvest.

Janice shows me where to harvest the tomatoes from. First she shows me the overgrown vines near the small children's hut in the children's garden. She pulls one and displays its deep purple color and hands it to me. She tells me that these are really sweet and to grab whichever ones are ready. As we move to the other tomato plants, about three rows east of the children's garden, she tells me that I can pull whatever green tomatoes I want, provided that they are a good size. The smallest one she holds up is about the size of a racquet ball. The row next to it is a row of tomatoes that are typical red tomatoes, but many of them haven't turned yet. She tells me to get whichever ones have fallen onto the ground, off the vine. As she walks away I taste the tomato. It is juicy, sweet, a tad bitter. Soon I feel my acid reflux returning from the night before.

After she hands me a black, rectangular tray, I put it down in front of me, and begin to crawl carefully, inspecting each green tomato plant. The scent of the plants are overpowering. The smell is strong, somewhat bittersweet, and it fills my nostrils. The leaves on all of the plants are wet, but the black tarp I am crawling on is mostly dry. I am not sure why the plants are covered, but a hole is cut out of the black tarp for the plants to grow through. When I pull a tomato from the vine, I grasp the vine between my index and middle finger, then gently pull down with my thumb wrapped around the fruit. The work is slow and methodical. Looking for each tomato, under each plant, is like gingerly lifting the arm of a sleeping kid hoping to find the remote. I am careful not to disturb the vines too much, and curse myself when I move a vine and I hear a small crack, meaning I have bent the stem too far. But the plants are heavy and difficult to move well. The ripening tomatoes remain and weigh down each vine, which makes finding the ready tomatoes that much more difficult without hurting the plant itself. As I make my way to the last five yards of green tomatoes, I become self-conscious about disrupting the soil, the beds too much by crawling. So, I stand, and hang at the hips like I am imitating a hunched over gorilla to pick the remaining tomatoes. Interestingly, this is a more comfortable stance, it's easier to move from side to side while plucking tomatoes. I work down the same row on the opposite side of the plants, without finding many other tomatoes ready to be harvested.

I work up and down the other row of tomatoes adopting the stance I took before, but only finding rotten tomatoes on the ground, which I also toss in the basket, unsure if having such tomatoes in the garden actually keeps pests off the healthier tomatoes or not. Emma thanks me for doing so after I inquire and tells me that we'll sort the bad ones out

later. The cherry tomatoes are much wetter overall; it's like sifting through vines in the jungle with the care of thumbing through a rack of clothes at a vintage store looking for the best deal. Every vine is a vertical cityscape and with each new perspective taken, a different borough reveals itself. I find at least twenty easy to pick, reddish, purple tomatoes. They pop off easily. I toss them into the black crate, in their own corner. I chose to pick these last so that they weren't crushed by the larger tomatoes. As with the green tomatoes, there are some that are rotten or eaten through. Signs that there is so much life in this garden. I am reminded of my time at the sisters of St. Francis, in Oldenburg, IN. I spent much of my time there either weeding tomato plants, harnessing more strings for the plants to grow on, or spreading out newspaper to stem the tide of weeds it seems. That time seems like a lifetime ago. I went there during a tumultuous time in my life, a season of being consumed with the PhD program, being a relatively new father, and feeling uncertain about the future. I had just started to recognize that I needed an outlet to deal with stress that something unexpected was happening to me. Looking back, this was the time of my emerging anxiety, and perhaps the start of my depression. Something about the work of being out in a garden space, I found comforting. Sometimes I worked with others, or at least near others, but I liked the work by myself as well. I would easily sunburn during those days in June, but I didn't care. It was a space to be, to listen to the wind in my ears instead of the doubts in my mind.

Analysis

As I retrace these field notes again, I am struck by how much I assumed an ethos of mindfulness regarding my interactions with the soil, plants, and their produce. And mindful is precisely the word that fits those interactions; I was keenly attentive to how

my actions were impacting the ecosystem around me and what the repercussions of those actions might be. Recall the frustration I felt when inadvertently breaking a vine. Notice that I worked through a fair amount of experimentation to determine the most efficient way in which to harvest the tomatoes, and that those methods differed based upon the types of tomatoes I need to harvest. Cognizant of how crawling along the ground may be compacting the soil too much, I adopted a harvesting posture that is minimally invasive to the organisms themselves and also happened to be easier on my back.

Yet at the same time I was focused on the needs of the garden. Harvesting also encouraged an attitude of appreciation, wonder, and play as I worked to discern what produce was ready to be collected as I thumbed through their vines. I found this volley between mindsets of focused efficiency and wonder remarkable, and rewarding, because it felt less like work and more like relationship-building.

Bed Prepping: Part 2

Field Site Visit- August 15th, 2019-Root Cause Farm- 7:25 AM

As I pull in, I realize that everyone is early and working to prep a bed, and have most likely been at it since 7:00 AM. Emma waves to me from the garden once the car rolls past the crew. After I make my way to them in the western edge of the garden, I see they are tending to prep the bed we worked on earlier. I apologize and tell them I would have been here earlier, but Janice smiles and says it's something they kind of just decided. My best guess is that because Emma and Kelly were gone for the volunteer night the evening before, Janice asked if they would come a little early to prep a garden

bed because of the busy day ahead, and that she didn't want to bother me with getting there earlier.

Near the bed, the white solarizing sheet that was on the bed is laid out to dry, and at the edge of it, on the top of the hill, is Janice's tent and sleeping bag. I notice she is in the same clothes from yesterday and I'm envious she got to spend the night under the North Carolina sky in the garden. I quickly set to work with a potato fork, working with Janice and Emma to break up the clods while also trying to fluff the dirt in the bed. I make the comment that breaking up the soil reminds me of trying to break up clumps of ground beef in the way that the soil looks, which gets a laugh from the crew. Soon, Emma and I are using the measuring tool (a four foot, u-shaped bar taken from some other implement) on either side of the bed to mark off a width of four feet and planting flags to mark the boundaries of the bed. Soon, though, my family calls me to talk to me about our Mari's first day back to speech therapy. She's our middle child, three years old, and extroverted. She is happy but, given her personality, unusually nervous about going back to see her speech therapist. After I reassure her multiple times and say goodbye, Katy tells me she's nervous because it is hard for her to say the "K" sound, no matter how hard she tries. It's difficult to shift back into work mode again. My heart is in ribbons.

Janice asks me to get a wheelbarrow full of compost at the front of the garden. As I break into the pile of compost, Mari is on my mind, but I am trying to be efficient. The black mound of compost I am shoveling from reminds me of breaking up a large Oreo cookie. Pushing the full wheelbarrow back up the hill to the bed is very demanding work, and I struggle to keep the wheelbarrow from tipping over. At this point, the crew

has shoveled up a thin layer of dirt from the walkways on either side of the bed, to return the soil to the bed, but also minimize soil erosion. Soon a good layer of compost is spread on the very top of the bed, and Emma is close behind with the nitrogen mix, or as they refer to it as, an "amendment." I am astounded to find out the ingredients of these amendments, given their respective names. Emma tells me that they are using bone meal, which is ground up bone with phosphorus, gypsum, potash, and azurite. The nitrogen itself comes from the ground up bone, whereas blood ash comes from dehydrated animal blood. Although an organically viable way to increase nitrogen resources in the soil, the practice strikes me as a type of old sorcery, using ground up animal bones to help plants grow. The amendment look like little white pellets of ice during a strange snowstorm, and Emma spreads them with care down the bed, while Janice works the compost, amendment, and soil together into a dark brown mixture. Emma discusses how industrialized nitrogen came about after the US had a surplus in the product after WWII, which the government then subsidized for use in industrial agriculture, so nitrogen sprays have paved the way for modern agriculture as a result of the military-industrial complex.

After Janice rakes the amendment mix and the dirt together, then Emma takes the long rake and gently moves back and forth over the raised bed, like a Zen sand garden, which she mentions she finds deeply satisfying. Kelly says that she thinks it looks so pretty. I ask the three what their attitudes are like while doing this work and their answers very. Janice finds the work to be strategic, necessary, but satisfying aesthetically, comfortable in the knowledge that he bed is welcoming and inviting to the plants to grow. Kelly is much the same way, perhaps more ambivalent in her response.

She doesn't seem to know what to say. She mentions that it's hard work but it's basically nice to see that it is done, that it is necessary work.

Emma's attitude is much different. She likes the rhythm, and finds the work to be grounding in a sense, focused on the deeply felt potential of what may come, especially when using the rake to finish the bed. She recalls being taught this method at an earlier garden by someone, and when she was teaching her how to do it, and when she was embodying the action, she had this sensation of ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response), a low grade euphoric feeling, noted by psychologists. This all goes to show that despite the ritual, it can function differently for those involved. The intention of the ritual may be the same, and end result, but the subjective experience during it can be different per person, in religious traditions, or secular spaces. I wonder how the rituals I have observed relate to Turner's rites of passage, structure, anti-structure, and then structure. As my mind wanders, I hear them talking about the moon cycles, and how this is actually not the best time to be planting beets because it was a full moon last night. I am worried I won't have the capacity to get to know all of these intricacies in enough time.

After the bed is prepped, Janice brings up a hand cart full of flats of beet and kale starts, which are from the same family. I am instructed how to lay the plants out, and how to plant them. I am told the starts should be arranged in a diamond pattern, (rows of 5, then 4, then 5) etc. The starts should be gently pulled out where the stem meets the soil, the excess stems and dead leaves should be removed (there should only be two stems to increase the chance of survival?). Next, the bottom of the start should be pulled apart, where the soil has been formed into a tight square, so that the roots have a better chance

of spreading out. This was the issue with the cabbages before, whose roots went too far down, without spreading out enough. To plant, dig down with a couple of fingers, place the start inside the hole and then gently pad the soil around the base of the plant, press down firmly. And so begins a long ordeal of planting, which is awkward, time consuming, and ultimately stressful.

My reaction and process: My conversation in the midst of this planting clearly gets in the way. I want to build relationship/rapport while hopefully getting to the heart of some of my research questions, but it is getting in the way of the process. I can tell that the crew is being polite, but I'm not necessarily redirected. It's the first time I have felt rushed. I'm crawling on all fours, not kneeling like everyone else, and it's ineffective. My knees are hurting and I am starting to sweat. I do enjoy breaking apart the bottoms of the starts because it feels like I am popping a small water balloon. All the moisture in them trickles down in big drops.

Their reactions: Emma takes up more space for her plants on her side, moves much faster, and I can tell there's a stoicism in this once very talkative and reflective gardener, perhaps even frustration at my pace. The continual correction regarding my patterns comes from Kelly who's planting after me, saying, "Wait, this row is off." This is said multiple times and I apologize. Janice seems largely indifferent and overall welcoming, although she does say, "It's hard to do this work while talking." I am sure this comment is meant to make me feel more at ease due to my missteps, but it can largely be interpreted as a silent plea to be quiet.

Towards the end of the bed planting, we have a conversation about favorite places travelled before Janice and Kelly move on to another task. Emma and I are left to finish

the bed. Some of the starts are pretty weak, so when you pick them up, the stems pull out of the soil in the flat. She teaches me how to pinch the bottom of the flat in order to pull the start up and it works well. I also start to stand up during the last third of the bed and begin planting like I was standing when picking tomatoes the day before and the method works much more comfortably, efficiently. Emma mentions that she sees planting and bed prep the same way that she's making way for something, and at times, she'll sing to seeds/starts that she's planting. Once we're done, I break away to jot down notes before the group comes. They soon arrive.

Analysis

From the excerpt above, it is easy to discern that my propensity for conversation transgressed a boundary very similar to that of the morning reflection. However, this time I was not sharing too much and thus inhibiting others from sharing their thoughts. What I had interceded upon though was the same sense of mindfulness, or intention, to the work that I relished when harvesting tomatoes. While the measuring of the bed, spreading of the compost, the distribution of the amendment, and so on had progressed smoothly, the interactive and detailed pattern of planting the beets and kale was disrupted by my chatter. Recall Kelly's frustration at the spacing of the rows and Emma's cool demeanor during the activity. Also, note Janice's polite redirection at the difficulty of focusing on the task at hand when conversation occurs. Going over these field notes again, put me back in the headspace of that morning. My attempts at conversation were also personal efforts to try to distract others from noticing my body's difficulty conforming to the demands of the task, which were so detail-oriented. The work of the U-Bar felt like play, while planting the starts felt more like wiring a house in that it was

an intricate activity that demanded precision with the potential for utter failure. After all, if the starts were not planted well enough, the produce may have difficulty taking root. If the beets were not spaced out well enough, the starts could compete for nutrients with each other and thus become under-developed.

On top of all of this, I was beginning to fundamentally question the usefulness of my research questions, as well as my interview questions. This is largely due to the fact that I began noticing just how variable individuals' attitudes were to the routine work that they completed in the garden. For Emma, planting was somewhat liturgical, for Kelly hard but necessary, and for Janice aesthetically pleasing. The lack of uniformity in these responses was not necessarily surprising, but their answers did frustrate my hopes of developing cohesive ritual categorizations regarding their attitudes toward the work of the garden. Similarly, my own experiences working in the garden over that three day period vacillated between a sense of play (similar to Grimes' notion of celebration), mindful action when harvesting, and ultimately exasperation when planting.

However, I began to notice that there was uniformity regarding the intentionality of the work in the garden which seemed to stem from and connect with the organization's morning reflections. That cultivated sense of purpose to the work and the garden space itself transcended the attitudes of the staff and interns. There was an understanding that the work itself had special meaning despite what one's attitude toward it might be. That is while we all may have different reactions to the work of bed preparation, there did seem to be a cohesiveness regarding the heightened meaning of the work. Aside simply envisioning the impact the work may have on those who might benefit from the harvested

produce, the heightened meaning of the work stemmed principally from seeing the garden itself as a collaborator with whom RCF worked.

Ritualization- Garden as Ritual Space/ Ritual Actor

What I came to realize was that too often ritual, at least in my understanding, has been focused upon the objects and actions that inhabit ritual processes. However, as I came to work more consistently in the garden, I understood that the process of gardening was ritualized not in relation to the work itself, but in relation to the health and vibrancy of the garden. The layers of meaning woven into the mindset cultivated during morning reflections was not focused upon the staff or interns' relationship to the *work* of the garden, but upon the relationship between those participants and the garden *as a participant* as well. Hence, the garden was both ritual actor and ritual space.

The garden functioned as a laboratory to practice the techniques of community-building that RCF attempted to perpetuate. As noted earlier, RCF was ever mindful of disrupting the giver-receiver paradigm within a largely capitalistic culture, in which exchange through financial means is typically emphasized. For RCF, food insecurity was a social issue that systemically disenfranchises those without the financial means, and the stigma of being food insecure carries its own strain on community relations. RCF worked hard not only to educate others about issues surrounding food insecurity, but also to invite individuals into community, food insecure or not, in order to see in what ways they could collaborate with the organization.

Far from being seen as a resource to be utilized simply for the purposes of the organization, the garden is seen as an active collaborator that must be respected and cared

for in order to literally cultivate its potential. The garden has its own biodynamic work to do, and that work must be respected. This is why I, along with other visitors to the garden, had been cautioned repeatedly—and ritually—to stick to the pathways and not to kneel on garden beds. Compacting the soil would threaten its ability help produce grow. Similarly, this is why shaking out loose soil from pulled weeds and shoveling dirt back into beds before prepping was so integral to the work of the garden. Likewise, using gravity fed watering by turning the hose nozzle upward to mimic rainfall was suggested by Emma before placing the solarizing sheet on a garden bed.

RCF did not grow produce in the garden. RCF grew produce *with* the garden. And it was the spirit of this collaboration that ritualized the work with the soil of the garden and its plants. Morning reflections functioned as a means through which to develop and refine a sense of community before entering into the garden, so that the garden could be incorporated into that sense of communal work, and thus into community with those who stepped within it.

Grimes offers a helpful characterization of ritual spaces as constructed and geographical spaces:

> Rituals happen in settings, geographical environments that are "there," but they also happen on constructed sets used to frame them. The set of a ritual is an artifact, no such thing as either an absolute given or construction out of nothing. As a given, a ritual environment precedes and exceeds the ritual itself; it is a force field encircling a ritual, those who enact it, and even those who study it. As an artifact, a ritual set is built of all sorts of things, some of it tangible, some of it conceptual, thereby

> transforming the given to the made over…Just as ritualists select actions for rituals, so authors construct ritual descriptions by hunting for causes that determine their shape, looking for their consequences, and mapping their connections and disconnections to the surrounding environment. (Grimes, 2014, p. 259)

Far from simply understood within the context of religious architecture, ritual spaces can easily be any geographical or constructed location where rituals are enacted. The garden at RCF was a mixture of both. It was a geographical location that has been, in Grimes' words, "made over" (2014, p. 259), or modified for the purposes of the organization. Beds were prepped, pathways established, loose fences constructed etc. Similarly, the ritual space maintained its presence before, during, and after produce had been planted and harvested. Yet because the activities that happened within its confines were uniquely contingent upon the life and productivity of the ground itself, the garden was at once a ritual space and ritual actor, biochemically reacting to the actions and inactions of those that worked with it.

Interestingly, Grimes notes that locations can also function as ritual actors, primarily nonhuman ritual agents (2012, p. 251). He explains that under the category of ritual actors, and ritual agent is "any ritual actor who acts, influences, or exercises power" (2012, p. 251). The onlooker may understand that technically, soil in any location acts, influences, or exercises power, or at least lives in a delicate balance with other organisms, human or otherwise. However, the difference lies in the reverent understanding that RCF applied to the garden itself. This knowledge was not only understood, but was also appreciated. The potential power that resided in the garden was critical for RCF to tap

into and collaborate with, yet not exploit through mismanaging that space. During an interview with Susan Sides, she highlighted the organization's premium on the potential for collaboration with the garden and with others who might come from different, and at times, divisive political backgrounds:

> Me: Earlier you mentioned that this work can bridge that in terms of bridging those divides, what is it about the work that bridges it?
>
> Susan: I don't know (laughs). Well, okay, we are trying to create an intentional space so in that space you are constantly reviewing and working to, you know, so what about this work, it's not just the work it's also the space. And as you are driving in you don't see a million things trying to get you to believe something or exclude you or include you, trying to stay, which isn't always a good thing, but trying to be a space that is inviting, uhm, trying, like trying to, right now, well in the past, and in the current there's been garden manager's training (her husband's phone rings)… Okay where was I?
>
> Me: Making an inviting space?
>
> Susan: Right, so you are trying to make an inviting space so, you want people to come, but then you have a lot of intentionality in the space, but you also have dynamic that you don't control…it's a very difficult balance, but it's kind of like gardening; you are creating the ultimate soil and space for the plants, but you're not actually making them grow. You know you are not actually dictating things completely. So that's how I see it with people. You are creating opportunity. So you are creating the best possible opportunity for people to get to know one another in a safe but bold way. We call it a safe space with a bold calling so it's a safe space that can call you to just stay safe, but it can also encourage you to be bold.

Ritual Language, Ritual Space, and the Potential for Growth

Susan's comments above bring us back to the positive and affirming language I continually encountered while at the garden. And this kind of language was not simply relegated to a role Janice had assumed for herself, but I heard it among other interns as well. Due to the fact that I received similar reactions because of my excessive speaking in both the morning reflection and when planting the starts, I learned something

important about RCF; like any garden tool, words could nourish growth or hinder it. That is, there was a difference between talking and saying something; the preferred method of speaking for the garden space was focused on words that encouraged the growth of the individual. Recall that the following mantras of RCF were introduced as phrases which bounded the ritual space of the garden:

1) *Everybody's hungry for something, and everybody has something to give.*
2) *People over production.*

These phrases are suffused with a commitment to the view that there is always the potential for growth in other individuals. Despite the fact that everyone is hungry for something, there is also the potential for them to collaborate with and to something bigger than themselves. However, the garden is at once a ritual actor that volunteers, interns, and staff can collaborate and encourage growth with as well as a ritual space where they can *practice* the language of potential growth with others. *The ritual work of the garden is to encourage growth both in and with the garden as well as in and with those who tend it*. The care that is given to growth in the garden is extended to those who work within it. And just as superfluous ingredients are not included in any amendment offered to the ground, unfocused conversation offers little to help others grow. This is not to say that conversations in the garden were always focused on phrases of positive affirmation. However, more often than not, interactions in the garden revolved around sharing stories, sharing life experiences, teaching others, listening, and as Chapter 8 describes, boldly tackling difficult social issues. Just as the morning reflection emphasized cultivating a sense of community before moving into the garden space, the

work of and with the garden was focused on the intention of encouraging the growth of relationships.

Working with the Garden as Ceremony

Unlike the morning reflection, working with the garden is planted more firmly in the Grimes' category of ceremony (2013). Whereas the morning reflection itself was a ritual designed to develop a particular communal mindset before entering into the garden space, a kind of celebratory ceremony, a largely ceremonious attitude characterized work with the garden space itself. The ceremony itself focused one's actions in relation to the garden where the power of the space as a collaborator is honored and appreciated. Movement in the space was ceremonious. There were expectations regarding how to water the beds, how to maintain the quality of the soil, how to mix nutrients into the soil, how to move through the garden without compacting the soil. Deliberate care was taken to maximize the potential for growth in and with the space. I found that the longer I was at the garden, as my field notes suggest, I became more attuned to such a disposition in the way I moved through the garden space. Of course, this was not an attitude I cultivated fully. To that end, note a portion of Grimes' description of ceremony from the last chapter; the author stated, "Ceremony invites the participant to surrender idiosyncrasies and independence to some larger cause, for which one is willing to fight, die, or pay homage" (Grimes, 2013, p. 41). My posture during the bed planting maintained my idiosyncrasies, and this was precisely the problem. Similar to the

morning reflection, my words were taking up too much space in the activity, however, my speech functioned differently in each rite. In the morning reflection, my words were inadvertently dominating the conversation. However, when I spoke while planting, my words were superfluous and distracting to the task at hand, so the attitudes of those around me cooled considerably; thus I failed to pay the land the proper homage as a collaborator.

Yet despite this transgression, those present with me worked diligently to recognize my potential to grow, just like the beets we were planting. Instead of reassigning me to a different task or correcting me in an overtly passive aggressive manner, the conversation shifts to sharing information about one another, namely getting to know some of our favorite places. Soon, I felt more at ease in the task I was completing, found another physical stance that made it easier for my body to move in accord with the rhythm of the activity, and took the time to listen more actively to what the others were saying. Janice, Kelly, and Emma all exhibited a ceremonious disposition toward the garden and its potential for growth collaboration, just as they exhibited the same ceremonious attitude toward me. So much of the disposition that the interns and staff exhibited in the garden is synthesized in Emma's philosophy of seeing planting as making the way for something. Indeed, RCF uses collaboration with the garden to make way for produce and people to grow. Below, I offer a synthesis of these themes in a full description of the ritual act of working with the garden:

Working with the garden at RCF functions as a unique ceremony in which language and actions operate in a multilayered context. There is an expectation that positive language and encouragement be offered, thus continually advocating for and

paying homage to the potential for growth in those one works alongside. In similar, and parallel fashion, while working with the garden space as a collaborator, individuals are expected to work diligently and evoke an attitude which honors the potential for growth in the land.

Chapter 6: Table- Sharing: Food Preparation and Presentation

When I arrived in August of that year, the organization was still very much in a state of transition from TLA to Root Cause Farm, updating signage and its web presence. However, the garden felt very similar. Programmatically, nothing had changed at that point. The interns Kelly and Emma were still at the garden at that point in the year, whereas others' internship programs had just ended. Janice and Ali were still very active at RCF, envisioning some changes for the organization likely after the fall harvest was completed. It was during this first day of my extended trip to the garden that I was able to witness a new ritual, namely preparation of fresh produce to be shared with others. Each Monday, RCF routinely set up a table at the local food pantry, Food for Fairview, located about a mile down the road from the garden, next to Fairview's elementary school. Similarly, a table of fresh produce was set up each Thursday morning at the garden for all to take from or contribute to. This Thursday event was known as the Share Market.

My analysis uncovered that this seemingly quotidian acts of preparing garden produce for display and sharing it with others were actually highly symbolic, yet understated, ritualized acts meant to evoke glimpses of hope against the strains of food insecurity as well as aspirations for community to those in need of it. These sets of subtle, yet highly formalized routines associated with "table-sharing" revealed

themselves to be a rich secular liturgy. While the preparation and presentation of produce for both table displays was essentially the same, I focus here specifically on my experience sharing a table of produce with those who came for food assistance at Food for Fairview during a particular Monday. This excerpt includes coverage of that morning's reflection and how its themes coalesced into the ritual of preparing food for distribution at Food for Fairview followed by a detailed synthesis of my observations with Grimes concept of liturgy (2013) and a corresponding term, hierophany, popularized by Mircea Eliade (1957).

Field Notes-8/12/19-Root Cause Farm-7:30 AM

I am the first to arrive, which was somewhat surprising. I quickly busy myself with taking pictures of the signs at the garden, including one that said Root Cause Farm, but it looked faded, not new. Soon, to my left, I saw Emma, and she waves at me. We exchange pleasantries and discussed how cold the weather had been the last time I was there. We are comfortable together…she expresses herself a lot, and she feels comfortable doing so with me. Janice and Kelly arrive soon after. I greet Janice with a hug and remark to Kelly that her hair is longer than the last time I saw her. She wishes it was growing faster.

We soon settle in to the morning reflection. Emma and I get out milk crates, and she takes a seat by the entrance to the shed. We discuss the weekend, I discuss my drive and the beauty of the mountains. Emma begins the reflection with two poems by Mary Oliver, "To Begin With the Sweetgrass" (2010) and then "We Shake with Joy" (2009). She asks that we listen to each poem, and then observe a moment of silence and breathe; she mentions that it will help her with her posture when entering the garden. This strikes

me as uniquely ritualistic, that the garden is a ritual space that must be entered with the right mentality, intention, or motivation. During the poem, Kelly is playing with her hair and Janice strokes her left knee while looking out into the garden. The end of the first poem states, "Love yourself, then forget it, then love the world." We take a moment to sit after this and then transition to poem #2. It is short and focuses on how grief and joy are usually intertwined. Janice states that grief and joy are housed together. She reflects on the birth of her niece and she's terrified about what she will grow up into as climate change poses more and more of a threat to future generations. Next, Emma discusses how joy and grief inform one another, the more you know one, the more you know the other. She also remarks about spending time with a child, the child of a friend, and wondering if he will have any forest left. She claims that "perhaps that is my work…asking these questions for these children and letting my vocation be formed around that." This isn't the last time she talks about this work as vocation. She also discusses biblical practices of grief in the Jewish tradition, and how joy is a physical enterprise as well. Whether it be the tearing at clothes, or the dancing she talked about doing when visiting friends, these practices need to be physically embodied in order to be worked out. Does she see her work in the garden this way? Is it grief for joyful work, or both?

I share a reflection about Mom and her diagnosis, about how the mundane activities of just speaking to one's parents are different for me now as I consider Mom's communication barriers, a practice of joy and grief, as she struggles to articulate ideas, and I struggle to know how to converse with her in a way that keeps her in the moment, keeps her comfortable. The group listens very attentively.

We then transition to the work of the day. Janice reminds us that a group from UNCA (University of North Carolina Asheville, which I gather is which is social justice oriented) is coming on Wednesday for a group, and that Wednesday is a volunteer night. Due to the fact that this evening will be the Food for Fairview table, Janice asked Emma how the chard went last week. She said it went moderately well, and that most of the produce was gone at the end of the evening. There's deliberation here about how much to send and what to send. The preparation of the food is being discussed here. Don't send what won't be taken. Don't send the produce that won't be touched because it's just food, but what people may be interested in taking. This plays into the notion of an aesthetic motif when dealing with the produce. Preparation for the offering. The tomatillos need to be harvested but don't need to go to the market because they didn't go over well last week. Emma seems to be asserting more of a leadership role, but it isn't forced, and seems welcomed. I recall observing something similar last time. She and Janice have a strong rapport. There's discussion about what produce to send where.

Janice transitions to the marker board with a list of produce to pull and the interns get to choose what to do, the choices aren't made for them. They get buy-in in the garden. That is partially the value of this reflection time. To choose the work you want to enter into. You are not lectured then assigned. All except for me that is. I tell them to put me doing whatever they want me to do, where I will be the least disruptive. I can tell that my self-deprecation is somewhat effective in terms of building rapport, but that it's easier now not to have to worry about that. I feel more a part of the group than in times past. Observations are still overwhelming, but I feel more confidence now. My back is

sore on the milk crate from the seven hour drive the day before, I am stiff, and my knees are stiff. I grunt when I get up. I am assigned scallions.

After Janice shows me how to strip and clean the scallions at the sorting table, I walk back to get my notebook and ask Emma if this is when they typically harvest, because of the Food for Fairview table, and she says yes, "This is part of our rhythm, we harvest Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday." Emma tells me, "You were given the meditative, somewhat agonizing task," when referring to the scallions. After a moment of cleaning them, I switched to the other side of the table to watch the garden and its participants in action. They move quickly to harvest in communal but isolating tasks. This work can make conversation difficult when interns and staff are all spread out.

The day itself transitions from gray overcast skies to sunlight. The birds are perpetually chirping and a rooster crows all morning. The air is sweet and warm, and everything is wet with dew. The wildflowers in the garden are calling for attention, loud and proud, and tall. I reflect on my own disposition again. I don't feel the pressure to make use of the time at my chore but I cultivate it to be efficient.

The way that I was shown to clean the scallions is simple, but it takes me time to do well. Three, black, rectangular baskets are in front of me. The fresh scallions are to my left. With each, I strip the dead stalk skin from the bottom of the bulb to expose its fresh whiteness. Then I trim the roots at the bottom, and prune the browning stalks on the top. The last step is one I continually forget. But as for the second, I quickly find a way to maneuver my right hand to simultaneously hold the stalk and pinch the roots so I can struggle to cut it with my left hand, with scissors that are dulling, and made for right-handed people, unlike myself.

I notice that I am getting hungry smelling the scallions, and the warmth of the air is making me sweat. Emma has discarded her long sleeve shirt and I notice that Janice and Kelly are in more conducive clothing as well…more baggy pants and/overalls. They know that layers of clothing are key in garden work…I take the note for the next day…my long sleeve shirt with a hood isn't serving me well.

I am beginning to get consistently agitated with the fact that I break the small bulbs off the scallions too easily. In my mind, this is another piece of food that will go unused. As I survey the garden again, they've all disappeared into it. Hunched over, busy, autonomous…hurried but not harried it seems. The attitude with which they approach the work is not antagonistic in the least. They are comfortable and complementary to each other, driven, and respectful of the work but not spiteful of it.

It strikes me that as I am preparing these scallions, that the task might take most of the morning. I gather that there is something important about the aesthetic presentation of the produce that's important. I take the chance to ask Janice about it as she is sorting out produce from the locker…some to be given away tonight and some to be given to the interns. The ones that are open to anyone at the garden are a little bruised, broken, or otherwise somewhat deteriorating. She's gathering the nicest produce for the food sharing table at Food for Fairview. But the way she is gathering it catches my attention. There are Dawn bomb peppers, along with other hot peppers, purple potatoes that have been washed, green tomatoes, Poblano peppers, small, sweet onions, jalapeños, and more. She places all the peppers in one box but distinguished and organized by tiny green, netted boxes. The green peppers and tomatoes are placed in intricate woven baskets. The produce is truly on display. I ask Janice about why take this time to prepare

the food in this way…some might have an attitude that it doesn't matter if the food looks fresh from the dirt because people are getting it for free (beggars can't be choosers). Janice's response doesn't surprise me. She claims that it is about care, that it is important that people feel worthy of good food, like they are going to a farmer's market, because such places can be elitist.

Here the aesthetic practice of preparing the food is to draw the participant in. To see well-manicured food that is appealing, healthy, and free. To excite, to entice. To focus on the individual, not as a number that must show verification for food assistance, but as an individual that sees fresh produce and imagines possibility, not limitation. Instead of prepackaged food in which one knows the end result, the produce provides an imaginative space for participants to play.

I ask Emma if she is still bartending and she says she is. Although she's not mixing drinks, she is quick to point out, just pouring beer. I remark that it is perhaps different because it is faster-paced and so it might be hard to be present there, as opposed to the garden, and she doesn't quite agree. She thinks present-mindedness is not dependent upon external conditions, but what we cultivate in our own mind. We feel out of control because we let ourselves. She discussed working at Starbucks and having to work the window because she wasn't fast enough behind the counter, she claims she's never been good at multi-tasking. She likes living at the garden because she gets to stop and appreciate it but it can be difficult not to just see it as a space where there is continuous work to be done.

Janice begins discussing the fact that she and Emma have been discussing best practices in relationship to efficiency in the garden and that it can be hard to find an

equilibrium in the work, especially when dealing with large groups that visit for a tour or come to volunteer. She makes a comment that a group of middle school girls that came as part of a class field trip had, at one point, just hung out by the bathroom, in the shade, instead of helping.

I shift the conversation to that of seeing the garden as an important space and I point back to Emma's comment of seeing the garden as a space that needs to have the proper posture before entering into it. They both take time to think about the response. Janice sees more chaos at times, but that it is difficult to find the balance. Emma says that it can be hard sometimes to remember that people find the space a peaceful place to be. Next we move into discussing what might be next for Kelly and Emma. Kelly wants to teach in some fashion but will focus mainly on finding work, while Emma sees a lot of opportunity in various places, but wants to begin to settle down.

It's at this time that a woman comes up who has met Emma from the Welcome Table meal the week prior with seven pounds of blueberries. Emma mentions that she is part of a St. Andrews society for gleaning and that the blueberries were donated by Trickleberry Farm, a defunct corporate land purchase that was repurposed into a "you-pick" blueberry farm. For some reason she mentions that the berries are small, when they seem a good healthy size. Emma notes the contribution on an iPad that has a spreadsheet which records food sources, weight, and distribution.

During much of this time, Kelly has been pulling up bed covers and Emma has been eradicating the basil (I believe three beds worth) due to a mildew disease which has left the leaves with black, dusty dots underneath. Emma mentions that these can be wiped off, but that giving such diseased produce isn't acceptable. "Those who need it the

most can't afford fresh produce, and it's just isn't market ready." Again, the quality of the food and its presentation is a central point.

There are multiple times while I am cleaning scallions that my legs are tingling, probably because I am locking my knees while standing, and my left shoe is uncomfortable toward the heel, because some extra padding has slipped down between my Achilles and heel. I am sweating now and grateful that the scallions are almost finished. I enjoyed finally getting in a rhythm though. I take the remainder of the scallions to be washed at the sink next to me and try to recall how Emma and Janice seemed to have washed them. It was important to get the remaining dirt off the bulbs without breaking the bulbs off. As I dunk the bulbs in the cold water, I can see the remnants of the other stalks floating, but the water is still clear. I carefully scrub the scallion bulbs and rinse them gently with a couple of good dunks before placing them on the sorting table. Emma instructs me to spread them out so that they can dry in the sun and thanks me for doing that work.

I sit and write for a bit near the big tree at a picnic table. Soon, I'm back and joining the three of them to prepare another bed by going through and digging up all of the weeds on either side of the contour bed, and watching as they take spades and dig up all of the old kale that remains. Janice and I discuss that I can take a stirrup hoe and work from the other end of the pathway to help her clear the weeds, even the wildflowers that are in the path. She asks me to also bring a garden rake and wheelbarrow when I return. As I step into the shed, I notice a picture on the wall near the door that clearly offers the names of the various tools. I begin to wonder if these are the ritual objects used to prepare the ritual space. When I return, I begin to work quickly with the stirrup hoe. It

feels good to drag it across the grown and then push it back to loosen up the sprawling weeds, including crabgrass and thistle. I pull the large wildflowers out by their roots, or try to. The stirrup hoe is a tool I have used before, and it can handle rough work better than some shovels or hoes I have used in the past. Its loose, U-joint head with metal teeth provide it just the flexibility needed to catch the plants at their base and rip them up.

Part of the garden's insistence is that at some point the walking paths must be clear so that people can tend to the beds with little difficulty while also averting the threats of any weeds that might reduce the vitality of the produce in the bed. After pulling up numerous plants either by hand or with the implement, I notice that I am doing something subconsciously. I begin to exhibit a practice that I learned at one of my earlier visits to the garden. I begin to shake the earth off the roots that I pull off, and allow the dirt to fall back on the path. This helps the walkways and the beds retain more of their soil for use, instead of allowing the roots of the weeds to hold onto it. It strikes me that maintaining the integrity of the soil through this simple practice came second-hand to me, which means I am not only becoming comfortable in this space, but I am gaining deeper familiarity in terms of putting its philosophy into practice.

This practice, along with settling in for the reflection, moving more easily in the garden in terms of confidence, even reducing my inclination for nervous chatter while working are indicative of being more present in the space as the space calls its participants to be. This feels like a kind of saturation point within the research.

That is, until I bend down to pick up the weeds and put them in the wheelbarrow and I realize that I had forgotten gloves. And it shows on the blister I have on my right thumb. The thistles sting my hands and I gather large armfuls of weeds and wildflowers.

I try to be more careful, pick up smaller loads, and carefully place my fingers around other weeds when Janice offers to get the piles because I don't have gloves. I let her, internally noting my embarrassment because of a desire to deal with annoying pain, perhaps in the deluded guise to appear masculine, instead of being more efficient and just getting a pair of gloves to finish the job.

After dumping the weeds in the compost bins, I say my goodbyes and make my exit as I mention that I have an interview to prepare for.

Field Notes-8/12/19- Food for Fairview-3:30 PM

I arrive at roughly 3:30 and park next to the distribution center which is located on the east side of the Fairview Elementary School. It may have been an old elementary school building. I notice Kelly sitting at a table covered by a portable tent on a small patch of grass in front of the building. Inauspicious isn't even the word for how ordinary the set up looks, not in a negative way, but more like the Food for Fairview placed RCF off to the side. I walk up and apologize for my absence. Kelly's attitude is very relaxed and she claims that my tardiness is fine, and I am not sure she noticed that I was late. She said she was late too.

The spread is well organized. Blueberries and green tomatoes, green peppers on the ground in big bins. Small containers of garlic, small onions, a basket of my scallions, mild green peppers, purple potatoes in front of me, a small basket of categorized hot peppers, celery, squash, and leeks; Kelly also has a giant glass jar (a gallon or more) used for her sumac tea, which is about half empty. She leaves to use the bathroom multiple times during our time there…because she drank so much tea! The tea looks like urine or

pickle juice. I can see four older, white gentlemen in the parking lot of Food for Fairview, fifty feet in front of us near the box drop off, looking over at us either curious that I have joined them or curious at the large jar…perhaps wondering what it is for.

We begin talking about ways in which she's been challenged/transformed by RCF and she mentions reading the book *White Fragility*, and how that was a good but challenging text about how defensive whites can become when talking about race issues. I mention David Abernathy's comment from the interview about people believing it was a good thing to change the name of RCF, and Kelly agrees. She thinks the historical connection to the movement from the early-mid 20th century has been lost on people, and that the name change doesn't necessarily exclude individuals who are religious, but that it is difficult to know where to draw the line with inviting individuals to the garden who might hold prejudiced views; however she believes that RCF does a good job of being inclusive without being pushy about the importance of diversity, that it's the work that unites people.

The food assistance program seems to operate in the following manner:

1. Families show up and park behind the building. They walk in front of the building, past the RCF table and an individual hands them a clipboard to write down the information to ensure food assistance through a verification process.
2. They walk inside and select their items, like at a grocery store.
3. As they wait for their food to be boxed up, many wander over to our table to peruse the produce and then eventually pull their car up to the front of the building, near the Food for Fairview tent in front of us, where the four gentlemen load up their food, before the families leave.

It’s at this point that people begin visiting us on and off over the next couple of hours. The reflections below attempt to capture my recollections of those encounters from my field notes.

-Older woman, tall, with little to no teeth, orange hair, quietly comes up to take some vegetables and looks at us briefly before walking away.

-Another woman, who was a return customer (Kelly can’t quite remember her name) comes up to take a variety of items. She is in her late sixties, blond hair, glasses, and has a garden of her own. She mentions her fondness of her garden and how her berries, except her blueberries, have bloomed well this year. She has a grandson who seems very aloof, that she asks if he would like some hot peppers. He shakes his head while walking behind her and not acknowledging her; he is in his early twenties, stocky with black hair down to his shoulders. She tells us she has been flat-lined at least three times but the doctors can’t figure out what’s wrong with her, that nothing is wrong with her heart. She tells us, “I know what it is…it’s that mold.” She mentions she lives in a trailer that has been ravaged by mold and that she needs to get out of there.

-A young woman comes with her son…she is somewhat heavyset with a pleasant demeanor. Early to mid-twenties. She grabs some produce with her son who is wearing a Batman t-shirt and sucking on an Ice-Pop that I come to gather were being handed out at the pantry. She compliments us on the amazing looking produce and thanks us. Her mother, who looks more like her grandmother joins them and also grabs some produce.

-A couple who is hearing impaired comes over and I don’t realize they are both hearing impaired until they inquire about the hibiscus flower that has been put out. I still keep

trying to explain to them how the flower is used for tea by speaking to them, information I have picked up from listening to Kelly, half-forgetting they're hearing impaired, half-hoping they can read lips. The man continually seems to be interpreting some message to his female companion. Perhaps he can read my lips and is letting her know what I am saying. Afterwards I feel ashamed. He is tall, with a Dawn mustache, moderately long, but thinning hair and very expressive, jovial. She is shorter, with paler complexion, a large nose, and an animated face, even though she has glasses on; perhaps a little more stern, slightly disinterested. Her hair is slightly above her shoulders and brown, full, somewhat curled at the bottom. She wears a blue t-shirt that says Fairview Community Schools. I wonder if she works or worked for the school system?

-A woman who looks to be in her late forties comes over in a short purple dress and tattoos covering her arms and chest. She has short black hair, with one crooked tooth in the front. She seems excitable, almost on edge, but very pleasant. She talks about the various dishes she makes, including chipotle chicken, and how she knew it needed onion but didn't want to go out to the store to get one onion. She discusses how she likes to make food at home as she bundles up the produce. She's chatty and appreciative of the food.

-A Hispanic family comes after moving through the food assistance line. The oldest girl, maybe seven, has on an Elsa shirt from the movie *Frozen*. She has a younger sister, maybe five, and a younger brother, perhaps three or four. The mother is bubbly and speaks mostly Spanish. She has a mole on her bottom lip/upper chin and is wearing a pink shirt with black pants. Once she comes over, she smiles at us and raises her eyes as if to ask if it's okay that she take some food, and we tell her to take what she wants. She

eyes the purple potatoes excitedly and says, “Papas!?!” She gushes over the produce and fills her bag which she then holds up and says “Mucho!” As she leaves she says “Thank you!”

-A young woman by the name of Perry comes over and asks us, “So, how does this work?” We tell her that most people come here for food assistance and they need to fill out the official documentation of need and that they can come out here and get fresh produce, but that this produce is for everybody. She tells us that she has recently moved from Indonesia where she had been studying with a monk. She is in her early-mid-thirties, tattoos that look like henna designs, on her shoulders, along her collar bone, and up her neck to her chin. Some are represented on her face. She has short brown hair and is wearing a brown dress. We tell her about the Share Market on Thursday and she hopes to check it out. Perhaps she can tell that I am trying to ascertain if she needs food assistance or not, a skepticism inspired by my suspicion that she hadn’t really studied with monks. She seems slightly stand offish, but otherwise pleasant. She mentions that her 10 month old would snap peppers off in her garden and eat them. She takes a couple of items and leaves.

-There is an older woman who must be in her early seventies with light brown/ red hair that comes to the table with some air of sophistication and she seems out of place among everyone else in terms of her clothing. She asks if there were any bags for the produce, and for some reason I not only open the bag, but hold it there for her while she places produce in it.

Mostly it seemed that women were apt to take something, while men who came alone would look over the produce and either claim they didn’t need anything, or look at

us, smile, and walk away. The vehicles of those receiving food assistance varied from beater cars to what looked to be new Subarus. I notice a lot of vets that come for assistance, they tend to wear caps with designations like "Gulf War Vet" on them. Many individuals are missing at least one tooth. And there were many individuals who looked to be unsteady on their feet for some reason or another. Everyone seems genuinely appreciative and a little surprised by the free produce. Some comments that were made include the following quotes:

"I'm diabetic."

"Husband got taken away by raids on illegal immigrants so I'm trying to help her out…she's got three kids and it's hard for her to get out of the house."

"With these (referring to scallions)…I use it all!"

"I'm gonna go ahead and grab some…is that alright?"

"I don't have any use for it…raccoons and possums cleaned me out…I'd set traps but then I might trap the kittens around. That's why I got a revolver, but I'll have to shoot the bullets directly in the ground. Those raccoons and possums cleaned me out."

"I just love the fresh stuff."

"I don't really need anything…my tomatoes are doing good."

"I'll catch you guys next time."

"Fried green tomatoes are my favorite!"

The produce that attracts the most attention are the hot peppers, Poblano peppers, blueberries, purple potatoes, hibiscus, and the green tomatoes. People are intrigued by

the purple potatoes, but most are reticent to take them. The conversations that permeate these encounters are either life stories about the difficulties that the clients have endured (diabetes, addiction, immigration raids, mold, the harshness of mountain life) and/or most individuals discuss their own gardens and what they plan on making with the produce they take and even questions about how to deal with certain pests in the garden. This is humanizing conversation. The conversation is about them as individuals, people over production. The conversation is meant to invite them in, invite them to see the possibilities with the produce, invite them to be creative. It almost seems like they are envisioning a meal, or a series of meals, or a family favorite when they take the produce. Faces are full of expression. They are communicating so much in those moments. Humorous revulsion at purple potatoes, excitement at the habanero peppers, delight at the sight of the blueberries, resentment at the celery. Most faces aren't muted, most are curious and pleasant.

I watch to see who will take the scallions I have prepared. It's an interesting dynamic. I reflect on the time and consideration I took in cleaning each one. I understand when people thumb through them and move on, but I feel a sense of pride when people take one or a small bunch to put in their bags. In retrospect, I remember questioning the utility of cleaning the scallions for so long that morning, not in terms of the presentation aspect noted earlier, but in terms of the idea that my energies might be better served elsewhere. Instead, that task was probably one of the most useful for me engage with because I was able to experience the story of the produce and its eventual reception to those in need.

This table seems to disrupt the assisted food paradigm in that participants aren't known as a number, and aren't meant to feel the obligation of the food assistance they receive. This isn't to say that this is the intention of Food for Fairview. Many of those working there seem to have relationships with recipients who have obviously been coming for a long time. The four gentlemen out front work hard to ready the boxes for each individual after they have been through the line and chat about their families, and in one case, a construction project one man was hoping to complete on his deck as they inspected the wood in the back of his pick-up. There is relationship-building happening at Food for Fairview as well.

But the larger, cultural narrative seems bent on embarrassment for those receiving food assistance, which calls to mind a story Emma shared with me of seeing her friend and/or his female acquaintance receive that assistance as well, and the shame she felt he had once their eyes met; it was then she made that realization that he may be food insecure. The table is there for play, more than necessity, and play makes relationships, or at least conversation, flourish. No one is pressured to take the food, but all are invited to. The aesthetic appeal of the fresh produce pulls people into conversation, and Kelly continually rearranges and consolidates the food so the table looks tidier, no matter how little produce is left. When I pick up on the theme of presentation that I discussed with Janice earlier in the day, Kelly speaks very much in line with Janice's sentiment, that everyone deserves fresh produce, and to clean it and prepare it humanizes the exchange in a sense. It brings to mind that the table is a buffet at a party, and we are the hosts, hosts at a celebration where those coming don't know those throwing the party. There is a touch of awkwardness, but only a touch. The conversation shreds it away.

Dawn is a good example of the intent and fulfillment of what the table at Food for Fairview is about. Dawn is a petite woman, missing most of her teeth, with almost bleach blond hair, and she speaks in a hurried pace. She claims she has forgotten her card to go through the line so she is waiting on her friend who is inside. She chats with others close by that seem to know her. Then as she picks over the produce and discusses it with us, she launches into the issues plaguing her life. She mentions that she has congestive heart failure and would love to make fried green tomatoes but she's on a restricted sodium diet. She says this multiple times. She then tells us that her husband took their ten year old daughter away because Dawn's an alcoholic, but that she's trying to get better, that she doesn't want to "do stupid stuff", that she might need to go to rehab. We encourage her to come to the garden on Thursday because she can get more produce and perhaps she'd like to be in the garden space itself because it is so peaceful. She tells us that that is what she needs...a nice place where she can sort things out. I write down the date, time, and location of the Share Market and we tell her the garden is right across the road from the Whistle Hop Brewery. She smiles and says she knows exactly where that is at. She wishes us blessings multiple times before she leaves saying, "Here I am sharing my life's story!" and tells us she'll try to make it.

Soon, I help the four men fold up our tent and load up the garden's truck with Kelly. At the end of the day about 90% of the produce is gone, with some peppers, celery, and scallions remaining.

<u>Table Sharing and Ritualization</u>

After the morning reflection of that day, it was apparent to me that the readiness that we attempted to cultivate in ourselves shifted organically into the work of the garden. For myself, the meticulous cutting, peeling, and washing of the scallions was much more than attempting to make the produce look appetizing for those who might take it. As Janice, Kelly, and Emma had intimated to me, such presentation was about inviting interaction by those who desired and even needed fresh produce by creating the facsimile of a farmer's market that in ordinary circumstances can exclude those who are socio-economically under-resourced. One did not simply clean the produce, but the produce was prepared and there existed a world of difference between the two. The former way of interacting with produce is steeped in practicality, where one may rinse vegetables haphazardly to remove grime and dirt with little thought of how it might be used or seen. The latter paired preparation with pageantry. Preparation surrounding the pulling of the useless roots, the peeling of the wilting layers of fibrous sheaths around the scallion to reveal its vibrant white bulbs and green stems, the trimming of those stems to ensure the careful uniformity of their length so that the vegetables looked appealing, as if the vegetables were vying for attention. And it was this method of preparing the produce that instilled meaning with it. Care was taken in this preparation with the hope that vegetables would look attractive to those who needed it. For those who work the garden at Root Cause Farm, the food functions as a hopeful means to build community in spite of the remarkable barriers that food insecurity builds. The care with which the food was prepared, presented, and freely offered stood in counter-cultural juxtaposition to the profane realities of food insecurity and as such functioned as a liturgical observance.

Previously I introduced the category of liturgy as one of several ritual categories under consideration for this particular research project. I recognize that applying the term to seemingly non-religious nonprofit organizations can easily raise skepticism. Yet, it is my argument that rituals and more specifically, liturgy, should be lenses through which nonprofits are examined more consistently; to confine the consideration of such terms to what we deem to be confined to the sphere of organized religion has the potential to constrain the boundaries of what objects, spaces, and work individuals consider to be sacred. As such, we'll delve more deeply into how Ronald Grimes understands the word liturgy and how his understanding of the term centers upon Mircea Eliade's concepts of hierophany, sacred, and profane.

Considering Liturgy and Hierophany

In his text *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (2013), Ronald Grimes describes liturgy in remarkable detail. While this particular mode of ritual sensibility has been described in an abbreviated manner above, a fuller description is warranted here:

> Liturgy is a symbolic action in which deep receptivity, sometimes in the form of meditative rites or contemplative exercises, is cultivated. In it participants actively await what gives itself and what is beyond their command. This is what separates liturgy from magic and what lends it an implicitly meditative and mystical character. Since liturgy is structured waiting upon an influx of whole-making (holy) power, it is inescapably a spiritual exercise. There is a sense in which a liturgical rite is but mere practice, a preparatory exercise, a way of biding valued time. But a liturgy is not only preparatory, it is also the thing itself. The exercise is the hierophany. Ritual symbols and gestures do bear the sacred. Bread does bear the presence. Dogs do have Buddha nature. If either dogs or bread is incapable of bearing the sacred load, so is everything else, including written and oral Torah, preached words, incarnate lords, warmed harts, changed, syllables, and visions beheld…Liturgical action is a vehicle capable of carrying ritualists-but only part way. In the end, liturgy always reverses itself as a form of action. It aspires to more than it has power to

> produce. It must become reception-what we sometimes call passion or deep receptivity. (pp. 45-46)

For Grimes, to enact a liturgy, especially a religious one, is to offer a glimpse of what cosmically is, and what will be, but only a glimpse. Liturgy is about awaiting the divine to come into and transform the world, an active anticipation of what is to come. Thus the Christian Eucharist is not only about the grace received by the bread, but also about the active anticipation of a holy banquet at the end of time. Yet, this holy banquet cannot take place by the sheer effort of Christians alone; it must fully be initiated by God. Similarly, when Muslims are on Hajj at the Plains of Arafat, confessing their sins to God, they anticipate God's forgiveness on that day. However, their state of penitence is a dress rehearsal for the actual Day of Judgment.

At the same time, liturgy is not only preparatory, but the exercise is also a hierophany, or an exercise of the active presence of the sacred. Grimes references this term in his description of liturgy, but it deserves a significant amount of attention to understand its importance to his characterization of liturgy. Grimes likely borrows this term from Mircea Eliade, a classic 20th century theorist of comparative religion who was well known for distinguishing two modes of human existence, the sacred and the profane, as well as how hierophanies can sometimes help individuals understand the distinction between both experiences. Eliade defines hierophany in the following way:

> Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the act of *manifestation* of the sacred, we have proposed the term *hierophany*. It is a fitting term because it does not imply anything further; it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, i.e., that *something sacred shows itself to us*. It could be said that the history of religions--from the most primitive to the most highly developed--is constituted by a great number of hierophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities…It is impossible to overemphasize the paradox represented by every

> hierophany, even the most elementary. By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself*, for it continues to participate in its cosmic milieu. (2008, pp. 275-276)

In short, the term can be understood as an ordinary or profane object that carries within it the presence of a sacred reality that is totally distinct from ordinary reality. This is the true mystery of the bread of the Eucharist in the Catholic tradition; it is at one time a piece of bread, and then becomes consecrated as the literal body of Christ by God through the priest just as the wine of the Eucharist becomes the literal blood of Christ. Yet, despite this well-known example, it is important to note that for Eliade, a hierophany can be any seemingly profane object for an individual or community that points to a wholly different reality than profane reality.

Eliade believed that humanity does not create the sacred through reductionist means, but rather humans have a historical tendency of orienting ourselves to what we consider to be sacred and are thus heavily influenced by it. According to Eliade, the study of religion is truly the study of humanity's reaction to the sacred's presentation of itself as it disrupts the ordinary homogeneity of time and space. Hierophanies are not only the vehicle through which the sacred reveals itself, but hierophanies can also interrupt geographic spaces and create the dualism of the sacred and its opposite, the profane. It was the distinction between these modes of being that allowed Eliade the space to determine the historical patterns of how humankind has manipulated the profane to better experience the sacred or how communities have moved within closer proximity to the sacred spaces. The spirit of the sacred was not a conditioned sociological product, but a force that attracts/attracted others to it in a variety of patterned responses throughout human history. Indeed, the sacred was not the byproduct of the organized community,

but offered mankind a meaningful orientation in life, around which cities and homes were designed, as a means to consistently experience the sacred more immanently.

Eliade's observations lend themselves to seamless connection to the world's organized religions. Humanity is drawn to stories, objects, places that function as hierophanies in which the sacred breaks meaningfully into the profane world and as such prove to be gravitational sources of symbolism. Christians are drawn to the Eucharist because seemingly ordinary objects like bread and wine carry the sacred within them. Muslims are drawn to the Plains of Arafat because it is a seemingly ordinary expanse of land imbued with past, present, and future experiences of the sacred. Eliade's observations also lend themselves to the sense of the sacred found in the ordinary lives of those who consider themselves to be nonreligious. Eliade explains that:

> There are, for example, privileged places, qualitatively different from all others- a man's birthplace, or the scenes of his first love, or certain places in the first foreign city he visited in his youth. Even for the most frankly nonreligious man, all these places still retain an exceptional, a unique quality; they are the 'holy places' of his private universe, as if it were in such spots that he had received the revelation of a reality other than that in which he participates through his ordinary life. (Pals, 2008, p. 280)

Eliade argues that there can be hierophanies for individuals and, by extension, organizations that are decidedly secular in nature. That is, what is considered by some to be sacred is not necessarily tied to concepts related to organized religion. Instead, there are "holy places", objects, and experiences, outside of the realm of organized religion that can point to something sacred or qualitatively and meaningfully different from ordinary existence. What is sacred to an individual or individuals is relative to what they find to

reveal a sense of the holy. Below, we'll consider how the food provided by Root Cause Farm at Food for Fairview is a hierophany tied to liturgical practice.

Table-Sharing as Liturgy

There is no doubt that the meticulous preparation of the produce to be distributed at Food for Fairview was a practice suffused with ritualization; there was implicit meaning crafted into the appearance of the produce in order to invite individuals to partake of the food; the ritual preparation and distribution of food uncovered a liturgical intention to offer an experience radically different from receiving food assistance at its adjacent food pantry. Root Cause Farm's table sharing activities at Food for Fairview offered food and a space with the intention of creating a sense of community distinct from, even if momentarily, the power dynamics of food insecurity in profane reality.

Once individuals show documentation of need at Food for Fairview, they move through the building with a guide to assist in choosing food that would be best for their family. This includes canned and boxed goods as well as fresh produce. The experience is constructed to encourage client choice in what is taken, but also to be streamlined and efficient to effectively move people through what is essentially the small-scale equivalent of a grocery store. The produce table provided by RCF outside the pantry functions differently.

Recall that the intention behind RCF's table at the pantry was to give the feeling of a farmer's market with attractive displays of produce that might otherwise be inaccessible to those who are socioeconomically under-resourced. This mode of presentation worked remarkably well, not only in drawing individuals to the table, but

also in terms of drawing out stories, questions about the food, family recipes, memories, and creating a space where people shared their personal concerns. The table and its produce functioned as a means to build a sense of community, not simply to provide food assistance. The table existed not only to nourish bodies in need of hunger, but to nourish individuals who may be in need of something more. This ritual relates to Grimes' category of liturgy in the following ways:

1. **Rooted in Receptivity**- For Grimes, liturgy is rooted in deep receptivity, where participants are understood to be the recipients of a power that is "whole-making". While not everyone who visits RCF's table at Food for Fairview chooses to receive food, they receive the invitation to the produce as a means to build community. Thus the organization's belief that "Everybody is hungry for something…" refocuses individuals as desiring to receive something material or spiritual to nourish their lives. The organization's table at Food for Fairview is a liturgical means to help meet that sense of receptivity in a way that encourages relationship on the participant's terms.
2. **Glimpses of Hope**- The ritual is a structured, symbolic, preparatory activity that offers a glimpse into a world where food insecurity and the concomitant issues of inaccessibility to fresh, organic produce and community are no longer prevalent.
3. **Use of Hierophanies**-The ritual objects, namely the table, the produce, and the tools used to prepare the food are hierophanies in that they are not only used to signal hope in a future without food insecurity, but they are used to provide a wholly other experience to those present where participants are valued as people in community through the sharing of food, and not simply seen through the lens

of food insecurity. Root Cause Farm intentionally uses these objects to elicit another reality focused on community distinct from the typical experience of those who receive food assistance through food pantry distribution.

Considering the Liturgical Character of Table- Sharing and the Christian Eucharist

Before drawing noting the similarities between table sharing with RCF and the Christian Eucharist, some important distinctions should be considered. First, the Christian Eucharist is first and foremost a sacrament. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines sacrament as "an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the holy spirit" (p. 898). The divine life of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is carried through material or natural objects in the Christian tradition writ large, regardless of Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant denomination. As a result, the Eucharist is a liturgical ritual that contains hierophanies under the label of sacrament. While I argue that RCF's sharing of produce at Food for Fairview is a liturgical ritual, the food used within it is not sacramental. To claim such would be to root the organization and its practices unhelpfully within a Christian context. Thus both rituals are similar not in their sacramental nature, but in their liturgical character by offering food as hierophanies.

Secondly, as Grimes notes, the Christian Eucharist is transactional in nature (2013). Typically before receiving the Eucharist, individuals are called to make a financial contribution, pray, or sing songs of praise and thanks throughout the ritual. Table sharing at Food for Fairview is decidedly non-transactional for Root Cause Farm.

The exchange of money, even in the form of donations to the organization, is completely absent at the event and only encouraged on the organization's website and email newsletters. Even pamphlets about Root Cause Farm are not distributed at Food for Fairview. All that exists within this rite is the invitation to food, conversation, and the garden itself. These practices are consistent with the organization's attempts at re-orienting the giving economy by encouraging individuals to consider the multitude of ways in which they might give of themselves while pushing against the cultural pressures of correlating self-worth with financial means. When visiting RCF's table at Food for Fairview, participants are invited in without expectation of reciprocity, but with a hope that the organization can provide more than just food to those in need and in time build community with them and on their terms.

However, there are important similarities to both rituals that cannot be denied. The food in both liturgies are used as hierophanies not only to bring individuals together, but to bring people together to experience an altered state of reality. The food in both activities undergoes ritualization in the ways that they are prepared, handled, and presented to those who will partake of them. That is the wafers and wine of the Eucharist are not unceremoniously offered to those who hope to partake of them, but are offered with care and attention by priests and Eucharistic ministers because they function as hierophanies carrying the grace of God and symbolizing Christ's sacrifice with the intended effects of deepening the spiritual life both personally and communally, and thus make individuals feel more "whole." The food presented at Food for Fairview by Root Cause Farm is also offered with unique levels of care and consideration because of the

potential impacts the produce has for those who are invited to take it, both personally and communally.

More than this, and perhaps most importantly, both liturgies offer a glimpse of hope into the potential of a wholly other, sacred reality. Referring back to Grimes' characterization of liturgy is useful here, "Since liturgy is structured waiting upon an influx of whole-making (holy) power, it is inescapably a spiritual exercise. There is a sense in which a liturgical rite is but mere practice, a preparatory exercise, a way of biding valued time. But a liturgy is not only preparatory, it is also the thing itself." (2013, p. 45)

The last line of this description is particularly instructive. Liturgies are activities of preparation for whole-making power, as well as a witness to the potential of such power. For those in the Christian tradition, the Eucharist represents and offers a glimpse into what awaits humanity in the future, a heavenly banquet in full community within the kingdom of God. Similarly, RCF's table sharing at Food for Fairview offers a hopeful glimpse into a world without food insecurity and rooted in deep community.

Claiming that nonprofit organizations perform liturgies in their own unique ways provides an entry point into reframing the analysis of work within nonprofit organizations. Consider the potential liturgical character of a gallery opening at an arts organization dedicated to using the power of expression to transform a struggling neighborhood. Or, imagine a graduation program at a nonprofit organization focused on adult literacy. Nonprofit organizations are frequently dedicated to social visions beyond their grasp, yet their volunteers and staff continually provide programs that attempt to resolve the existential issues that are experienced by their constituents to show, if only

temporarily, the transformation from potential to actualized visions of social change. RCF understands that sharing food at Food for Fairview will not dismantle the systemic socio-economic issues surrounding food insecurity, but it can offer a regenerative glimpse into what such a society may look like by focusing on the interdependence of nourishing food and nourishing community.

The veracity of these claims can be understood in light of an interaction I had three days after my experience at Food for Fairview. In the following excerpt from my field notes, Dawn came to visit the garden's Share Market with her mother, inspired by the conversation she had with Kelly and me as she surveyed the produce at our table.

Field Notes-8/15/19-Root Cause Farm-11:30 A.M.

I glance over at someone who has just arrived to the garden and notice it is Dawn milling around at the table for the Share Market. I stand up and go over to greet her, and she introduces me to her mother, Mindy, who was clearly related to Dawn. She is taller, a little hunched over, with red hair and a gray blouse. Dawn for her part, looks healthier than the last time I saw her. She's wearing short blue shorts, a t-shirt, and I notice some blue coloring in her hair. She's also wearing a black satchel bag of sorts.

As I shake her hand, I tell her that it's good to see her. She tells me that she told me she would make it, with a smile. I ask how she's doing, and she motions to the black satchel. She tells me that it keeps track of all the data for her heart, and if she starts to become unconscious, that she needs to push a button on the pack to shock her heart. She tells me that she is tired, that she doesn't have the energy she once did, but that she is happy. She informs me that she finally got on Medicaid and that now she can go see a

regular doctor; she tells me she has an appointment next Thursday. I suggest she take a walk in the garden with her mom. Her mom asks if she'll be alright as she moves into the garden space. Dawn reassures her and tells me that since her sister passed away, her mother worries about her constantly, in terms of physical activity. She tells me she is thirty-five and dealing with all these issues, and I think to myself that she looks older. She reiterates that she needs to go to rehab, but she's afraid that it might make it hard on her mom, and that her mother has already been through a lot. I tell her about how a family member came out of rehab okay. She explains that she's also depressed, but that she doesn't want to get "on a bunch of medication", and that God is ultimately who is going to make her better. I share with her about my depression and that the medicine just helps to even me out a little bit. I tell her that what puts stress on me is when my family doesn't take care of themselves, and that she could really help her family out by taking care of herself, perhaps lessen their stress if that's what she's worried about. She seems to agree. I motion to the food on the table and tell her that this food is really going to help to. I beckon Janice over to meet Dawn and they exchange pleasantries. Dawn discusses her congestive heart failure, that she's gained five pounds in fluid in the last couple of days. Janice tells her to come to the garden and walk around anytime she needs.

This brief interaction at the garden synthesizes the hopes of the table sharing ritual at Food for Fairview. While RCF hopes that participants will take the food that they want and need to nourish themselves and others, the organization wants individuals to feel a sense of belonging when they need it. Dawn seemed to find something she was

looking for the day she visited the garden, a glimpse of hope. After considering the analysis provided above, I have defined the nature of RCF's table sharing ritual in the following way:

RCF's table sharing program at Food for Fairview functions as a secular liturgy. The preparation, presentation of the organization's produce casts the food as hierophanies which symbolize a wholly other reality that upends the socio-economic barriers to healthy food and a sense of community spurred by food insecurity. The ritual offers a visionary glimpse at a culture with free and communal access to organic produce while at the same time symbolizing the potential for such a reality in the present. Finally, food insecure participants in this liturgy are viewed by RCF as receivers of the invitation to community through the sharing of food, devoid of the pressure to reciprocate.

Chapter 7: Welcoming Groups

The day I knew The Lord's Acre would be the site of my field research, in 2016, was nearly two years before my first actual day of field research in the fall of 2018. I still remember it clearly. The conference I was attending included an optional trip to the garden, and I readily signed up for the experience. I was shocked at how inconspicuous the garden was, that it nestled so neatly into the landscape and was dwarfed by mountains surrounding it in the town of Fairview. I remember sitting underneath a large hickory tree, on wooden benches arranged in a circle under the tree's canopy. It was June, and the afternoon sun was beating steadily on us. Soon, we were joined by Susan Sides who walked casually through the garden gate and joined us there.

After thanking us for coming, she asked us to introduce ourselves and after we had done so, she told us about the work of The Lord's Acre like an experienced storyteller. Inspired by the organization's mission to address food insecurity, we were all

eager to move through the garden space through a brief tour. After reading about TLA's story in Fred Bahnson's *Soil and Sacrament*, I was more eager than most. The garden seemed like the living embodiment of my years of studying how spiritual beliefs, philosophical principles, agrarian work, and charity intertwined throughout history. When we broke into small groups to actually work in the garden for a short period of time, I was taught, for the first time, how to use the U-Bar by a summer intern who, at one time, trained in the Jesuit order. He taught me about how the implement made quick work of prepping a bed for planting. I tackled the task with alacrity, trying to prove something, but not sure what. I quickly realized I would have to slow down if I wanted to learn about how the intern came to The Lord's Acre. Once I did, we settled into a comfortable rhythm of work and discussion that centered on our interests in agriculture and theology more broadly. The rhythm soon became relaxing, and the work more intuitive with each lean backward to break up the garden bed. I breathed deeply and felt a presence of mind that would call me back to the site years later.

After about an hour's worth of work, we were all called to the hickory tree again to share our reflections about the work we had done. Susan led the discussion and encouraged feedback about our experience there. I do not remember what I said, however, I do remember the attitude of the group largely being sincere and self-reflective. At the end of the reflection, I remember Susan telling us that the work we did in the garden that day would have an untold impact on the lives of others, that there was a particular beauty to the garden in that so many hands, over time, could work in the space invisible to those who would benefit from the fruits of that space. What connected those who gave to the garden and those who received from it was the land itself.

While sharing food at Food for Fairview highlights how RCF attempts to offer its physical presence in the community of Fairview, it spends much of its time attempting to draw people into its garden space through educational programming that can take the form of workshops, the aforementioned Share Market, the family focused Sprouts program, and finally by hosting groups like the one I was a part of in 2016. In the time I would come to spend with the organization, as both TLA and RCF, I came to understand that hosting groups was one of the more consistent activities that the organization undertook. The garden was a frequent field trip site for student groups ranging from middle school to college-age students, community groups, and nonprofit organizations, all interested in how the organization functioned as a garden that grew and voluntarily gave away its produce. However, for RCF, the groups were an important opportunity to foster intensive conversations about food insecurity in an attempt to raise awareness about the pervasive nature of food insecurity as well as showcase potential ways to mitigate its reach in Fairview/Ashville.

Whereas Food for Fairview provided charitable, short-term relief to those in need, hosting groups was a pathway toward plumbing the depths of social issue, determining its causes, and working to address those causes collaboratively. Of course, there were no illusions by the organization that meaningful solutions to food insecurity would occur in such limited experiences; however, there was a perpetual hope that at least individuals would leave with an awakened sense of urgency and passion regarding food insecurity when visiting the garden space. It was this hope for a sustained, altered perspective on food insecurity in which I began to rethink the ultimate purpose of this program at the garden. As such, the staff and interns in charge of leading groups through dynamic

discussions about the causes of systemic food insecurity had formalized attitudes toward the solemn subject and were focused on creating an inclusive, dynamic space where visitors were also participants in shaping the contours of those conversations Far from providing a simple, organizational overview of RCF and its functions, the goal of the program was transformation on the part of the visitor to see food insecurity, and ways to address it, in new ways.

In this chapter, I argue that welcoming groups to RCF was ritualized as ceremony that functioned as a rite of passage for visitors. The ritual functioned as a ceremony because of the formalized attitude RCF staff/interns approached the structured conversation of food insecurity as an important communal event with an established code of conduct with its guests. The reader might take note that the rules and the roles for this event are more overt than that of the morning reflections. Additionally, the ceremony functioned as a territorial rite of passage, or as Arnold van Gennep claimed, a rite of passage that takes place by individuals transitioning into a new mode of being by through a geographic location and back again (1960). My observations and subsequent analysis are the result of my participant observations one morning when two groups of students from the University of North Carolina-Asheville (UNCA) came to visit RCF for a shared tour of the garden. The selection below begins right after I had reflected on picking tomatoes as the groups were arriving.

Field Notes-8/14/19-Root Cause Farm-10:30 AM

After jotting down my notes, we are all keenly aware that the two groups from UNCA have started to arrive. I quickly take the tomatoes over to the sorting table and I can tell Emma and Janice feel a little frantic. They quickly get out the marker boards

they intend to use for the discussion and the activity. Emma rushes over to the area under the hickory tree and asks everyone to take a seat. Some of the other students are directed to get the benches, and I help one bring the last bench over to the circle. Soon, Adrianna, a frequent donor and potential volunteer comes drives up in the midst of all this, wanting to help in the garden. She joins me sitting on top of the picnic table as Emma begins talking with the two groups once they settle onto the large wooden benches arranged in an oval under the tree.

The two groups are very similar in their respective demographics. They are all in their late teens-early twenties. Most of them are in shorts and t-shirts and they almost all seem to register as classic introverts, save perhaps their group leaders, who will come to dominate a lot of discussion later in the visit. Some of them have tattoos and there are a number of them that have the thick, black framed glasses like Zoey Deschanel from the television series *New Girl*.

During the introductions, Emma begins going around and telling individuals to offer their respective names, preferred pronouns, where they are from, and favorite vegetable. All of the students seem very comfortable articulating their preferred pronouns and a handful of the twenty students identify as transgender.

Emma begins a well-rehearsed opening speech, more like an oral history, that goes on for several minutes. She discusses that the garden has been operating for eleven growing seasons, but that the organization wants to pay respect to the story of the land and those that have come before it. She passes around an axe head that was found on the property years ago, that after being evaluated, is believed to be at least 3,000-5,000 years old. She also shows some of the spear heads that have been discovered on the property.

The students all seem interested in the objects. Emma mentions that these objects help to ground us "in the literal ground" and that it feels right to be naming that, paying homage to the fact that the land has a history. Kelly and Ali join us from the garden. Emma discusses that it is important to understand that this land has been exploited in the past as have the people on it, and that it is important to the organization to consider that as they do their work. A student then asks if the garden works at all with representatives from the Cherokee nation, to which Emma says, no.

Emma discusses relationship between RCF and Gardens that Give, its various programs, and partnerships, and the students seem very interested. The speech transitions to the internship program, the Sprouts program ("We read a book under this magical hickory tree"), etc. Emma discusses that overall the garden wants this space to be a welcoming space, where people can enter into the complexity of what it means to be. Emma typically addresses small groups and even other interns with similar meditative phrases that push the listener to consider fully what she might mean. Like a Zen koan, such statements seem designed to disjoint the mind from its own stream of consciousness and be present in the moment. Janice has been sitting next to Emma for a couple of minutes now as they prepare to transition into a group activity.

Emma mentions that, as the discussion continues, they will rely on just popcorn answers from individuals as they see fit, and that there is no wrong way to have these conversations. The answers that they give will be different than any other group and that that is okay, because each group offer new experiences. Janice wants to first set up some guidelines for their time at the garden. Students seem very accustomed to this practice. One of the students raises their hand and suggests, "Respect ourselves, others, and the

plants." Janice takes this time to remind everyone to take breaks and use the bathroom if necessary as she writes the guidelines on the board. One of the outspoken group leaders chimes in and wonders if everyone has heard about some staple of social conduct involving one's fingers (pinky = safety, ring finger = commitment, middle finger = accountability, index finger = fun). I have never heard of this but many students begin to fill in the blanks for what finger means what. It seems new to Janice as well, but she writes down the four values on the board. Another student offers up the importance of being open-minded and flexible. Emma makes a joke about how one always has to be flexible when working in a garden.

Another suggests the importance of working on a team. Janice asks everyone if they have heard of the acronym WAIT (Why Am I Talking/Why Am I not Talking) and that it is an important one to keep in mind, whether you or introverted or not, when contributing to conversation…in an attempt to say things of importance instead of just speaking; this allows others the time to speak as well; I quietly reflect that this would have been a helpful acronym for me to keep in mind earlier in the morning! She tells the group that they have space for one more. Two different students offer two different suggestions- Take in the sunshine while you can (Janice: Yes, we should all be taking in this amazing sunshine and air) and be present and pleasant.

It is interesting, but not surprising, that Janice develops the list with the group. Again, ownership, or at least collaboration in an experience is prized over being told what to do, even when it comes to a code of conduct. She did offer the WAIT acronym on her own, so she seems to want to put some boundaries there. Before the discussion gets underway, she does mention the importance of not stepping/kneeling on the beds because

it is like where the plants sleep, so they don't want to be disturbed. She likely hopes the metaphor will be more effective than discussing the dangers of compacting the soil.

It's here that Janice seems to take more of an active role. I wonder if each group is co-taught. Janice refers to an activity that she has learned at the Highlander Center and briefly discusses its social justice history. She leaves space for people feel comfortable with their emotions by telling them that at any moment, you may feel uncomfortable, and that it is okay, but it can be difficult to talk about hard issues, but that the garden wants to encourage bringing up hard things.

The activity involves naming the various signs and symptoms, immediate causes, and root causes of food insecurity on a pre-drawn tree placed on a large marker board. Signs and symptoms are represented by leaves on the marker board, immediate causes on the trunk, and the roots of food insecurity are symbolized by the roots of the tree. Everyone is asked to consider what they first think about when they think about food insecurity. Adrianna and I share our thoughts as do the other students. She thinks of emaciated children and I think of children who rely on food in the form of the Ice-Pops/Push Pops I witnessed at Food For Fairview the other day. This activity is intended to get us to think about and name the various leaves of food insecurity, first.

As the students end their conversations, the discussion is brought back to the group. Emma will write the various images/symptoms of food insecurity on the board, and she invites everyone to sit with these symptoms as they are recorded. One student raises her hand and goes on a lengthy discussion about how she and her neighbor in the group talked about how hunger is understood to be a third world problem and that it is still an issue here. She also mentions a story about a man approaching her for money in a

restaurant and that our learned reaction is not to give money to those who ask for it, but that people are hungry because of how we treat them, not for who they are.

I learn that Janice and Emma have the very unenviable job of synthesizing and translating minor diatribes into sparse phrases, words, sentences to fit on the marker board. This is a difficult balancing act that takes a lot of judgment. Janice and Emma are both gatekeepers for what gets put on the board, with the knowledge that not everything can make it. But they still need to pay honor or respect to the participants' comments to keep them involved in the spirit of collaboration. In reference to the student, Janice claims that hunger can be difficult because it is so close to home. Emma writes on the board: Hidden/Invisible Hunger on the trunk, as well as Stigma on the trunk as well. Emma writes down Shame as a leaf.

Another student chimes in that it is important to get to the roots here and he begins talking about how even food producers, like farmers, can go hungry and that migrant workers who pick those crops are placed in hazardous conditions. The students to this point are very impassioned about what they are saying, but they are running afoul of the process of the activity, which is to consider the symptoms first. Here, in a rare display, Janice tries to redirect the conversation to the leaves/symptoms of food insecurity, and the student's comments aren't jotted down.

What I find hilarious is that there is a student spraying bug spray on himself behind the group after returning from the bathroom, in a locale that would typically not use such a product and generally does not have an antagonistic attitude toward bugs. The student is noticed by Janice, but not corrected, or addressed.

Students seem to refocus a little and through conversation, Emma lists possible symptoms as Chronic Illness, Undernourished, Lack of Access. Janice takes this time to inform the students of a USDA report that claimed that nine out of ten people on food assistance want fresh fruit and produce. .Another student suggests that Fatigue/Exhaustion can often accompany food insecurity because if you aren't eating right then you can get tired easily. Emma writes these down. Janice adds that a lot of food insecure people are living in survival mode.

As the commentary floods in from students about their various ideas/opinions, Emma and Janice seem to find it difficult to sort through the information, especially that which is overlapping, because each suggestion for the tree also incorporates a personal story, cultural story, or historical episode that is remarkably hard to synthesize because they take the form of tangents that are earnest but hard to track.

A student who is just as outspoken as two of the leaders proclaims that not everyone can take the time to cook a whole bag of raw beans or rice, because many people are working multiple jobs and so they don't have the time resources to prepare good food. Janice adds that some people want to take more produce from Food for Fairview, but don't have a refrigerator at home to keep it in. One of the group leaders offers that not everyone can afford to live as a vegetarian or vegan. The same student joins in again, more impassioned and says, "This all comes down to stagnant wages!" Why isn't this written down somewhere on the tree?

Another student offers that those on the margins cannot find food assistance as easily, that the socio-cultural barriers to minority communities may inhibit food assistance. Or that there are some individuals with disabilities who find it difficult to get

additional food, especially if they have dietary restrictions. Disability gets put on the board. Another student says that food deserts are full of fast food and that not every family can drive 20 minutes to the nearest grocery store because they need food then. Emma offers that government agencies subsidize the large agribusiness and that is why the price of fast food is so much cheaper. Students continually talk over each other, and then retreat after apologizing.

By this point, the discussion has been going on for a long time. The students are getting restless and need to move. Janice wants to change the terms that are routinely used. She said that people routinely talk of food deserts and food swamps, and that the latter is actually where there is a bunch of fast food, but that these designations aren't helpful because life actually thrives in these natural environments. Instead, it is more appropriate to discuss how these areas are food apartheids because they are not naturally occurring, but are planned ways in which to restrict food access.

One of the outspoken group leaders discusses redlining and the housing/financial practices that led to a still segregated south and that there have been no reclamations against those policies. At some point, the group leader says the word "We" when referring to the abuses of white culture against people of color. Quickly, Janice says, "I want to pushback a little on the usage of 'we language'". When I ask Janice about this later, she tells me that at one point the student referred to such discriminatory practices as something that "we" did, and that such terminology lumps individuals from different racial backgrounds into a homogenized group without calling out system racism on the part of white culture. Not only did the leader's comment not call out white racism, and thus inadvertently, attempted to normalize it, it seemed to "Other" those who were not

white in the group. This was a rare situation in which Janice set a firm boundary, but with the intention of being inclusive for those present. The leader who made the comment immediately acquiesced.

The discussion then shifted to the problems of gentrification, especially in an area known as the Triangle Park Area in Asheville that many of the students seemed to be familiar with. The student who made the comment about food access being restricted for marginalized communities says, "I don't want to be too radical here, but the real problem is late stage capitalism." Everyone laughs in agreement because it doesn't seem like a radical statement to this group. Emma smiled widely. The student claims that America was never about freedom and liberty, but designed to exploit people from minority backgrounds.

The volunteers are talking a lot about the intertwined threads of issues associated with capitalism and it seems as if the conversation is getting away from Emma and Janice. A student makes mention of the disastrous effects of tariffs, and Janice tries to redirect the conversation to others who might want to contribute but hadn't had the chance to at that point. Adrianna discusses the issue of "food snobbery" that relies on aesthetically pleasing food to sell groceries and largely discards what doesn't get sold instead of redistributing it given the food policies of not redistributing in terms of expiration dates. Emma chimes in that we have been conditioned to look for what we see in the grocery store because of agribusiness.

At this point, Ali seems to be motioning to Janice that it is time to transition to the garden, or perhaps asking if Janice wants her to lead the tour. After discussing a lack of social centers in food deserts, the conversation dies down and Janice throws out the

option of taking a tour, and the students seem eager to do so. However, this group won't get to work in the garden, probably because they were so interactive in the discussion.

The group moves slowly into the garden itself and I gather the tour will take on a mostly educational tone as Ali leads the group toward the middle of the property and discusses why certain beds are contoured to help maintain soil integrity. She does a great job of leading discussion and asking the group questions, but the students seem mostly awkward, tired, hot, and they move clumsily through the garden paths. I find it interesting how closed off they seem, arms folded, as they move sullenly through the garden space, given how talkative they were before. They are adjusting to the garden and how to move and listen within it.

She discusses the sheer variety of the plant life now, peppers, bell peppers, okra, and why the beds need to be solarized to kill bacteria or diseases left in the soil from other organisms that were grown there. Her questions go largely unanswered, and this reminds me of my college students. I work hard to keep up with the group, trying to stay at least one row over from them so I can capture everything that's happening. Ali discusses how the garden utilizes a lot of different modes of gardening to show others the varieties that they can try themselves. As she discusses the numerous beds at the back of the property, she focuses on the need to use hand tools to be less invasive to the soil than a motorized tiller, for example.

Conversation shifts to how sometimes the priority is given to growing produce that RCF knows its community partners will use, such as growing ginger and turmeric for Green Opportunities. In the middle of the garden now, there is an open grass pathway that largely separates the front of the property and the back. The students congregate

more easily to listen to Ali discuss tomatoes and sweet baby watermelons; Ali elaborates upon how they are excited to grow the small watermelons as a way to offer an otherwise expensive fruit to others who are food insecure, and might crave it. The awkwardness persists, and students are trying to pay attention despite feeling somewhat uncomfortable in the outdoor environment. However, more curiosity begins to pique when Ali invites students to try nasturtium, an orange, edible flower, that has a peppery taste. Students are more than happy to try the flower out and Ali mentions that they are also growing this plant for use by Green Opportunities as well. Side conversations erupt and interest is renewed.

After discussing some of different gardening methods within the organizations' demonstration garden, Ali moves to a small bed of Stevia plants, which she explains are between 100-300 times sweeter than sugar. She recommends to students that they take a just a portion of a leaf because of how sweet it is. The students are excited. One student reaches for seconds and another asks questions about how to get seeds or starts for it. More questions start to come in to both Ali and Janice, who has joined us, and the students open up more.

Next, Ali discusses a portion of the property dedicated to permaculture gardening so it needs less intensive maintenance and then focuses on a section of blackberries and hibiscus, the latter of which was grown for use by an organization known as Bounty and Soul, because the plant is used in a drink favored by Latinx families who interact with that organization. Janice picks one of the small flowers that garnered so much attention the other day at Food for Fairview, picks its petals apart, places them in her right hand and invites students to take a petal, claiming that its sour and tart. Students gradually

chew it, and smiles spread across their faces. "What was the name of that plant!?!" a student asks. Ali responds by saying, "Hibiscus, or hi-roseelle."

As the tour winds down, Ali highlights a bed that has buckwheat planted as a cover crop. She mentions that after harvesting, there is about a three week period where something needs to be planted in the soil again in order to maintain the health of the microorganisms in the soil, so buckwheat is good to plant to maintain the health of soil in the interim and that bees really enjoy it. She elaborates that a professor had come out to the garden at one point and mentioned that there were probably up to 30 different species of bees on the property.

Transitioning again around the hickory tree, students find their seats on the large wooden benches under the tree's branches. Ali introduces the students to the activity she mentioned, which is chewing the spilanthes flower that I was introduced to later in the week. I find it difficult to hide my excitement at what their reactions will be like. Ali pitches that the activity is fun, and encourages everyone to try it. She tells them that once they get their flower, they'll chew it together as a group, swish it around for about a minute, and then spit it out like mouthwash. Soon Ali is back from the garden with the flowers and they are passed around, then she goes back to the garden and retrieves one for me as well. One lanky student claims he took three and the other students chuckle. Another student jokes, "Don't overdose!" I chuckle to myself because they do not know what they're in for. Ali sits down and instructs them to put the small flower in their mouths. As they place the flowers in their mouth, the following dialogue takes place in the group:

-"What's it taste like?"

-“Do we suck on it?”

-“Chew it, it’s a little lemony.”

Instantaneously, the entire group erupts in a mixture of reactions that vary from laughing out loud, noticeable discomfort, shrills, and whoops. The atmosphere under the oak tree is electric. Students retreat from the group, and many of us start spitting the remnants of the flower out as saliva overtakes our mouths. Others are still laughing, somehow, more comfortable with the overwhelming sensation in their mouths. I’m laughing harder now.

-“It tastes like pop rocks! What is happening!?!

-“Eww!”

-“I got pranked!”

-“My mouth is buzzing! WHY!?!”

-“My mouth feels fresh.”

-“This is the best oral care you have ever given yourself!”

-“Well it doesn’t feel like the best!”

-“What is the purpose of this!”

This is by far the most energized the students have been the entire time, and for good reason. They have been given a unique bonding experience that they’ll reflect on with each other and with others long after this day. They are in wonder at how such a tiny plant can evoke such a response. As the students settled in after the activity, Janice

wanted to collect their thoughts on the experience for posterity, and to report to potential donors in the future. Janice has to quiet the conversation so that we can all "Take a minute to hear what other people are saying." Students make the following comments:

-"There are a lot of options here."

-"It's really interactive."

- "The vibe is really chill."

-"You can't put a price on the value of a place like this."

They also discuss learning how multifaceted the food issue is after the roots activity with the group before the tour. Ali takes this moment to reiterate that the garden is about food justice, not charity. "If we just address the symptoms we will never put ourselves out of business." Before they leave the students leave to get lunch, Janice asks if there is anything that has changed their perspective; students reply with comments surrounding the need for there to be more gardens like RCF, as well as commending the interns and staff for maintaining the space for over eleven years.

Ritualization and Welcoming Groups

As I have mentioned, I have had the unique experience of being both a participant in a group tour at the garden, as well as an observer; I attended TLA as a participant in a group tour in the summer of 2016, and then again as an observer of the same event at RCF after its name change in the summer of 2019. As such I can trace the general overview of the routine and similarities between both of those experiences, supported by

the conversations I've had with various staff and interns who have interacted with the garden within that timeframe.

First, when groups arrive at the garden, they are instructed to sit on benches under the shade of the hickory tree and at least one member of the organization takes the active role of leading discussion. Individuals are asked to offer their names and something about themselves to build a sense of rapport with the group.

Next, conversation transitions to a history of the garden and a description of the work that it performed. As I mentioned earlier, this functions largely as a type of oral history to root participants in a better understanding of the purpose of the garden, its story, and the philosophy of those who continually work it.

Following this, a sustained conversation about food insecurity ensues. This is a collaborative discussion, where everyone is encouraged to contribute and the garden representative(s) help to facilitate the conversation to ensure that individuals stay on task and are mindful of allowing everyone a chance to offer their thoughts. Note how often Emma and Janice allowed the conversation about food insecurity to develop its own circuitous path but also attempted to redirect discussion when focus seemed to be shifting elsewhere. While the marker board anchored the discussion around symptoms, causes, and roots of food insecurity in the example above, and had been widely used with groups prior to my 2019 experience, it was not a feature of group discussion I had in 2016.

Soon after, groups would either move into an educational tour of the garden, work in small groups in the garden with interns/staff, or do both. When only tours take place, a premium is placed on mindful walking in the garden as well as tasting some of its

produce, whether that be some of its raspberries, plums, Stevia, or hibiscus. In the example above, time did not permit the groups from UNCA to actually work in the garden due to predetermined scheduling issues that the groups had. However, the ideal for RCF is to have groups to move into a tour of the garden and work with the land before concluding their time with reflection under the hickory tree. When work can be included in the garden experience, visitor-led conversations regarding their questions about the garden are encouraged. Regardless of time constraints or the visitors who came to RCF, some time is always dedicated to an interactive experience within the garden space for those who come to visit it.

Finally, groups are invited back under the shade of the hickory tree to collectively reflect upon what they learned during their time at the garden. The example highlighted above was interesting because Ali and the other staff/interns decided to end the experience with tasting the spilanthes before transitioning into the reflection component. It is important to note that in my participation, observations, and conversations about this reflection time, it is continually emphasized that this component of the tour is a crucial aspect of visits to the garden because it highlights the organization's attempt to synthesize the issues surrounding food insecurity with its model of at least attempting to mitigate its effects through deep conversation. At time, interns and staff of RCF voiced concerns about being an organization that is squarely focused on handing out food; however, community education and reflection at the end of tours were seen as efforts toward advancing food justice, not just food charity, by altering their perceptions and experiences of what food production can mean. It is precisely this alteration of perception in others through intentional work and conversation that many staff and

interns I interviewed described as some of the most valuable work that they performed at the garden:

Danny Szemple

> But yeah, I think, as I said before, there's a tension between what's the most important thing, is it the growing of the food or the instilling of the values when people visit the garden, to the extent that we are really just welcoming groups all the time, that's a great thing, but were allowed to do that and have those experiences.

Kevin Todd

> Yeah. So, it's a big tree that's right there by the garden. Um, and it's really one of the only few shade spots up there, so it's naturally the place where people congregate because it's a cool spot once a day. It actually has some adverse effects on some of the plants because I think the roots from the tree affect kind of the growing of certain plants. So, you kind of see a little part in the garden where something doesn't grow as well because the roots of the hickory tree. But, you know, most people would have cut it down because of that, but Susan would always say "First of all, it's our only shade tree, but second of all, this is where we get together with folks." It's just kind of like this space where you feel at peace, and that's kind of what happened. Obviously at the end of a hard day of work it's a place to sit down under the shade, but it's a space where we'd do our introductions with the groups. So, you had this sense of getting, like, you know the barriers that might be up when you first meet someone for whatever reason, those kind of start to fall...

Emma Childs

> Yeah, I mean, I think the way we are hosting groups and trying to have conversation about kind of systemic issues feels really important, and then inviting them to engage in the work alongside us. Well, I don't know if that always feels welcoming, I think a lot of middle schoolers aren't into it (laughs)…So, holding space, I think, holding space for plants to grow, and people to show up, whatever state and season they're in, feels like the most valuable work.

Ali Stone

Yeah, uhm, I think definitely leading the groups and doing the introductions and doing the feedback, and also getting some time in the garden to develop those conversations, uhm and sometimes that didn't happen as well and people just wanted to enjoy the time they were there…uhm, but I think, yeah, definitely the discussions and I was just taken away by so many different levels of engagement by different people; there's one group that sticks out to me, uhm, in the summer I think it was a group of seventh graders who came out of their fifteen passenger van and they were like throwing water bottles at each other and like picking up gravel, and you know, just being very childlike. And so I looked at one of the summer interns and we were like, we are going to make a short introduction today and you know just gauging off their interactions after the first minute, they were probably not going to want to discuss very long or very deeply and we would mostly just work with them that day.

Uhm, and then we sit down and we start our introductions and about the history and I think we do an exercise with them and I think the entire team was just swept away with how they took that conversation, how quickly they went from these playful seventh graders to these engaging, and honestly, very deep, uhm and I remember this one boy came, he was talking about nutritious food in his middle school and how he knows that some people don't eat well, and he had brought it into his basketball team he was a part of and how he is healthier because of his family and how some people don't have the money to afford extra activities like basketball to keep themselves healthy and that that probably means that their lifestyle are just different because of income issues and he started talking about body issues, and body image, and how he struggled with thinking that he might become overweight and he was just fearful of that and how he was going to start asking his parents to buy healthier foods because he didn't need to eat chips every day after school like he was just going on with (inaudible) and like the reflection of his life, and I was just like this young teenage boy in a group of his peers is talking about, for one I think body image for men in general is something to like stay away from let alone someone so young within his peers.

Janice Brewer

Janice:I feel like really rewarded, especially when we have groups out and we share the reflections at the end about the things that they've learned or the new perspectives that they've gained, so it's really meaningful to me to impact other people and how they view the food system, or how they view people, dealing with food insecurity…So I guess changing or

expanding of perceptions…is really meaningful. I think having groups out is one of my favorite parts, that, those are the days that, usually, sometimes we have groups that are…hard…uhm, but those are the days that I leave feeling really lifted, and smiling on my drive home…like it makes it feel worth it or something…all the hard times.

Me: What do you mean when you say "lifted"?

Janice: Like almost literally lifted…like airy, or happy…I guess…It's almost like a physical standing up straight.

Me: That's great…Does that, getting back to your previous question, does that happen at the potlucks and the volunteer nights, the Wednesday volunteer nights, is that kind of when you feel it the most? Or…

Janice: I think…when we have groups come out, so they'll come from like a school or a university, or a camp…Our Wednesday nights are typically the same people coming over and over. So I think it's more of the impacting of people who…or giving them an experience that they've never…BEEN on a farm before, they've never harvested a carrot before, never tasted a fresh raspberry right off the plant, so I think those…when I see people experience that and THEY light up it makes me light up.

Me: That's interesting….so you feel the most meaning in the work you do when you get to engage with people who are in some ways very, what do I want to say, not ignorant, but unexposed right? And so, then…right. But the people who routinely come out, I am sure still feels good to you, but there is something about a new perspective, right, that takes place.

Janice: Yeah, and I think it's a part of pushing for that paradigm shift, the more people that feel connected…and feel…like THEY have meaning in where the food comes from…yes, because I remember that moment for me and it being like, so life-transforming, in the direction that I went with my life…what made me feel good instead of running to look good, or like eating healthy foods to lose weight, or getting on my phone to look at other people and comparing…there are different ways that I can find meaning in my life and seeing that start to happen for other people is so exciting.

It is clear from the attitudes described above that welcoming groups to tour the garden is designed to function much more meaningfully than a simple introduction to the work of RCF. From the perspective of those who orchestrate the tours, there is intentionality in building relationship with community groups as a means to change their understanding of the issues facing food insecurity through deep conversation and

introspection. Welcoming groups through a tour of the garden is structured with activities designed for just this task. From the detailed conversations about food insecurity under the Hickory Tree, exploring and working with the garden as well as conversing with others in small groups, and finally group reflection on what participants have learned from their visit, the potential for changing the perspectives of others is meaningfully cultivated in each of these tasks, and hence ritualized. Indeed, I argue that the sequential structure of these activities mirrors a symbolic ritual, namely Arnold van Gennep's concept of a rite of passage.

Welcoming Groups as a Rite of Passage

While one typically considers a rite of passage as an individual experience in which someone transitions into another stage of life, Arnold van Gennep's landmark text, *Rites of Passage* (1960) offers broad theoretical consideration to just how pervasive rites of passage are in individual and communal life. Of particular interest to this project is van Gennep's concept of territorial rites of passage, in which the movement through physical locations can mark a transition in which the individual is incorporated into the community or larger culture that function as gatekeepers to that locale. The author's prolific examples include moving across the borders of countries, the threshold of a temple or church, as well as the doorway of one's home. Whether grand or minute in geographic scale, van Gennep contends that crossing thresholds or moving through constructed portals into different locations can carry the symbolic significance of moving from the profane world to the sacred and back again, or at the very least moving into a "new world" (van Gennep, 1960, p. 198).

Territorial rites of passage, like all rites of passage, contain three distinct yet interrelated stages that were highlighted in an earlier chapter. The first stage is the separation from community, or the pre-liminal phase, which indicate a "separation from a previous world" (van Gennep, 1909, p. 20), rites undertaken during the liminal or transitional phase in the new or sacred environment, and finally rites of incorporation into the new world or post-liminal rites, marking a change in status within a new community and moving with the acquired status back into the old world. Notably, territorial rites of passage can incorporate the same ritual acts one undertakes when entering and exiting a space. One example that van Gennep offers is that of those in the Orthodox Jewish tradition who touch a mezuzah upon entering the home of another Jew:

> Rites of entering a house or temple, and so forth, have their counterpart in rites of exit, which are either identical or the reverse…In the same way, whenever an Orthodox Jew passes through the main door of a house, a finger of his right hand touches the mezuzah, a casket attached to the doorpost which contains a piece of paper or ribbon upon which is written or embroidered the sacred name of God (Shaddai). He then kisses his finger and says, 'The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, evermore.' The verbal rite is here joined to the manual one. (1960, p. 24)

Below, consideration is offered to how welcoming groups to the garden mirrors the stages of a territorial rite of passage.

1) Pre-liminal Stage/Separation from Community

Aside from physically being separated from their respective homes or communities when travelling to the garden, the true mark of this stage in a rite of passage occurs when groups gather themselves in a circle, on wooden benches, underneath the shade of the hickory tree and engage in thoughtful discussion about food insecurity. Here, a concerted effort is made to build community with the group on behalf of the staff/interns that

facilitate the oncoming conversation. This included introductions, brief reflections on why individuals decided to come to the garden, at times their preferred pronouns or favorite vegetable, etc. Next, an oral history was offered about the story of the garden, including its purpose and its programs to offer the appropriate context for group members about what marks the garden itself more different than other gardens. This conversation then pivoted to a detailed discussion about the multilayered issues surrounding food insecurity and its systemic presence in American culture. And similar to language used when working in and with the garden in an earlier chapter, the conversation facilitated by interns/staff in this portion of the rite was as intentional and inclusive as possible to promote the educational growth of visitors to the space while also pushing back on those whose language denied a sense of inclusivity to those present (recall Janice's redirection of a student's use of the word "we" when discussing racial discrimination).

This stage is considered a pre-liminal stage because the intensive conversations were meant to effectively reorient the minds of those present to the systemic problem of food insecurity and thus provide a sense of cognitive dissonance regarding systemic nature of food insecurity in which they lived before entering into the garden space; for example, many visitors to the garden may benefit from the socio-economic factors that make food insecurity a reality, yet at the same time recognize it is a problem. In a sense, this stage of the rite encourages participants to think critically about the harsh injustices of food insecurity and critically examine it in a space reserved for safe and productive conversations about the topic, free of judgment, and intellectually distant from such a culture. Such intentional conversations mark a pre-liminal stage or separation from one's community.

2) Liminal Stage

Having been separated from society, engaged in a conversation that reorients participants to an understanding of systemic food insecurity, and familiarized with the mission of the garden, participants are now ready to cross the threshold into the garden space. What is remarkable about the garden space itself is that it is a ritual space that is also a perpetually liminal space. It is literally always in the process of transition. As such, the rites that take place within it are not necessarily formulaic, but respond to the needs and time constraints of those groups who visit it; however, every group interacts with the garden in some way. For example, in the recollections I offered about my experience at the garden, we briefly toured the garden and then set to work within it. I was able to gain a brief understanding about how the garden fostered relationships and connection with the land, and those who worked it, thus providing a realized, altered perception, of food production over and against that of industrialized agriculture and systemic food insecurity. Similarly, while the students from UNCA did not have the ability to work in the garden, they interacted with the space through the tasting of its produce, whether that be the hibiscus, the nasturtium, or the spilanthes. More than this, they were educated about how the garden seeks to be a space that educates others about how to grow their own food, the intentional consideration given to soil and plants as collaborators in the garden, as well as how produce is tailored to the needs of partner organizations and the clients that associate with them. In all cases, groups are taught to see the garden space in active transition and opposition to a culture that encourages food insecurity.

3) Post-Liminal Stage/Rites of Incorporation

The transition out of the garden space and back under the hickory tree for active reflection about the experience marks the post-liminal stage of this rite of passage. In line with van Gennep's notion of a territorial rite of passage, the exiting of a liminal space occurs after crossing the same threshold as well as enacting a similar, but sometimes, reverse rite of entry. As with crossing the threshold out of the Syrian family's apartment and putting my shoes back on, groups crossed and exited the garden space through its gate, and sat back under the hickory tree; however, instead of discussing food insecurity, the rite was focused on how their understandings of food insecurity had changed as a result of their experience at RCF. In other words, the conversation centered upon how their perceptions of food insecurity had altered at the end of their experience.

What's interesting with the experience of the UNCA group, is that the liminal stage extended somewhat into the post-liminal stage through the spilanthes activity. However, I believe this activity was meant to better spur the reflection/post-liminal rite that it transitioned into. Like many rites of passage, the post-liminal stage provides a rite which marks a formal transition has taken place. Participants are changed, or "new," in some way before entering back into their conventional sense of reality. For the staff/interns at the garden, this is an important rite in that now individuals can leave the garden with a connection to the garden itself and a new educational outlook on the issue of food insecurity through shared conversation. It is this altered perception of food insecurity that is crucial to the work of RCF in helping others see the root causes of such a systemic socio-economic issue.

<u>Welcoming Groups as Ceremony</u>

By this point, the category of ceremony has been well-trodden. Like the morning reflections and working with and in the garden, there are ceremonious attitudes and actions that take place when welcoming groups to RCF, including expected roles and behaviors. The role of educator and facilitator make up the official roles that are portrayed by staff/interns as guides through this particular rite of passage. In line with these roles, the expectations of what actions should be taken are enforced. These include creating the rules for conversation before moving into the garden, managing those conversations, and instructing students how to enter into and interact with the garden space. The larger purpose for which this rite of passage is intended is to educate others about the specter of food insecurity that weigh heavily on American culture, and to alter perceptions about the importance of that issue, as well as provide an example of how the issue can begin to be addressed through community-driven gardening programs.

However, until this point, a particular aspect of Grimes' category of ceremony has not been elaborated upon. As Grimes notes, at times, ceremony can refer to a ritual which considers the contentious of power associated with ceremony (2008). Grimes explains that:

> Whereas decorous actions are typified by their politeness and exaggerated courtesy, ceremonious protagonists are sometimes so certain, and yet defensive of their ideological territory that they dramatize their victorious heroism. Gracious understatement gives way to solemnly pious, political overstatement. Ceremony is no longer face-to-face. The 'other-side' is caricatured, since ceremony both expresses and creates 'our' solidarity as opposed to 'theirs.'
>
> Power is a central consideration in ceremony. While it is operative in both ritualization and decorum, in ceremony the actions often symbolize power itself- either the power to conserve or make change. Power of whatever kind- political, military, legislative, influential, economic- is always ambiguous; it is both a source of conflict and a means of resolving it. (2008, p. 42)

This is not to imply that I believe the garden and its staff/interns positioned themselves as inherently heroic figures given the organization's philosophy. However, this particular ceremony was rooted in a particular narrative positioned against a culture that enables food insecurity. Also, the power of the garden space in the group tours was highlighted as a means through which substantive change could be made against such a culture. RCF understood that its garden was not the solution to food insecurity; however the garden functioned as a liminal space that showcased the power to push against food insecurity. Of course, this is the purpose of a rite of passage to begin with. There is no rite of passage that simply reaffirms an individual's or a group's preconceived cultural ideologies or practices. Rites of passage are enacted to change, not sustain ways of seeing the world. Hence, by touring the garden, participants leave in greater solidarity with the garden space, and in less solidarity with the systems that encourage food insecurity. As such, I have described welcoming groups at RCF in the following way:

> *Welcoming groups at RCF functions as an organizational ceremony. The staff and interns of the garden guide participants through a territorial rite of passage that first, reorients group understanding of issues involving food insecurity through facilitated conversation. Next, participants transition into a liminal space where interactions with the garden frame the potential for alternative modes of food production and community-building are highlighted. Finally, participants are guided through reflecting upon how their perceptions about food insecurity have been altered from their experience at the garden.*

Chapter 8: Sprouts in the Garden

For the last chapter, I highlight the garden's Sprouts program. It was a Friday morning program dedicated to interactive learning about the beauty and complexity of garden ecosystems that fostered respect for the land and its creatures. Any and all families were welcome to come and encouraged to stay past the hour long activity. Below, I include two observations of the Sprouts program, two months apart from each other. Attendance at these programs, like most Fridays I gathered, were a mix of grandmothers caring for their grandchildren and stay-at-home parents eager to get their children outdoors and to learn about the natural world. It's worth noting that these excerpts are some of my shortest and this is in large part because the Sprouts program itself only ran about 45-60 minutes each time. Not only this, but I sometimes struggled to take notes effectively when the children in the program (and their caretakers in tow) darted from place to place in the garden. Nevertheless, each experience was memorable in its own regard. The mood was always incredibly relaxed, despite the frenetic nature of the children present, because whatever plan was implemented for the Sprouts program, it was generally understood that the children would largely drive the activities and the

conversation. Whoever was in charge of leading Sprouts knew that they would be conducting an orchestra of kazoos and that was part of the fun.

In retrospect, it was during Sprouts that the garden felt the most like itself; the garden and those in within it existed in a time of its own making, outside normal time, like someone stepping out of a rushing torrent of water and lying on a warm flat rock. Instead of barrage of moments that wear away at you, these moments with Sprouts felt as if time nourished everyone involved. Thus I came to understand Sprouts as a celebration, imbued with festive spontaneity and play only tacitly concerned with schedule, and with less focus on formalized actions and roles that might be found within Grimes' notions of liturgy and ceremony (2013). As in most celebrations, structure is only adhered to loosely and at times even sarcastically mocked as participants move through it; this is as if to say that those present know how "things *should* go" but as long the celebratory feel is maintained, structure can easily be sacrificed. Consider a wedding reception that lasts far longer than organizers intended and may even spill out into other venues once the reception hall closes. Consider a child's birthday party where the parents are ready to serve cake, but the kids are having too much fun tossing water balloons at one another to ask them to stop.

The following excerpts reflect my observations of two iterations of the Sprouts program I was fortunate to experience. In my analysis, I argue that while the structure of the program resembles that of welcoming groups to the garden, the program should not be understood as a ceremonial rite of passage, but instead as a ritualized celebration that explores the wonder of the garden space.

Field Notes-6/14/19- The Lord's Acre-8:50 AM

Everyone transitions to get up and get ready for Sprouts. Ali reminds Janice that it begins at 9:00. Ali runs down a plan of how it will go. Start with a book about chickens…move to the garden to find food for chickens with other kiddos (one intern to every two kids or so), go to feed the chickens, and then end at the raspberries. Danny Szemple, a former intern and now volunteer at the garden that I had previously met at the garden, comes right before this and everyone gives him a hard time for wearing shorts and a cut off t-shirt. He sees Kelly in a blanket and claims it's not that cold. He trades jabs with Ali about whether or not to have his hat embroidered, because Ali embroiders a lot of her clothing.

I re-introduce myself to Danny and talk about the potential for an interview at some point. Sprouts begins under the big tree, but Ali moves it to the picnic area where there is sun. It's an area with picnic tables on a large wooden deck built into the ground next to the garden's parking area. We are all freezing, the temperature is easily only in the low 40s, which is weird for June in North Carolina. The children are asked their names and one thing they like about the garden. The kids are allowed to speak up and out. We give crew introductions. Most of the kids gather on the ground in front of Ali when she starts reading and after she invites them; she introduces the day's text, *Chicken and the Worm* (Mcbrier, 2008). It's an educational book about friendship between the two kids of creatures, and the qualities that chickens and worms provide to the ground by continually turning it. Ali stops to ask the questions throughout the text and then listens attentively to the children's responses.

Next, Ali asks everyone to transition to the garden and look for bugs to feed the garden's chickens. Ali asks that everyone move to the garden, and asks interns to work

with the children to look for bugs, worms, and foliage to feed the chickens. This happens haphazardly, interns just gravitate to kids and aren't assigned people. Nick and Kelly move to weed the kid's garden space, for example. Danny connects with twins who are dressed as Chewbacca, and I talk to their grandmother about the trouble that the Amazon Alexa device can bring to a household.

I follow Emma and the kids she's chosen to work with as they look for clover and daisies, she mentions her mom is great at finding four-leaf clovers. She seems a little hesitant with them at first, but then loosens up much more. It all moves organically. I try to move away to get a fuller sense of what is happening. I watch all the groups moving about…picking different foliage from the ground (chick weed, clovers, bugs, dandelions) that will eventually be given to the chickens. They all have little white pails to put their foliage in. They seem so independent, and determined. It is organized chaos. The children take the lead and it seems that this is what Ali intended. I listen to Kory talk to his daughter about fennel, and its smell and talks about the plump nature of purslane. Emma says not to pick the daisies. Emma finds a baby broccoli and tells her kiddos that they can touch it but not pick it. It will be saved for harvest later.

Someone asks, "Does everyone have a bug?"

Soon, the groups gather around the small chicken coup, a wire mesh cage with a small shelter in it; the chickens are milling around as well. The baskets are emptied either on the ground or in the chicken coup as the chickens are released to eat and run around for the kids to enjoy. Ali reviews with them what the chickens can do for the ground by asking the question, but the kids don't care. Kory's daughter is carrying the chickens around and kissing them. They are full grown, but ODDLY comfortable in her

arms. It is a celebration. It seems like a birthday party. The families kind of drift off on their own after this. They don't end in the raspberry patch as Ali intended; I check to be sure. Not surprisingly, there is no consternation about this.

Field Notes-8/16/19- Root Cause Farm-8:45 AM

Emma shifts the conversation away to talk about her Sprouts program in more detail before the group comes. She tells us that the program is still rooted in the five senses exploration, and that she wants to focus today's class on herbs and making sun tea and bath salts. She plans on reading about sunflowers and then transitioning to the herb garden, and then the larger garden to collect things for the various projects. She also wants them to have time to sample some plums. She asks that the rest of the crew helps them harvest during the activities. Soon, Ali joins us with a boy named Oliver, right before the program begins.

Sprouts begins around 9:00, but most people are talking, and waiting for other families to show. For many of them, they are return families, very familiar with one another it seems. They discuss kids, education, family names. They all sit under the hickory tree. I see Emma has put some books out on a small table in the middle for free reading.

Emma opens the activity with an introduction, asking everyone to discuss what they like doing in the sun. Afterwards she reminds everyone that they are still working on their five senses. They read a book entitled, *Sunflower House* (Bunting, 1996), and they discuss the squirrels, and their sense of smell- she makes reference to the sunflower

heads they've eaten. She encourages the children, ages 18 months-7 years probably, to gather closer and think about their own sense of smell.

As Emma reads, she shows pictures, discusses how the story relates to the garden, and it is clear she has a lot of experience reading to kids. The kiddos are allowed to interrupt. They walk around but most sit in rapt attention. One kid blurts out, "I'm going to camp today!" Emma asks why the book mentions birds in relation to sunflowers. One child mentions the lifecycle of the seeds. Emma discusses how birds eat them, and then poop them out, and that's how seeds are dispersed. Emma explains the projects, distributes small, white, plastic buckets and shears to the kiddos and parents, and she tells them to close their eyes while smelling the herbs and the flowers in the garden and to pick anything that smells good.

The children quickly transition to the adjacent herb garden and walk through a trellis that reminds me of a Shinto gateway to the natural world; it is largely overgrow on one side with ivy it seems. It is a rough structure, but majestic. The herb garden itself is very overgrown, but has some clear, discernible pathways laid out in woodchips. The area itself is small, perhaps the size of a basement or large family room. As the families walk in, everyone is quickly bottlenecked at the entrance because as the exploration begins, movement stops. Gradually, kids, parents, staff, interns make their way all the way through, trying out different herbs, smelling them, snipping them, offering explanations, ducking down, kneeling, pausing, immersing themselves in the small area, in the task at hand. Time is suspended. Engrossment isn't the word. This is play, this is learning at play, wonderment.

I feel incessantly awkward walking around the herb garden and listening to conversations, jotting my notes, without having a formal introduction. I feel like I am a suspicious character, but I try not to move like one. I make my way to the outside of the herb garden, along the makeshift, stick fence when I hear Ali asking some children if they want to try to find some mint for their baskets. I try to make small talk about having mint in my backyard, but it feels inauthentic. Like I am trying too hard as an outsider to fit in. This feels like needing to gradually ease my way into being a preschool teacher at St. Thomas in Nashville years back in an establishment that was predominantly female, in a profession dominated by females. This space is also full of moms, and as the only male, I feel out of place.

The group starts to transition to the larger garden. Now they have free reign, now they feel freer to explore. The herb garden was just a taste, and the full garden offers a smorgasbord of sensory overload. I move more freely around the garden as well, taking note of the larger group dispersing into the bigger space. Parents begin one-on-one time with their children, snipping flowers, observing insects. They are tasting raspberries, they are tasting plums, just like the group from the day before. I notice that Janice redirects someone who is stepping on a bed by accident, marking that boundary again. Everything is centered on child exploration and everyone seems to celebrate the exclamation of children encountering earthworms, tasting the fruits of the garden, and taking in its flowers. Aside from Emma pointing out a harmful weed at one point, the kiddos aren't told what to pick. I hear a mother reinforce to her child the importance of not stepping on the beds. After most are directed to the plum tree for a taste, Emma

directs the group(s) to start making their way back to the tree. Off in the distance I can see a small contingent examining the chickens near the front of the garden.

We eventually all move back to the hickory tree. Parents watch from behind the benches as their kiddos gather excitedly around Emma, who has started to lay out the bowls, and ingredients for the bath salts. There are two small, ornate bowls flanked on either side of a larger mixing bowl. The children eagerly gather around as Emma arranges the ingredients. She is a pro at giving directions, offering patience to those who are interrupting her. She asks who wants which job, she encourages children to share when stirring, to take turns. She ensures everyone gets a chance at doing something. For each bowl, three to four kiddos collaborate on what flowers and herbs to put in ("Decide what you want to add that would smell good in a bath!"). In a matter of minutes, the work is done and parents come over with the jars they brought to carefully dump the bath salt concoctions into, or the crew packs the salt into plastic bags.

As I mill around, worried about how to overcome the awkwardness I feel from not being introduced, I retrieve some recruitment flyers from the car and put them on the picnic table under a rock. I decide to work up the courage to ask Emma if I can introduce myself before everyone disperses. Once I get her attention and I get the chance to speak, the mothers turn to me, most of them smiling. I introduce myself employing my characteristic weapons of self-deprecation, I talk about my research of community gardens, and how I've been taking notes. I discuss how much I appreciate having the chance to be at the garden this week ("This has been a real gift…"), and how seeing the kiddos run around today has made me miss my kids, which I am about ready to drive back to see. I tell them to please take a flyer if they are interested in me interviewing

them about their experiences with the garden. I am sure I won't have any takers, but the ice has been broken, at least. As parents start to file out, two wish me safe travels. I go to get my notebook and Emma, Ali, and Janice are all quick at work, making a bag of bath salts for me to take home to the kiddos. I am very touched by the sentiment. They tell me to go pick some flowers for them as well, so I do. It's my last trek through the garden space that has served me so well over the course of the week. It feels like a bittersweet departure.

I make my way to the tool shed to fill out some comments on Kelly's card (it's her last week!) and when I leave, Beth, one of the board members, introduces herself to me again. I remember seeing her somewhere that she had been at the board meeting I attended with the racial equity experts. She tells me that she is also a college professor and that she teaches women and gender studies in Spartansburg (I can't remember the name of the college, but it sounds like a satellite campus). She tells me that she has also started a campus community garden, partially inspired by RCF, where half of the produce is distributed to those in need free of charge. I tell her my research is really focused on this particular garden, which she understands. She agrees to let me interview her sometime in the future, which is good because I need an entry point into the board.

I quickly make my way back over to the hickory tree and offer Janice and Ali hugs goodbye. As always, they are gracious and generous with their sense of presence. I catch Emma's attention and tell her goodbye from afar because she's involved in a conversation. I back the car up slowly, probably too slowly, so as not to hit any kiddos still playing on the playground equipment.

I have started to really understand the distanced role an ethnographer can feel when studying a site. I feel close to the subjects, to the space, in my own way, but there is a wall of something that seems insurmountable, a barrier to deeper relationship or friendship. This is a mutual understanding, unspoken, of what I am doing there. As observer, a guard will always be up in some way. Either subconsciously by me, my nervous talking, my easily perceptible means of trying to dig deeper at a word or phrase, my conceptual questions, or the sense that the crew has that I am always on, that everything is potentially recorded, perhaps even a lingering doubt as to what I plan to do with this information. I am a mystery to them in so many respects, and the space and its people will always be more of a mystery than I want them to be.

Ritualization and Sprouts

Sprouts made me reflect on my time as an elementary school teacher and a preschool teacher so many years ago. The Sprouts program functions differently than almost any children's education program I've coordinated in elementary or preschools or participated in as a parent. In those programs, the guiding hand of the educator (either a different teacher or myself) had a distinct learning objective in mind and would continually reorient students to ensure that the objective was met after moving through a well-structured lesson plan, with little room for derivation. Certainly each Sprouts program was planned and somewhat structured. However, the end goal of each class included both the lesson intended for that day as well as a continually developing curiosity about the garden itself. What made the educational program uniquely ritualized is that it was catered not only toward understanding content and concepts related to the special eco-system of the garden, but the cultivated disposition toward appreciating the

wild creativity of the garden space. It reminded me of how working in the garden aims to see the garden as a collaborator of sorts. Families built community with each other in that space, but also families built community with that space. In an interesting way, Sprouts felt less like an educational program and more like a play date with the garden itself. And it was the meaning found in the exploration of that relationship between family and the garden, between child and the garden, that kept others coming back each week during Sprouts' three month program period, every Friday, from June-August. In a conversation about Sprouts, Ali Stone mentioned to me the potential backlash they faced when the garden briefly explored the potential of shutting the educational program down to focus more time on growing in the summer:

Ali Stone

> "I also think that, yeah, I think the Sprouts program has a lot of great feedback from young families. Uhm, there was a time when we were thinking, we are starting to grow so much, and wanting to keep expanding uhm what we are able to produce as far as produce, and that means if we are going to spend more time growing and taking care of the plants then we can spend less time on programs, we were considering, is there anything that we need to cut and Sprouts program is probably the least amount of time that we put into things anyways, again its only for three months and it's for one hour on Fridays. And so it's easily, I think, something to cut down on, and it wasn't received very well. People really wanted that experience. And so it's something that we are going to keep, and realized it is something this has a lot more influence and importance to these families to be able to come and connect with other kids, other parents, other moms, and also like outside environment and doing things that maybe, where they are living they don't have this kind of like outdoor space and can't engage or simply aren't learning as much, like tactile learning, and (inaudible) throughout the rest of their week and so I think that was a program that we overlooked in terms of its importance and the impact it has within this community, uhm and so I am happy to be keeping that program."

My observations and this particular exchange help to illuminate that the education received in the garden space was secondary only to the experience of interacting within the garden itself. It was the space itself that held special sway over children and families as a means to the education that staff/interns wanted to impart.

Why Sprouts is Not a Rite of Passage

Given the last chapter, there are certain correlations to the garden's hosting of groups and the Sprouts program that may lead one to the conclusion that the Sprouts activity is another form of a territorial rite of passage; however that assertion would be wrong. There is a certain pattern to both experiences. Each contain an educational component before entering into the garden space under the hickory tree. While in the garden space, there is some activity that takes place where the participants form a closer relationship to the land. Finally, a group activity usually signals the end of the time in the garden as groups transition out of that space and back around the hickory tree. Ostensibly there seems to be a pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stage in both experiences. However, it is the difference in orchestration and interaction with those present that keep Sprouts from being categorized as a rite of passage. First, rites of passage tend to have a prescriptive nature to them, in which participants must be guided through the requisite stages to achieve reincorporation. Secondly, the language during the conversations about food insecurity that occurred as groups visited the garden was structured around particular rules for engagement, respecting one another's thoughts and a kind of holding space for others to speak and be heard. Lastly, there was a level of cultural introspection that occurred in group tours that encouraged a

conscious level of separating from one's cultural mores through critical examination of issues surrounding systemic food insecurity.

However, when it came to the Sprouts program, there were no requisite stages for participants to move through. They were invited to do so, but if any child simply wanted to wander in the garden during the entirety of the program with a parent, there would not have been any hint of redirection from an intern or staff member, simply an invitation back to the activity. Recall how the end of the first excerpt resulted in numerous families wandering back to their cars after feeding the chickens, but before reflecting on the lessons from the book that was read. Next, children were not encouraged to temper their speech during the Sprouts program; outbursts were common without penalty or reprimand; children talking over one another and the staff/interns leading Sprouts was very common. Finally, education about the life of the garden was not contextualized in such a way so as to distinguish the normal lives of the children involved from what they were learning, thus marking some separation or pre-liminal phase. To put it simply, rites of passage are typically orchestrated in stages with little vacillation that encourage an active sense of separation and transition into a different status or understanding of the world. However, the attitudes and curiosity of the children largely drove the program; the attitudes of the participants were not expected to conform to the Sprouts activities. The only expectation was a disposition of play through education.

Sprouts as Celebration

Throughout the other programs that have been analyzed during this project, many have carried an intense level of analytic focus to see how/if Grimes' categories applied to the observations I made and activities I participated in. However, the Sprouts program carries little analytical ambiguity, and that may have to do in large part with the audience of the program itself. While the weekly visit to the garden was certainly a service for the families involved and community education about the garden an integral aspect of RCF's vision for community involvement, the curiosity of children remained the paramount objective of this particular program. The Sprouts program was an exercise in celebration. Recall that from Grimes' characterization, celebrations are festive, creative, and encourage responses from those present, with no desired end in sight (2013). A further elaboration of Grimes notion of celebration is needed to best categorize the Sprouts program:

> A celebration rite is one where there is no bargaining, no gain, no pursued result, and no magic. Celebration is expressive ritual play. Celebration takes a variety of forms: carnivals, birthdays, feasting, pretending, gamboling, gaming, dancing, singing, music-making. Whenever ritualists begin to detach themselves from matters requiring pragmatic modes of participation in order to toy with the fundamental forms themselves, they are beginning to celebrate. Since ritual is always a way of formalizing things, it is inescapably linked to the ludic impulse….When celebration occurs, celebrants are whole and without need of something else to make them complete. Such ritual play occurs in the moment, in the twinkling of an eye, between two beats of a heart, and it is gone. (Grimes, 2013, pp. 47-48)

This characterization underlies the importance of a lack of a planned programmatic result in celebrations, and hence in the Sprouts program. Yes, the staff/interns would love for the children present to be able to understand and repeat the learning objective for each particular session, however everyone involved was simply content with having a play-based experience within the garden itself.

Recall the care and wonder that the children approached plants with in the herb garden, so much so that a bottle-neck was easily created. There were no calls for children to hurry through. Adults' (parents/interns/staff) actively suspended their normal obsessions with "keeping on schedule" to allow and encourage those moments of play by focusing on exploring that space with their five senses; time was taken to take time. The children were encouraged to carefully handle the plants, smell them, as well as seek out aesthetically pleasing flowers for their bath salts. The same can be said for the lackadaisical nature with which children moved through the garden looking for foliage to feed to the chickens. And after the chickens were fed, remember how comfortable Kory's daughter felt simply lifting up a chicken, with no reprimands from any adults present even though such an act was not "part of the plan." This is the beauty of celebration. The rules for behavior are understandably relaxed to allow for the freedom of expression, to encourage the synthesis of the individual's personality, the activity itself, and the space in which the activity takes place.

Of course, this was the purpose of the program; hence I categorize the Sprouts in the following way: *Sprouts at Root Cause Farm is a wholly communal ritualized celebration of the garden's wonder; the celebration is born out of each child's curiosity and unencumbered experience with the garden space through educational activities.*

Chapter 9: Stepping Out

As soon as I left Root Cause Farm during the end of my weeklong stay in Mid-August of 2019, I started to understand the distanced role an ethnographer can feel when studying a site. I felt close to the subjects, to the space, in my own way, but there was a wall of something that seemed insurmountable, a barrier to deeper relationship or friendship. There was a mutual understanding, unspoken, of what I was doing there. As observer, a guard will always be up in some way, either subconsciously by me, my nervous talking, my easily perceptible means of trying to dig deeper at a word or phrase, my conceptual questions, or the sense that the crew has that I was always "on", that everything is potentially recorded, perhaps even a lingering doubt as to what I planned to

do with this information. I was a mystery to them in so many respects, and the space and its people will always be more of a mystery to me than I wanted them to be.

In the months, and years, that followed, I began to yearn for and mourn the lost sense of community that I felt at RCF over the years. The work felt genuinely gratifying, the relationship-building authentic, rooted in something genuine and not ephemeral. Of course, the onset of the pandemic made life worse for everyone. I suspended any additional trips I had planned to take in the summer of 2020, hoping concerns about travelling would ease up the later in the year because North Carolina was frequently noted as a pandemic hotspot. When I attempted to get back in touch with my old contacts at the garden the following spring, I found that Ali had left RCF for another job, and that Janice was training a new garden manager to take over duties; soon, new interns would be arriving to the garden in the coming months. Their departures seemed to foreshadow the coming of the Great Resignation that summer and fall of 2021. It was at this time that I felt my research had reached its saturation point because my own longings were beginning to take the place of the research I had conducted years before. It was time to move on. Upon further reflection, I may have wanted to get back to the garden under the guise of more research, with the intent of just wanting to be in a geographical space that seemed to embody such a unique synthesis of my personal background on a family farm, my academic interests, and the kind of authentic community-building on the land I hoped to pass on to my children.

During a remarkable time when self-isolation was rampant due to the pandemic, mental exhaustion, or political polarization, authentic attempts at community with others are hard to fathom and even harder to find. Such a divisive socio-political context only

helped to underscore the presence of deep community, or communitas, at RCF. In this final chapter, I explore my final thoughts of my research at Root Cause Farm by discussing two conclusions. First, I argue that the concept of communitas is deeply embedded within the rituals of the RCF and that concept contributed to the ethos practiced and felt by the staff and interns I interacted with. Furthermore, I expand upon the contributions my research has to nonprofit studies by detailing three specific implications for further research of nonprofit organizations; I argue that the study of organizational rituals within nonprofits, particularly liturgical rituals, and utilizing ethnography more pervasively as research methodology can uncover rich new layers of the interior lives of nonprofits.

Communitas

I have always found the notion of building community within community gardens to be fascinating. Long before embarking on my research with the Lord's Acre, I was interested in researching how religious congregations with community gardens may develop a deeper sense of congregational community by sharing in the work and care that came with community gardens. However, many of the congregational community gardens I researched simply included individual plots of land for families of the congregation to experiment with growing their own produce. My family and I had also experimented with community gardening on a small plot of land owned and managed by the Parks and Recreation Department in our city of residence, Franklin, Indiana. Again,

we had our own plot to manage, and hoping to meet and form connections with others with similar goals of growing their own fruits and vegetables, we were disappointed with just how private and individualized work in a community garden could become. We rarely, if ever, saw other gardeners present, but we knew they existed because other plots looked so much better than ours! Perhaps they were simply avoiding the family whose produce looked so remarkably anemic and considered us a potential walking blight that would inevitably curse their own produce by simply speaking with us.

As these experiments and academic wanderings developed down their own circuitous paths, I became enthralled with Victor Turner's notion of communitas, a concept that was highlighted in Chapter 3. Here, a theoretical concept about community presented itself that I felt may have concrete applications to a community garden that took community-building seriously. After spending nearly four years studying RCF, I believe that communitas is created and sustained in its garden space.

Recall that Turner closely investigated van Gennep's notion of liminality and found that deep communal bonds can be forged between individuals going through the same rite of passage; this sense of community can be created precisely because the liminal phase can also be a period of anti-structure, where the social roles and hierarchies that may have existed prior to a rite of passage no longer apply during a time of such transition (1969). For Turner, this is a time and space of radical egalitarianism. Also, Turner theorized that there may be groups that are in continual opposition to the structures of society, and thus contain the potential to create communitas amongst its members. For the purposes of review, groups that are most likely to exhibit the experience of communitas are those that are 1) in a perpetual state of liminality, such as

monastic or mendicant orders 2) marginalized communities that are seen in opposition to the conventional social hierarchies, such as Hippie or Millenarian movements, and finally 3) communities that include those that are seen as inferior or vulnerable members of society, such as the poor, children, and minorities from diverse backgrounds (Turner, 1969).

From my observations, RCF exhibits qualities of each of these theoretical generative grounds for communitas, and it is born out of the rituals I have explored above. The organization is certainly against the socio-economic structures that enable food insecurity that the majority of individuals find themselves completely subject to and is thus a marginal community. While many may claim such a stance philosophically, in practice, RCF's insistence that community relationships be built without the obligation of economic reciprocity positions the organization diametrically and actively opposed to the forces of food insecurity. Individuals are frequently skeptical of such an active philosophy and similarly in awe that it is lived out precisely because of how radical its vision is. Recall the woman who was skeptical of Susan's generosity when she was found to be taking food from the garden. Remember the questioning glances of volunteers associated with the Food for Fairview program, as well as the trepidation of the clients who hovered around the fresh produce wondering if they could actually take it for free. Food is given away for free either to recipients directly, or secondarily through partner organizations that will distribute the food to those in need. Food is readily accepted in lieu of donations to the organization. If people cannot give food, their simple presence at the garden suffices either in the form of work or in simply visiting and appreciating the garden space. Groups that are welcomed to the space with the intention

of educating them about the harmful socio-economic structures that enable food insecurity and how the garden exists as a potential scratch in the armor of such an iron-clad institution.

As a marginal community, it also offers to serve individuals of all socio-economic levels educationally, but focuses the distribution of its resources to those that are considered inferior by the majority of society, such as families that are food insecure. The organization seeks to reverse the sense of shame and guilt that can be so isolating for those struggling to have enough food, by using food to build community.

Lastly, but certainly most importantly, the garden space itself is saturated with liminality. By virtue of the fact that it is a garden, it is in a continual phase of transition. It is continually being worked, nurtured, planted, harvested, etc. It is too much to say that volunteers, staff, and interns are similar to a mendicant community. But the liminal character of the garden as a ritual space is used with the express purpose to build community.

Morning Reflections- Preparing to enter into the garden itself includes a counter-cultural practice where notions of efficiency correlate with taking the time to connect with one another in a celebratory ceremony where mutual respect and collaboration on prized. Here, individuals, regardless of rank or tenure, get to choose how they wish to work in the garden, offering an anti-structural approach to task management.

Working with the Garden- Working with others and with the garden itself as a collaborator easily sheds any pretensions of cultural status; the focus shifts to the growth

of one another through positive language, and the potential for growth in the garden itself.

Table-Sharing- When preparing produce to be given at Food for Fairview, those who work in the garden challenge the structural norms of a capitalist society by arranging the food in an aesthetically pleasing way so as to offer the perception of a farmer's market that might otherwise be off-limits to the food insecure.

Sprouts-When interacting with families in the Sprouts, the celebratory attitude of the program helps participants wander through the garden with the curiosity of the children present. Deferring to the curiosity of children subverts the roles adults might have in other contexts; here the children become the leaders, the collaborators, instead of merely following the directions of other adults.

Each of the rituals of the garden space described throughout this research offer unique ways to foster a sense of communitas and because of this, an ethos of communitas easily transcends them all and applies to the garden as a whole. One final excerpt from my field notes may be helpful in describing this observation. Below, I offer a passage that references a startling episode that happened right after a Sprouts program had ended. In it, all of us present bore witness to the vulnerability of creatures in the natural world who are in competition with one another:

Field Notes-6/14/19-Root Cause Farm-10:00 AM

After the program has ended, I look over and find that Emma and Josh are near the fat cat bird house, in the shape of a fat cat holding eating utensils, on the side of the shed, and it seems a baby black snake had found its way in. We're concerned that the

snake has eaten the babies and the mother is furious, or agitated. She is flying around with food in her mouth, but can't get in, either because of our presence or she's scared.

The bird house is quiet. Over time, most of the interns, Janice, and I gather around the birdhouse. Emma has been trying to pull the snake out with some tongs but to no avail. The birdhouse goes silent with the mother still outside. We are sure that the baby birds have been eaten by the snake. Kory walks over and someone tells him what happened, and he frowns. He tells us that this reminds him of a documentary he watched as a kid on National Geographic, *The Savage Garden* (1997) and that it was hosted by Leslie Nielsen; apparently it was about the microcosmic cycle of life and death in garden spaces.

This is a unique moment in my observation. We all stand solemnly, for probably a minute or so, reflecting on the potential loss of life. It is like a wake for the birds. Creatures that they didn't really know, innocent creatures. Kory then breaks in and says that it is interesting that we didn't have a problem feeding bugs to the chickens but that somehow this feels different. It's not lost on me that the fat cat now houses a snake that is probably fat from eating the young birds. I can tell that it has affected Emma and Ali in particular. Ali mentions coolly, "There's a lot of duality in the garden."

This brief episode is referenced, not because of the violent act of nature we bore witness to, but because the moment seemed unique. From that day onward, I would reflect on that experience with the steadfast knowledge that the thought of holding a silent vigil for baby birds being eaten by a snake, and silently mourning for the mother

frantically trying to make her way inside a birdhouse to stop the massacre would have been met with stiff opposition on most industrialized farming operations, perhaps my family's included. Taking the time for such reflection is not considered cost efficient because one would be "burning daylight." While I am positive my father would have been sympathetic to the ordeal, I am also quite confident there would have been a fair amount of "encouragement" to get back to work. To which Mom, patron saint of all wild creatures, would have told him to be quiet!

Yet in that space, at that moment, taking the time to reflect, to mourn, to ache for the loss of innocent life was seamless and organic. It was a deeply communal activity where the pressures of work held no sway over the significance of the existential crises unfolding before us. In this way, the event was counter-cultural. We needed to bear witness to that event together to better understand the dynamic life systems that the garden housed, and thus understand our work more fully. Soon, afterward, we drifted back to our tasks in the garden and wordlessly considered deeply the moment we all shared. Yet, in the silence, we knew we shared in something important and did not simply observe the same situation aloofly. The organic nature with which we all engaged in that spontaneous wake is perhaps the most striking example of an ethos of communitas that was ritually developed within the organization; the ethos of communitas that grew just as proudly as the spilanthes at the garden made such an experience possible. Below, I expand upon how this ethos of communitas, born out of RCF's unique symbolic culture, can be extended toward three important implications for the study of nonprofit organizations more generally.

Areas of Future Research in Nonprofit Studies

1) Rituals are active within nonprofit organizations and deserve closer study in order to understand the symbolic cultures of meaning within such organizations.

Far from simply being seen as agencies that attempt to enact their vision of the public good either charitably or philanthropically, I have attempted to show, particularly through ritual analysis and thick description, nonprofit organizations are their own deeply rich and symbolic cultures. More importantly, the explicit and implicit rituals that are enacted within nonprofit organizations offer a multilayered understanding of society's common belief that people work or volunteer with nonprofit organizations because they "find the work meaningful." Exploring the ritual nature of nonprofit organizations can offer a particularly useful lens through which to understand what is meaningful and why such nonprofit work is meaningful to others.

I have argued that RCF is an example of a nonprofit organization whose ritual life adds meaning to those who work within it primarily because its organizational culture attempts to provide rituals that cultivate an ethos, a communal way of being, that understands and addresses food insecurity in ways that are distinct from contemporary culture. It is not enough for those involved in the organization to know that food insecurity is an issue that deserves attention and to design programs to chip away at it. For RCF, the only change that will come from an issue that malnourishes one's community is to offer nourishment through the use of food and the creation of community where such gaps exist. Community must first be created at the garden itself between the staff and interns and then exponentially expanded to the garden and those who visit it, and finally to those who are in need in the community, as was the case with

the recipients at Food for Fairview. At Root Cause Farm, this these community-driven rituals produced an ethos of communitas among its staff and interns.

The argument could be made that many nonprofit organizations also attempt to develop a distinct ethos within their organizational rituals for those that participate within them. Of course, religious organizations and movements specialize in the development of an ethos specific to their particular denominations. Fraternal organizations and other member-serving organizations also include their own ritual-driven ethos for its members. Yet, I argue that what may make RCF and other nonprofit organizations distinct from these examples is an existential concern about a particular social issue, such as food insecurity, homelessness, reproductive rights, environmental protection, or addiction, and the commitment to organizational rituals that cultivate a deep-rooted disposition within its staff/volunteers to combat a seemingly insurmountable issue.

2) <u>More specifically, liturgical rituals are active within nonprofit organizations and deserve more examination.</u>

Liturgical rituals within nonprofit organizations are likely where their ethos is most developed because they are where values are actively ritualized with an abiding hope against the existential issue the organization and its community faces. For example, the liturgical preparation of and sharing of produce at Food for Fairview was so much more than the simple offering of free produce to interested parties. Instead, there was a remarkable amount of the organization's symbolism woven into the activity as well as the anticipation of a new and sacred reality where food insecurity was no longer a barrier to nourishing the bodies of community members or a barrier to authentic relationships. It was in this particular ritual where the ethos of RCF seemed uniquely present. Recall the

mantra "Everybody is hungry for something and everybody has something to give" which formed the philosophical basis for so much of the organization's ritual language. The unstated reality of individuals who visited the garden's table at Food for Fairview was that they were indeed food insecure and once they understood that the food was indeed free, without need of economic reciprocity, many of the pantry's clients offered their stories, their life circumstances, their recipes, their gratitude. The simple offering, but symbolically complex presentation of food provided a glimpse into a world devoid of food insecurity; in those moments food became the conduit to a sense of community in opposition to the systemic socio-economic barriers that food insecurity builds.

And this may be an important quality that makes nonprofit organizations themselves so unique, faith-based or not. I am convinced that many nonprofit organizations are enlivened by individuals who dedicate themselves to philanthropic causes with the hope that one day, a wholly new reality will break into and shatter the systemic grip a particular social problem has over society; as such, secular liturgical rituals are likely commonplace within nonprofit organizations as a formalized opposition and response to such existential threats. If that is the case, investigating liturgies within nonprofits has the potential to change how we think about the organizational life of nonprofit sector as a whole.

3) <u>Ethnographic research should be embraced more fully as a research methodology when studying nonprofit organizations.</u>

Throughout my research of RCF, I have endeavored to show just how rich the interior life of nonprofit organizations can be in its symbols and ritual actions; without ethnographic research as the primary lens through which to engage with and analyze my

experiences with the organization, my findings would not have been nearly as robust. Of course, there are practical limitations to using ethnography. These may include the professional obstacles of gaining prolonged access within a nonprofit organization, the time required to engage in participant-observation, the financial resources necessary for such extended research, and so on. Also, organizational transitions such as alternating staff, program defunding, shifting priorities, and a lack of trust provide obstacles as well even if a scholar has everything needed to begin an in-depth study. However, the potential benefits of rich ethnographic research of nonprofit organizations outweighs these potential hurdles. At the beginning of this work, I detailed the five potential benefits to using ethnography according to Erynn Beaton (2021). While these benefits are indeed important to consider, I offer a sixth potential benefit to her list. Namely, ethnographic research may be one of the only reliable methodologies to uncover how the symbolic culture of a nonprofit organization may actually be connected to the work that it undertakes. In the case of RCF, I found that the work of the organization was becoming ritualized, thus its programs were largely both pragmatic and symbolic at the same time. Yet, ethnographic research of nonprofit organizations can uncover a variety of ways in which the symbolic culture of an organization may be attached to its work. Outside of uncovering the ritualized work of nonprofit organizations, I offer three additional ways in which ethnography can provide more insight into the symbolic cultures of nonprofit organizations, and philanthropy as a whole:

i) The ethnographic approach may provide an important means through which to investigate whether or not there exist multiple symbolic cultures within a nonprofit organization. I felt comfortable describing the organizational

culture of RCF as a collective entity because the staff and the interns were so few; similarly, I was not granted access to interview many board members. However, in larger nonprofit organizations, where there are more individuals and there are clearer hierarchies between personnel and volunteers, it may well be the case that the perception of a cohesive organizational structure is illusory; instead, an organization may consist of multiple organizational cultures, or subcultures, demarcated by hierarchical relationships or departments. As such, an ethnographer could traverse the various subcultures and determine the unique symbols that make up these various subcultures as well as determine what impact such symbolic subcultures may have on the work or the mission of the organization itself.

ii) Ethnographic research may be an invaluable tool to uncover the life of social movements without a consistent field site. My research was located at a particular field site and while staff/intern transitions occurred during the length of my project, I could rely on a handful of individuals to be steady contacts within the organization. However, the transitory nature of grassroots social movements in both membership and location may require becoming culturally embedded within a network of activists so that the scholar can remain nimble enough to engage in participant-observation by attending protests, marches, or demonstrations that take place and thus delve deeply into the symbolic culture of such movements. Similarly, when/if social movements develop into formalized nonprofit organizations, ethnography can be an invaluable tool to investigate how the

iii) symbolic culture of movements transitions into a symbolic culture of an organization.

iv) Scholars make a mistake in assuming that the programs of a nonprofit organization, while ostensibly benefitting a particular community, are necessarily found to be personally meaningful for those who work or volunteer within such an organization. Ethnographic research can uncover why individuals within a nonprofit organization may find little meaning in the work that they do, or the programs they enact. Whether such dissatisfaction is a result of leadership conflict, a lack of focus on cultivating an ethos within the organization, political barriers, or broader changes to the nonprofit landscape, ethnographic research can help to uncover the interior life of nonprofits and why organizational cultures may find little meaning in the work or the mission of the organization.

When I was first decided on focusing on the ritualized work of nonprofit organizations, I believed that a community garden would provide an ideal setting for such research because of the ways in which work would need to move in accordance with the seasons. In my mind, if the work of a community garden was tied to seasonal changes, agricultural rituals of planting and harvesting must be implemented in such a context. I knew that based upon my childhood in an industrialized agricultural setting, this was certainly the case. As I mentioned in chapter four, those assumptions about easily categorizing the work in a nonprofit community garden into discrete rituals proved to be almost entirely baseless. Of course, that is the frustration, and the inspiration, of qualitative research through an ethnographic lens. One is frustrated by being proven wrong, but only

initially. Soon afterward, the researcher is glad that previously unimagined layers of meaning begin to reveal themselves, invite closer inspection, and demand deeper retrospection. This was my experience at The Lord's Acre/Root Cause Farm. The small nonprofit organization challenged me to think more deeply not only about the implications of ritualized work within it as a nonprofit organization, but the construction of meaning and community in the midst of pressing social concerns. As such, it provided me, and hopefully other scholars, with more theoretical tools to dig more deeply into the vast arrays of rituals and symbolic cultures found within the nonprofit sector.

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Curriculum Vitae

James Robert Alexander

Education

PhD 2022 Indiana University
Dissertation Committee Chair- Dr. David Craig

M.T.S. 2008 Vanderbilt Divinity School
Advisor: Dr. Douglas Knight

B.A. 2006 Franklin College
Major Fields: Elementary Education
Minor: Religious Studies

Publications

Alexander, James [Review of the Book: *The paradox of generosity: Giving we receive, grasping we lose* by Smith, C., & Davidson, H.]. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector* Quarterly, 0899764015595637, first published on July 23, 2015

Conference Papers and Presentations

Alexander, Jim "The Gift of Dwelling and Emerging Franciscan Piety"
3rd Annual Ways of Knowing on Religion, Harvard University, October 2014