

MICHIGAN REAL ESTATE DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVES ON  
DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINABILITY, AND NATURE:  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

By

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## ABSTRACT

### MICHIGAN REAL ESTATE DEVELOPER PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINABILITY, AND NATURE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

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As a deep ecologist working to forge peace between nature and culture, I began this autoethnography to learn how highly successful real estate developers talk about and do their work. For 50 years I witnessed the loss of nature in Michigan. I knew of global losses of biodiversity and species and that these losses are tied to land development. I wanted to hear from those who would destroy nature: real estate developers.

Ethnography is a study of culture. Autoethnography is a study of one's experience in one's own culture (Ellis and Bochner 2000). This autoethnography chronicles my experiences entering the lives of 15 highly successful Michigan real estate developers. I am not neutral about their work: it breaks my heart (Behar 1996). Yet to understand what drives development and how we might protect nature, I had to go where it most hurt. During 90-minute confidential interviews, my life was transformed as developers honored me with narratives about how they became developers, why their work is meaningful, and how we can protect nature.

Like cream rising, my findings are a rich concentration of the constituent elements of these narratives. I analyzed developers' responses by question and created thematic categories. Other sources of data were fieldnotes; participant observation; eight key informant interviews; and developers' autobiographies, biographies, and guidebooks.

Findings included: (a) development *is* and *is not* about money; (b) developers talk about their work like women talk about their babies; (c) development is driven by individualistic, utilitarian notions of land as private property for human use; (d) nature is invisible unless protected by law or public interest; (e) plat maps, master plans, and zoning ordinances reveal and frame our destiny; (f) planning is at the core of the solutions *and* the problems; and (g) conversations and change are under way. I conclude that while there are forces resistant to change within the culture of the real estate developer, we all contribute to land transformation in the United States. I suggest a national sprawl campaign to shift American preferences; changes in policy, planning, and evaluation; and increased investment in land protection.



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2003

## DEDICATION

To my son, Matthew, who has been on this journey since the beginning; to my granddaughter, Ella, who will inherit the Earth; to Arne Naess, who said it first and best; and to all the wild creatures whose lives enrich my own.

For this I am so very grateful.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Quitting your job mid-career to complete a doctorate is difficult. Without the inspiration and guidance of my major professor, Frank A. Fear (Resource Development), I would not have begun let alone completed this dissertation. His steady presence and constant support since August 1995 made everything possible. Each of my guidance committee members has made a special contribution: Martin Benjamin (Philosophy) added depth and clarity, Jacob Climo (Anthropology) walked by my side and helped articulate my thoughts, and Laurie Thorp (RISE Program) came in at the end to share her special journey and enrich my own. Our committee meetings were amazing multi-disciplinary conversations and an integral part of my intellectual growth. Beyond this, each person offered friendship, which made the journey shine.

Two people from my past have had an underlying presence. Orin Gelderloos, Director of Environmental Science and Studies at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, helped me experience and learn about the natural world. My soul flourished in field biology and all the courses I took from him. J. Patrick Dobel, now at the University of Washington, opened up the captivating world of political philosophy and required excellence in my thinking and writing. I still stand in awe in his presence. Their lessons and spirit accompanied me on this journey and they will always be an integral part of my life.

My intellectual work has been deeply informed by the writings and lives of Arne Naess, Johan Galtung, Denis Goulet, and Ruth Behar. Norwegian philosopher Naess's philosophical writings gave voice to my life's experience. Peace researcher Galtung's writings helped me conceptualize the dilemma I have been witnessing as cultural violence toward nature. Scholar-practitioner Goulet has been a living presence in my life and a model as the world's first development ethicist. Anthropologist Behar's brilliant writings gave me courage to write my own.

There are so many people in my personal life to acknowledge, but there is room here to mention only a few. Sharon McKinley is like a sister to me. She provides me a place of refuge near Lake Michigan where I finished writing this dissertation and took long walks with her on the shores of Lake Michigan. Pat Kuessner is a long-time dear friend and traveling companion. We walk and talk often in the great city of Ann Arbor along the Huron River. Maryellen Lewis has given me so much that I do not know where to begin. For six years we have met for breakfast at 7:30 a.m. every Friday. Her great mind, depth of character, and special friendship provided a steady ship through the oft-stormy seas of graduate school. Her heart is with human communities and mine is with the natural, we found overlaps that enriched each of our understandings.

The love and support my family has been essential. My son, Matthew, always seems to know just the right things to say and do to make me feel loved.

He has been a constant joy since the moment of his birth. His wife, Anne, shines with intelligence, depth, and kindness. I am so grateful to have her in our lives. My infant granddaughter, Ella Mary, brings joy beyond words. My mother, Dorothea Beach Chichester, and stepfather, Richard, are always there with love and a word of encouragement. My sister, Wendy Vigmostad Holst, and all her animals provide constant love across the miles. My brother, Erik Beach Vigmostad, sister-in-law Meg, and their children are there when I need them. My stepdaughter, Kathleen Anne Rohrer, whose path is amazingly parallel to mine, is always ready to discuss issues and join in the enjoyment of nature.

Finally, there are those now departed who will always be a part of my life and I miss every day. Until her untimely death to cancer in April 2000, my beloved standard poodle Lily was a steadfast, loving presence. My deceased father, Trygve Vigmostad, taught me to love nature and books, and to live simply and richly. He took me to the Great Lakes and opened the door to my life's work. My deceased grandmother, Blanche Easton Beach, taught me to live gently in the service of others. My deceased grandfather, Rev. Joseph Wycliffe Beach, taught me the abiding connection between spirit and nature. I share with you now the words he used to christen me by the shores of a wilderness lake in Maine when I was 11 months old. In his words I also find the origins of my life's work:

August, 1949  
Phillips Lake, Dedham, Maine

Dearly beloved,

You have come unto this holy place to render thanks to God for his most precious of all gifts, this lovely and lovable child and to present her to him and to dedicate her to all that is best in life.

This is in very truth an holy place. "This is none other but the House of God and this is the Gate of Heaven." The stately trees with their branching and bending boughs form the aisled columns of his great cathedral. The spacious firmament, studded by day with fleecy clouds and by night with the eternal stars, form her vaulted roof. The light reflected from rock and white bark and glancing wave and breaking through the fair green leaves form her windows of many-hued and ageless glass. The fragrance of pine and fir are the incense of her high altar. Her site by this fair and lovely lake is made sacred by the memory and the spiritual presence of those loving and Godly forbears who so greatly loved it and by their presence blessed it and blessed us who worship here.

God and you alone know how fully grateful and happy you are for the gift of this precious child. We who also love her can only dimly guess. That God also loves her with infinite love is indicated by the simple and kindly way in which Jesus rebuked his officious disciples, who would keep away from him mothers with their babes in arms, and said "Suffer little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

In dedicating your little girl to God, you take upon yourselves an obligation to bring her up in the way of faith and love; to teach her to walk the path of service to others and of loyalty to the best and highest that you know; to be a follower of Jesus, the Man of Galilee; to live in his spirit and to join hands with others in building the better world that he called "The Kingdom of God."

Do you accept these solemn and happy obligations? WE DO.

Karen Elizabeth, I christen thee in the name of the Heavenly Father, the source of Light and Life and Love; and may God Bless the Little Lass. AMEN. PRAYER.

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1-7 God's Chosen Servant

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth justice to the nations.

He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;  
A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.

He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens, and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to those people upon it and spirit to those that walk in it:

“I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you a covenant to the people, a light to the nations;

To open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and from the prison those who sit in darkness.”

Finally, I would like to thank the fifteen Michigan real estate developers who honored me with their stories and ideas, and John Dwyer, Susan Barro, Paul Gobster, Sue Stewart, and others of the USDA Forest Service for believing enough in these stories to generously support this research.

Because of the inspiration and support of all of these individuals, I am completing this dissertation with passion and joy. Thank you.

## PREFACE

This dissertation has had a life of its own. It seems to have written itself in the most awkward times and places. It came out in bits and pieces, sitting at the breakfast table, taking walks, driving the car, and reading the newspaper. It came out in large chunks in the middle of other writings and sometimes even in a research journal where it “belonged.” Thoughts and insights were recorded on little yellow sticky notes, the backs of envelopes, magazine inserts, index cards, business cards, and placemats at restaurants. Ideas emerged just as often reading advertisements on the side of a Greyhound bus or listening to Ella Fitzgerald as when I was reading “the literature.”

Sometimes I would wake up at 3 a.m. and an entire section would flow out full-form. The outline came out whole in 1996, although at first I put it away in fear for it didn’t sound or look like a dissertation. In fact, it didn’t sound like anything I had ever written or read. So I cajoled and tweaked and rewrote to make it seem more normal. But I didn’t like it. It sounded jilted, lifeless, and inauthentic, and each time I started to work on my dissertation I felt like I was being strangled. I was stuck.

After months and months of anguish, I finally just had to let go and trust the process. I took out nearly all the structure and just started writing. It was *I* coming out, my voice was becoming clear and visible, and I was learning how to express it. Much of the struggle was fighting rather than cooperating with an

inherently messy process. I wondered what to do with all the little pieces of paper. They had piled up, undated, all over my house, on the floor of my car, on bookshelves in my office, in various notepads, and in the margins of my books. Slowly I began to find ways to respect and manage my own process of creation. I started a file called “Research Jots,” and I threw these things into it. I started dating them. I allowed myself to type them into my chronological research journal that I had originally reserved for planned, systematic, “serious” writings. I created file folders for my own strange, emerging categories like “concepts of nature” and “solutions as problems.”

I began to understand that I was not only part of this study, but I was living it. This clashed with all that I had learned and been taught in academia. My saving grace was Frank Fear, my major professor and the chair of my guidance committee. I called him late one evening, desperate. I explained that although the language in my dissertation sounded authentic and rang true, it just didn’t sound like a dissertation. Frank’s response was a turning point, for he said that academia needs to change and to just keep going, and so I did. As I met with my other committee members, they were also fully supportive and seemed to have faith in my work. I was relieved because I knew that I really had no other choice.

Then one Sunday morning, I sat in bed reading Denzin and Lincoln’s 1,100-page *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000) and came across an article that

cinched it. Ellis and Bochner (2000) described and modeled an autoethnography, and as I read their article I knew I had found a name for what I was doing. I sighed in relief, and like I believe Galileo said, I am grateful to be standing on the shoulders of giants.

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I am done with great things and big things, with big institutions and great success. I am for all those tiny invisible molecular moral forces that creep from individual to individual, through the crannies of the world, like so many rootlets or like the capillary oozing of water. Yet which if you give them time will level the hardest monuments of man's pride.

William James

## A PARABLE: WHOSE SUMMER HOME IS IT?<sup>1</sup>

A worker cuts into an ancient sand dune stretched 300 feet above the Lake Michigan shoreline with his bulldozer. He is part of a building team constructing a 4,000-square-foot summer home for Bill and Evelyn Wilson. The house, which will overlook the large, blue expanse of the lake, is the first in a small new development in a remote coastal area masterminded by developer Sam Spade. The Wilsons live in a Detroit suburb and look forward to enjoying their new summer home on weekends. They work hard, and this is the dream home they have waited 20 years to build. They are eager to sit out on the deck surrounded by an expansive green lawn and watch the sailboats go by. They can envision the happiness on the faces of their children and grandchildren when they come to visit. Next year they may even put in a tennis court and swimming pool near the edge of the dune on their five-acre lot.

Sam Spade looks over the expanse of water and feels satisfied. He knows he is making a living—a good living—and his workers are building a fine home. His grandfather and father were builders and developers, and by age eight he was following them around and learning the business. He loves the challenges of being a developer and is proud to carry on his family's tradition. He finds it exciting to watch one of his visions turn into a building, something of value that

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<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this parable—elaborated with several others—was published as an ethics case study in *Ag Bioethics Forum* (Vigmostad *et al* 1997). Although it is a fictional account, it is

he contribute to the community. Sam cannot think of anything he does not like about being a developer. He has enjoyed all of his projects, which he sometimes calls his little children. Each development is unique and full of surprises, delights, and good hard work. He has been in business for more than 20 years and has trusted employees, with a substantial payroll to maintain. He is proud that he has never had to lay anyone off.

Sam watches as the bulldozer tears out more than an acre of weeds to make room for the lawn and the several hundred red pines that will be planted. He likes red pines because they grow quickly and are nearly indestructible. Red pines are also inexpensive, so he can plant them for a fraction of the cost of hardwoods like oak or maple. He thinks the pines will look nice and protect the house from the harsh winds blowing across the lake, especially in November when the weather is so fierce here.

Sam really loves this coastal land and has built himself a summer home at the far tip of the peninsula. He likes to hunt, and this spring he brought in a half-dozen deer. He was careful to follow the recommendations of a wildlife biologist and brought only males so they cannot breed and overpopulate the area. He knows Bill Wilson is an avid hunter and will enjoy coming to his new home for the opening day of deer season. Meanwhile, Sam likes to see the deer. He thinks

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based on actual coastal development projects and ecological research in the Great Lakes ecoregion.

it adds to the wilderness feeling, and people buying lots tell him it is a great selling feature.

Building in this remote area is quite a challenge, but Sam always has liked a challenge. It took him more than a year to obtain some of the permits so he could fully develop the five-mile coastal peninsula, but he finally has them all in hand. The local community is small and in need of jobs and an increased tax base, which this development promises to bring. He likes the thought of adding to the local economy and helping build a new neighborhood in the community. Without a decent access road and dense forests to build around, some of the building materials will have to be dropped in by helicopter and others by boat. The first thing Sam did a few years ago when he bought the property was to create a small marina and temporary quarters for some of the workers. He will end up putting in an expensive runway this summer so he can come and go easily in his small plane from his office several hundred miles away. The five-acre waterfront lots are selling between \$750,000 and \$1 million, so many of the future homeowners who can afford such lots undoubtedly will have access to small planes and make use of the runway.

Providing drinking water to this development is no problem because Sam can drill wells that tap into abundant, pristine groundwater, and septic systems will drain well in the sandy soil. Natural gas lines are not yet available out this far, but he can use propane for now. Electricity has been the biggest obstacle, so Sam is having his foreman look into solar panels, passive solar design,

windmills, and geothermal systems to supplement the propane. He is not worried. He will find a way.

Ecologist Violet Easton's heart sinks as she witnesses the work of the bulldozer. With the previous owner's permission, she is almost finished compiling an inventory of rare plants and plant communities in this ecosystem that she began more than 10 years ago. This coastal area is made up of some of the last wildlands on Earth, and Violet feels quite protective. She loves the swales and ancient dune ridges formed after the glaciers receded 14,000 years ago. A pristine kettle lake is tucked into the landscape like a precious jewel and is surrounded by small, delicate orchids. Huge beeches and maples shelter the spring flowers and wildlife. Along the shoreline are many rare and endangered plants and prime habitat for the endangered shore bird, the piping plover. The yellow warbler is abundant, as are the American redstart and many other migratory birds that nest here in the summer. The air here is so refreshing, and the quiet a blessing.

With most of the rest of the coast now privately owned and developed, Violet was hoping this last five-mile section would survive intact. But watching the bulldozer and seeing the survey ribbons on stakes all along the old Indian trail, she knows this will not be the case. The previous owner was a second-generation farmer trying to make a living in this northern coastal climate growing cherries and peaches. He loved the land but was in poor health, and none of his children were interested in farming. The price of this land per acre

was more than the local land conservancy could raise to purchase it. As farmland this land is not worth much, but for summer homes it commands a big price.

Violet notes that the plants being destroyed by the bulldozer are the common milkweeds (*Asclepias syriaca*), nondescript green native plants that can grow to five feet tall. Milkweed flower from June through August and their blossoms close up by noon like morning glories. There are about 30 or 40 varieties in the United States. Milkweed grows in dry, sun-filled fields near the dune edge. What makes milkweed particularly interesting is that it is food for bees, flies, and monarch butterflies. These insects, in turn, cross-pollinate the milkweed, thus completing a life cycle.

Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) are dazzling crimson and black, having a wingspan of four inches and weighing less than a gram.<sup>2</sup> Monarchs are common throughout the United States, yet to Violet – and even to famous monarch experts like biologist Bill Calvert and chemical ecologist Lincoln Brower – this particular butterfly holds allure beyond words, some would even say magic. Monarchs travel up to 2,000 miles from their winter home in a 50-acre area in the mountains of Mexico to breed in this coastal area each August. The trip takes many months and involves flying over great expanses of water, through storms, droughts, and other hardships. No one really knows how many

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<sup>2</sup>Natural history from Palmer & Fowler (1975), Halpern (2001), and Johnson & Coates (1999).

make it this far, but it appears that monarchs stop along the way to lay eggs, and it may be one or two generations later that continue this miraculous flight from Mexico to as far north as Canada. Monarchs are the only butterflies that migrate this way and scientists still do not know how the monarchs find their way.

Violet imagines that when the monarchs arrive like clockwork in early August on the developer's land, the milkweeds will be gone. The butterflies will have flown over open water, battered by storms and drought; many will arrive in a weakened condition. They will fly all over trying to find the milkweeds so they can lay their eggs. The milkweed plant is critical to their survival. The juice in the milkweed is extremely bitter, causing the monarchs to develop a bad taste and toxicity. This causes certain predator birds to drop them or get violently ill if they do eat them. Without milkweeds, the monarchs lose this protection. This is so potent a protection that the viceroy butterfly has developed its coloration to mimic the monarch. This protects the viceroy even though this butterfly does not actually eat the milkweed or actually have a bitter taste.

Violet sees dozens of young red pines in burlap sacks. She assumes these will be used to landscape the new house. The red pines are a poor choice for wildlife of any kind, and she regrets the builder's selection. Then Violet spots a male white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginiana*). She has never seen a deer in this area because it is too confined to maintain a herd. She recalls that white-tailed deer have a territory of about one mile and form herds of one male to about three or four females. Male deer can weigh 300 pounds, jump 8 feet high and 30 feet

long, and run as fast as 30 miles per hour. If their food sources of twigs and leaves of aspen, nuts, yellow water lily, and acorns are missing, they will eat whatever vegetation is available. One can always see a deer browse line on the trees when they are nearby. Their hoofs are pointed and sharp, and cut two- by three-inch tracks deep into the earth, which can sever botanical connections for generations. Violet cringes to think of the destruction that this magnificent creature brings to areas when it is artificially introduced.

Violet is troubled that the last remaining wild areas can be bought and sold in an instant by people who may never have seen the land or know its history or ecological value and importance. She is sad that bulldozers can be brought in and completely destroy an ecosystem that has been evolving for thousands upon thousands of years. She will miss seeing the monarchs on the dune ridges next August. She questions the process that renders nature invisible and unable to protect itself. She wonders aloud just whose summer home this is, and who gets to decide.

#### CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH AND RESEARCHER

As I write these words I am overlooking the ancient forested dunes of the Great Lakes and the coastal town of Frankfort, Michigan. I have sequestered myself for the final writing and editing of this work. Each day I walk the beach for an hour or so, an act as necessary as breathing. The Great Lakes are not

abstract; they are my lifeblood. Soon I must leave the lakes so that I can protect them in our nation's capital. But I will be back. I will never leave.

It is August 2002 and the monarchs have arrived on schedule, dancing on the offshore breeze as I walk. Yesterday I picked up one whose life had ended, who was conceived, crystallized, and broke free from the milkweed to live a life of freedom and vulnerability. I have her black-and-orange brilliance resting to the right of my keyboard. She still looks alive, and I sometimes tense for I expect her to fly off when I come near. But she is silent, forever still. Only her story lives on, in and through those who would hear it.

Inspired by the parable that opens Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962), I begin this dissertation with my own. I hope this parable expands in you, the reader, what philosopher Martha Nussbaum calls your moral imagination (Nussbaum 1995). I want to bring you straight into the heart of a fundamental ethical dilemma in the practice of real estate development in the United States. I hope you will walk by my side as I lay bare the enormity of the clash between human "projects" and the lives of other species. I hope you will hold on to both the complexity and the tensions between the two disparate versions of the story. Please do not privilege one over the other for now, and withhold judgment until you hear all the stories woven together here.

## Witness: How I Came to This Study

Although I am not an ecologist, I do have ecological knowledge such that I walk each day in what Aldo Leopold called “the world of wounds.”<sup>3</sup> For 50 years I have witnessed the gradual loss of wildland, woods, and meadows in Michigan and throughout the Great Lakes basin. I feel deep physical and psychic pain when I see a tree toppled, a wetland filled, a highway constructed, or a sand dune mined. I understand the impacts these actions have on the many varied creatures that I have loved and been curious about since my earliest days. I am not objective or neutral about development; it breaks my heart (Behar 1996). And now I choose to use my research to continue, broaden, deepen, and transmit this witness.

Great Lakes water quality and civic environmentalism. Beginning in 1980, I was part of what (Sirianni and Friedland 1995) now calls the civic environmentalism movement. I was working on my Master of Science degree at the University of Michigan’s School of Natural Resources and Environment. I took a course on the theory and practice of managing environmental conflicts from Dr. Patricia Bidol and became a research associate with the Environmental Conflict Project. I took additional training in mediation through the county and

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<sup>3</sup>Thanks to Mark VanPutten, currently the Executive Director of the National Wildlife Federation, whose April 2000 speech at the University of Michigan’s School of Natural Resources & Environment reminded me of Leopold’s words and that others feel the same pain.

co-mediated cases with fellow graduate student Michael Lesnick (now of the Keystone Center) and others.

I spent more than a decade in various positions using these skills to resolve policy-level Great Lakes water quality disputes. But by the early 1990s I began to grow uneasy. I wasn't sure what was wrong. These techniques were successful, but something felt amiss. I remember reaching agreement about a clean-up plan for a 10,000-gallon spill of perchlorethylene into the St. Clair River. We had Dow Chemical, Greenpeace, and everyone in between at the table. Yet no sooner was this dispute settled than there was another spill, this time by Polysar. I began to suspect that perhaps our efforts and the civic environmentalism movement itself were merely putting Band-Aids on larger systemic ills. Or worse, I feared that our successes were postponing the day when we asked the deeper questions, like just why are we making all these chemicals, who is profiting, and is this what we really want as a society?

In 1994 I decided to leave the Great Lakes basin to get a new perspective on this nagging issue. I spent the summer taking a peace research course at the University of Oslo. I wanted to learn what scholars and practitioners from other nations were thinking and, I hoped, gain insights into the environmental issues back in the United States. We were a small class of 20 representing a dozen or so countries. Our professor was a South African English professor and peace researcher, and he brought in other scholars almost every day. We met for six or more hours each day and I heard many more stories of direct violence than I care

to remember. But I was there to learn something else, to learn about indirect violence, something that isn't visible like a fist on someone's jaw or a gun in the belly.

We had a huge course pack, and I read for hours every night. One evening I forced my way through a difficult article by Johan Galtung called "Cultural Violence" (Galtung 1990), and I knew I had found what I was looking for. Galtung is the world's first peace researcher and founder of the Peace Research Institute in Oslo. He had written an article 20 years earlier on structural violence, which I understand addressed structures like institutionalized racism that aid, abet, and cause violence.

The 1990 article that I read presented a case for a less visible, more insidious cultural violence. An example might be the measures of value we use that count cancer-treating technology on the positive rather than negative side of the gross national product equation. Galtung included a few sentences on cultural violence toward nature that left me breathless. I immediately, utterly knew that this is what I had been experiencing in America, and that somehow I needed to shift my life's work to address cultural violence toward nature.

When I returned from Oslo I knew I must find a doctoral program to study this phenomenon. Upon the recommendation of several colleagues, I met in October or November of 1994 with Frank Fear, who at the time was the chair of the Department of Resource Development at Michigan State University. Within an hour, I knew that I had found my program and major professor. Fear asked me

to create and teach a course in environmental conflict and offered me four years of support to do my doctorate. I then finished up various work obligations and started my doctorate in August 1995.

Great Lakes islands and coasts. Another shift was under way. I had gradually realized that Great Lakes water quality issues were almost completely about concerns with human health. Almost no one was talking about the health status of other species, at least publicly. I had gone into environmental work because I wanted to do something “international” and for “children.” But over the years my deep love of nature needed to find a more central place in my work.

For a variety of reasons, I created a small Great Lakes island project. I had wanted to work on island and coastal biodiversity issues for years in various Great Lakes positions, but it just was not a priority for any of the organizations I was with. I knew we were making state policy and management decisions about Great Lakes islands without any understanding of their place in the global scheme of things. So I wrote a proposal and was awarded a grant to bring together all the Great Lakes island experts I could find to meet for the first time to share information about the islands, determine their scientific values, and create an agenda for action. So the year I started my doctorate I also came with this grant. This final step merged my personal and professional interests. It also set me on a long odyssey to learn from the developers why we are losing so much coastal land – the habitat of human and other species – to development and just what we can do about it.

## Research Approach

### Normative-Empirical

My approach to research is perhaps unusual in that I embed an empirical study within the clearly normative stance that the loss of biodiversity and species is tragic. Martin Benjamin, the philosopher on my guidance committee, came up with this term early on, during one of our lively multidisciplinary committee meetings. Yet what is unusual may not be that my approach is normative-empirical, but that I am conscious and open with you and myself about the normative undergirding of my work. This marriage of the normative and empirical means that you don't have to work to figure out what my beliefs are or what I care about. They are in your face. Reflexivity, discussed later in the research design, is the cornerstone of my approach.

### Transdisciplinary and Problem-Focused

I might have picked a discipline if I had ever been able to limit my seemingly endless curiosity and range of interests. I might have been a political philosopher or a development ethicist if I could have been content to stay in the world of the mind, creating ways to think more clearly about and help others address problems. I might have been a sociologist if I wanted the challenge of constantly unpacking, tearing down, and rebuilding around issues of power, class, and gender. But then again, I might have been an anthropologist because I

do come alive in the field. I just want to get inside people's minds and muck with them around their ideas and beliefs. Then, clearly, I might have been a field biologist because – along with ethics and ethnographic methods – field biology was a favorite class. I still vividly recall all the individual creatures and their ecological relationships: the yellowthroat singing at the top of the young trees of the open field, the chipping sparrow building a nest in a pine, the bumblebee gathering nectar on the locust tree, a yellow-rumped warbler flitting back and forth in the low shrubs, and the damsel fly blowing herself into life on the sedge in the shallows of the lake.

So it comes as no surprise that my first two degrees were interdisciplinary with a focus on environmental studies, political philosophy, and public policy. For my doctorate, I found a department that allows the openness of what we call a transdisciplinary approach. We are focused around questions and bring to bear the disciplines needed to articulate and study these questions. With this approach, boundaries are an issue, for with the freedom comes the fearful task of creating ways to limit and focus one's work. This is compounded because the various literatures rarely "talk" to each other; thus one can never read "the literature" on a topic. A transdisciplinary, problem-focused scholar must read *literatures*. I have listened for and tried to capture the ideas and discussions from disciplinary works through the force of my own questions. This is a daunting and exhausting task, relieved somewhat when writing forces us to weave

together some of the ideas and discussions into a fabric that always seems to have a life of its own.

### Peace Worker

During this study I have walked as closely to my own path as I am able. In a brilliant essay, Johan Galtung (Galtung 1995) asked if we should call ourselves peace activists, reformers, fighters, or something else. He settled on the term *peace worker* to acknowledge that the path toward peace is always just that: a path, a process, a way. This term acknowledges that there will always be differences and many conflicts over those differences. So the task is to work toward and for peace, never expecting to arrive and never giving up. In this vein, my commitments as a peace worker transcend all else.

I am an experienced environmental mediator deeply committed to pluralistic democratic ideals. I insist that all voices be at the table. Within that framework, I seek to not knowingly do anything to destroy or diminish nature, to always keep the vision of a healthy river or lake or coastal ecosystem foremost in everyone's mind. I have come to have great faith in ordinary people doing the right thing when they know what they are choosing and can act without huge personal cost. As a mediator I have watched people rise to the occasion, struggle to hear the other person, and try to truly understand other perspectives. I have witnessed their transformation – not perfectly, still shaky and vacillating,

but nevertheless a transformation with no going back, like a monarch emerging from the chrysalis, and me from my innocence.

### Research Assumptions

I started with the assumption that knowledge is political, place-based, and partial. I assumed that understanding is dialogical, participatory, produced, and evolving. I assumed that research is an embodied, visceral, lived experience, and that as a researcher I would be affected by and affect those I interviewed and interacted with. I further assumed that the larger social processes are embedded in the lives of ordinary people (Chase 1995) and would be revealed in the interviews with real estate developers. I also assumed that the developers would be forthright and honest.

### Purposes of the Study

My fundamental driving purpose has been to learn what is destroying nature and what I can do to prevent it. This purpose has nagged me, and I could not let it go. For five years I felt like I was placing my hands into the blades of a fan, learning to tolerate the pain, in a single-minded quest to understand. Yet as I carried out this study, I began to reframe that purpose. As I have mentioned, I conducted this research as I live my life: as a peace worker. I used my skills as a mediator to deeply listen as developers shared their stories with me. As planned, I began to see their world through their eyes, to understand why they

develop the land, what it means to them, and, more important, how they explain their work to themselves and others.

As I listened to the developers, I began to feel a shift. I heard stories from many different perspectives and began to conceptualize some points of convergence. I began to suspect that we are all players in the game of development. The purpose then became to understand what drives development, and what we can do together to protect the lives of other species. In the end, I hope this work can be used to help craft a new framework for resolving conflicts at the ragged edge where nature and culture meet. However, I hope this time we will consciously and purposefully include the voices of nature.

### Research Objectives

My overarching research objective was to learn why we are losing all this land and just what drives development. I approached this work with the further objectives of:

1. Listening to the life histories of elite Michigan real estate developers and the context of their development practices.
2. Eliciting the language, guiding metaphors, and mythic tales developers use to explain their work and its meaning.
3. Ascertaining whether developers think about sustainability and, if so, how they conceptualize it.

4. Learning how developers talk about nature, and whether they know of or think about ecological connections.

At the end of the Chapter 2, I present fully articulated research objectives with their corresponding interview questions.

#### A Note on Word Usage

The most important word choice in this work is the use of *nature* instead of *environment*. The Americans and Canadians I have worked with on Great Lakes issues seem to use *environment* to describe exclusively human concerns, for example, about the human health risks from consuming PCB-laden fish. By using the word *nature*, I want to clarify that I am concerned with things in the environment that transcend – not discount or ignore – the interests of humans. In this example, I would think beyond a contaminated fish readied for a frying pan. I might be concerned about how that fish became contaminated and consider how the PCB materials must have moved through the aquatic ecosystem from a source such as an electric transformer.

#### Coffee Table Books: About My Suitability to This Study

As I was preparing to defend the proposal for this dissertation, I laughed when I noticed the two coffee-table books in my living room. One is an oversize volume brimming with color photographs of fantastic modern homes designed by contemporary architects. I come from a family of engineers, and I studied architecture for a brief time in my 20s. Since the age of 16, my favorite pastime

has been to read and reread house magazines and study building plans. I end nearly every day this way, and my bedroom is littered with piles of house magazines and books. I have such a hard time letting these magazines go that I finally bought several bookcases to acknowledge their importance in my life and somewhat clear out my bedroom.

The other book, simply called *Zoo*, is a stunning, heart-wrenching black-and-white photographic essay by a Dutch photographer capturing private moments of the anguish of animals kept in zoos. The photographer needs no words to make her point. My own love affair with nature began as an infant. My earliest memory is of being pushed in a stroller by my mother, who stopped to show me a chipmunk on a sunlit path. Weekends were spent with my family on a small boat on Lake St. Clair, and we vacationed on inland lakes in northern Michigan, taking long walks in the woods. I spent endless hours in my youth exploring a huge urban park. Much to my mother's dismay, and despite our urban location, I brought home a series of creatures from various pet stores and outings: two Peking ducks, four baby chicks, lost dogs, a chameleon, grass snake, painted turtles, white mice, parakeets, and more. I believe my passionate love for nature *and* buildings makes me a fitting person to struggle with this issue. In my work and everyday life, I delve at the edges where these two meet, and I refuse to choose one over the other. I believe we must find ways to accommodate and enjoy both.

## Structure of the Dissertation

In this chapter I introduced the context of the research and researcher, as well as my approach and some of the critical concepts that undergird and frame this work. In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical perspectives and inquiry approach within the context of the problem and the meaning of what is at stake. Chapter 3 is a discussion of the research design and methods. In Chapter 4 I bring you into the world of the developers as I share their perspectives on development, sustainability, and nature. The themes that emerged during the interviews and fieldwork comprise Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 I share some final thoughts on this work and introduce the notion of ecological development. I end with an Epilogue reflecting on the concept and philosophies of deep ecology and environmental pragmatism.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND INQUIRY APPROACH

Guns have metamorphosed into cameras in this earnest comedy, the ecology safari, because nature has ceased to be what it always had been-- what people needed protection from. Now nature tamed, endangered, mortal--needs to be protected from people. Susan Sontag (b. 1933), U.S. essayist. *On Photography*, "In Plato's Cave" (1977)

This study concerns the cumulative and irrevocable loss of habitat, species, and biological diversity<sup>4</sup> caused by the traditional Western approach to developing land. Each day biologically productive open lands, forests, farm fields, and wildlands are transformed into biologically inert shopping centers, office complexes, subdivisions, and parking lots. When the world was not crowded with humans and the frontiers were open, this type of development was not particularly troublesome. But over time humans have spread over much of the planet, and we are beginning to experience repercussions. With the world's population more than 6 billion, most agree there are limits to growth (Meadows, Meadows, and Randers 1992; Milbrath, 1989; Ophuls, 1977; Ophuls and Boyan, 1992). Humans cannot continue to increase their numbers, energy consumption, and use of natural resources without consequences. Just what those limits are is uncertain, but we are measuring the effects on a global scale.

Land development fragments habitat, changes hydrologic flows, reduces the acreage and function of wetlands, adds chemicals, introduces exotic species, dislocates and causes the extinction of species, and reduces biological diversity. The particular concern that spawned this dissertation is development that threatens other species and reduces biodiversity. As human populations have grown and expanded, we have increased the land area we inhabit, such that the habitat and lives of other species are affected. Plants and wildlife have been dislocated, reduced in numbers and kind, and eliminated as we have taken over and disrupted their habitat. Simultaneously, species that thrive in disturbed habitats have increased, and exotic species have further stressed and uprooted native species.

As champions of development in the United States, real estate developers play a critical role in the transformation of undeveloped into developed land as they extract and alter natural resources such as gravel, trees, and soil to construct buildings. Despite their key role, we know very little about how developers view their work, define sustainability, or perceive the natural world. The purpose of this study was to learn more about real estate developers. By

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<sup>4</sup>Biological diversity, or biodiversity, means several things. First, biodiversity refers to the total number of species (i.e., plants plus animals plus birds, and so on.). It also refers to the total number of individuals within a species (e.g., total number of ruby-throated hummingbirds) as well as the genetic diversity across subpopulations of species (e.g., the ruby-throated hummingbirds nesting only in the Great Lakes basin). A final level is the individual genetic codes (i.e., the variation of this particular ruby-throated hummingbird compared to another). Some argue that one of the most important tasks humans face is to retain as much biodiversity as possible at all these levels (Reaka-Kudla, Wilson, & Wilson 1997; Wilson & Peter 1988).

interviewing developers about how they conceptualize and carry out their work, this study should yield information to improve our understanding of the processes of development and the people who carry it out.

### Loss of Habitat, Species, and Biodiversity

Estimates of the total number of species on Earth range from 2 million to 100 million, with the number probably around 10 million (Institute 2000). Worldwide, projected losses of species are staggering. Myers (1991) reported that there is "mounting evidence" (Club of Rome 1990; Ehrlich & Ehrlich 1981; Raven 1994; Soule 1991; Western and Pearl, 1989; Wilson 1988, 1989, 1992) that we are in "the opening phase of a mass extinction of species." This has been called the sixth great planetary wave of extinction, and Myers estimated that we could eliminate half of all species on earth within the next 100 years. What makes this particular wave of extinction troubling is that *human action and not natural events* are responsible for the projected losses of millions of species. Myers believed we might soon begin to lose one species per hour.

Although still lacking inventory data so the picture is incomplete, the Nature Conservancy (1994) identified 131 Great Lakes basin elements as "critically imperiled, imperiled or rare on a global scale". Of seven ecosystems in the basin – open lake, coastal shore, coastal marsh, lakeplain, tributary and connecting channel, inland terrestrial upland, and inland wetland – they found that the unique features of the Great Lakes basin are the lakes, coastal marsh,

coastal shore, and lakeplain. The coastal shore and lakeplain hold what the Conservancy called a “ disproportionate share” of the basin's unique biological diversity. In Michigan, many Great Lakes coastal communities have been experiencing increasingly rapid development. This means that our most unique biological diversity is at great risk.

A rich diversity of species provides essential services. Perhaps most critical are increased ecosystem resilience, ability to respond to stress, and adaptability to change. Specifically, the World Resources Institute (1992) listed these biodiversity values:

Ecosystem services. Protection of water resources, soil formation and protection, nutrient storage and cycling, pollution breakdown and absorption, contribution to climate stability, maintenance of ecosystems, and recovery from unpredictable events.

Biological resources. Food, medicinal resources, wood products, ornamental plants, breeding stocks, population reservoirs, and future resources.

Social benefits. Research, education, and monitoring; recreation; and aesthetic, spiritual, and ethical cultural values.

The nonutilitarian incommensurables such as beauty and joy are lost when a once rich, thriving ecosystem becomes a denuded and silenced landscape. Furthermore, although the loss of an individual species may not pose a serious threat to, for example, ecosystem resilience, we do seem to understand that extinction of even a single species is a grave event. Even at only an

unconscious level, we do know what we are doing. The federal committee charged with listing and delisting endangered species is referred to as the “God Committee.”

### Getting at Root Causes

The World Resources Institute (2000) identified both *direct* and *indirect* causes of the loss of biodiversity:

The direct mechanisms include habitat loss and fragmentation, invasion by introduced species, the over-exploitation of living resources, pollution, global climate change, and industrial agriculture and forestry. But these are not the root of the problem. Biotic impoverishment is an almost inevitable consequence of the ways in which the human species has used and misused the environment in the course of its rise to dominance.

The biggest threat to species is the loss, disruption, and fragmentation of their habitat—all products of human expansion and development. Table 1 illustrates the loss of several major nonforested habitats around the world, such as all but the last one-percent of tallgrass prairie in the United States:

Table 1. Examples of Loss of Nonforested Habitat

Country or Region	HABITAT TYPE	ORIGINAL EXTENT (KM2)	PERCENT REMAINING
North America	Tallgrass prairie	1,430,000	1
Sri Lanka	Thorn scrub	19,800	25
United Kingdom	Heathland	1,432	27
Nigeria	Mangrove	24,440	50
Paraguay	Chaco	320,000	57
South Africa	Fynbos	75,000	67

Source: Groom and Schumaker, as cited in Myers 1991, p. 112.

The current rapid pace of landscape change in the United States is unprecedented and closely associated with these losses. For example, the most rapidly developing states (California, Florida, and Hawaii) are undergoing the greatest losses of habitat and species (Reaka-Kudla, Wilson, and Wilson 1997; Snape 1996).

In the Great Lakes ecoregion, where this dissertation research took place, the Nature Conservancy (1994) identified development, water levels, and agricultural practices as the three greatest factors reducing biodiversity. Development includes “vacation home and resort development, urban growth, urban run-off, marina development, road building and maintenance, bridge construction and airport construction,” and affects “a wide range of systems” (Conservancy 1994). In Michigan alone, a projection based on current trends predicts that by 2020 urban sprawl will consume land area equivalent in size to four or five mid-sized Michigan counties (Officials and Smyth 1995).

Clearly, the dimensions have stunning implications for the lives of other species in addition to our own.

### Responses to Crisis: Social Experiments in Sustainable Development

In response to this and other global environmental crises, calls for “sustainable” development surfaced with the 1987 Brundtland report, *Our Common Future* (Development 1987). The Brundtland report framed the challenge as making economic growth *compatible* with environmental protection. However, this notion raises additional questions that have yet to be fully answered. What is sustainable, and who decides? What would sustainable development look like in practice? Is there any such thing? If so, how will we know it when we see it? Is sustainable development ecologically sustainable, such that it is good for other species as well as humans? Given the current extent of human occupation over the Earth, it is imperative that we accurately assess whether development as currently practiced can be sustainable and, if so, how.

There are many what I call social experiments under way that proponents believe will curb urban sprawl or some of the harmful trends of development. Smart Growth, New Urbanism, co-housing, and New Towns are a few examples. Smart Growth attempts to redirect suburban sprawl back to urban redevelopment. New Urbanism exchanges large-lot, car-dependent development for 50-foot lots in “walkable” communities. Co-housing offers single-family housing clustered around a shared communal building. New Towns attempt to craft entirely new communities with more “rational” use of

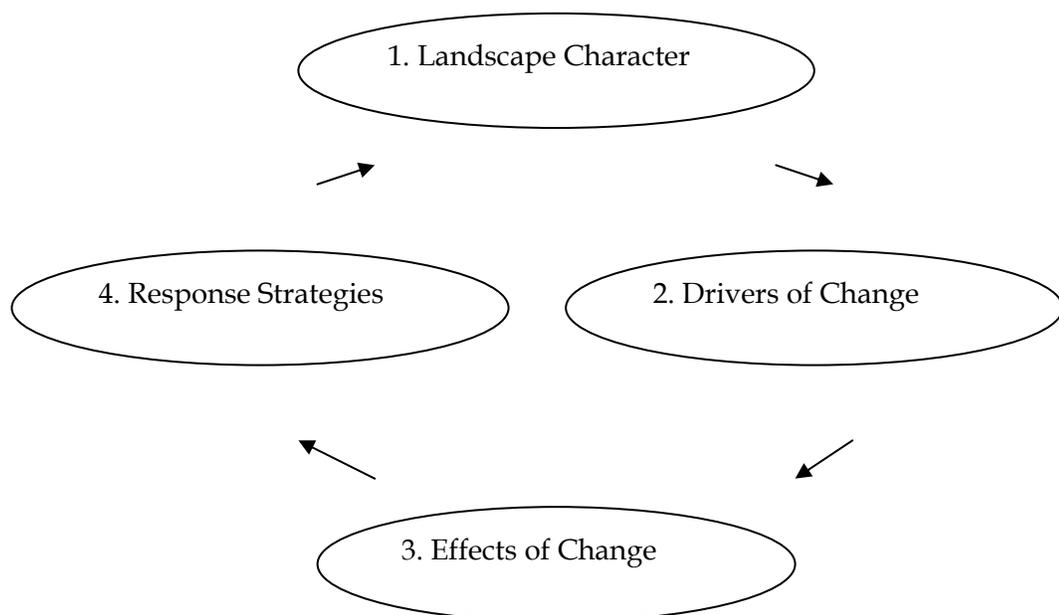
land and neighborhood amenities such as walking paths and open space. However, many questions remain. Development is still a physical process that invariably reduces the habitat of other species while it increases human habitat. As far as I can tell, the critical systems of accounting that would allow us to evaluate the true impacts of these models and other models of development are not in place. For example, we do not have systems that track and account for cumulative impacts of development, or for the effects on other species, the larger ecosystem, future generations, or even neighboring communities. Without this information, I believe it is premature and mistaken to proclaim these experiments “sustainable” solutions.

In fact, in our search for solutions we may be acting before we fully understand the range of factors that drive landscape change. For example, Grand Traverse County in northwest Michigan is one of the most rapidly developing counties in Michigan, *despite 20 years of community-wide consensus – among citizens, environmentalists, and developers alike – to develop sustainably and to protect the recreational, amenity, and natural values of the watershed.* One study has indicated that the watershed is already developed past the 10% amount of permeable surfaces beyond which water quality will be degraded, and there is no sign of slowing of new development. One of the background interviews I did in preparation for this dissertation was with a planner (P3) in Northwest Michigan. He admitted that they were not expecting the surge of spin-off development from a “big-box mall” that has strained infrastructure, increased

traffic resulting in the widening of roads, and devastated an older, smaller mall: “It’s been kind of a shock, I think, for the community to see that tremendous growth,” he said. One wonders whether this type of community consensus for sustainable development might not actually *increase* the rate of development by removing obstacles and providing resources that stimulate growth and development that might not otherwise happen. Even well planned development is still development and may contribute to or even accelerate the problems.

### Understanding the Drivers of Landscape Change

In an effort to better understand landscape change in the Midwest, the USDA Forest Service created the Landscape Change Integrated Research and Development Program (Gobster, Haight, and Shriner 2000). The Forest Service conceptualizes landscape change as a four-stage model, shown in Figure 1.



## Figure 1. Model of landscape change

The Forest Service has funded my dissertation study as part of the research and demonstration project. My role is to help elucidate and better understand the drivers of landscape change (stage 2). It is my hope that this research also might help us better anticipate the effects of change (stage 3) and craft appropriate and effective response strategies (stage 4). Because it is people who initially formulate development plans, I focused on the *individuals* making decisions about local development proposals. Of specific interest, of course, are the most successful, high-profile real estate developers, not only because their choices and influence can have the greatest impact on nature, but also because they should have the most to teach us.

### Five Theoretical Perspectives

Several theories attempt to explain development and can be used to assess the causes of urban sprawl. The two major contenders are urban growth coalition and regime theories. There are three other theories that I believe are relevant but have not yet been part of the “discussion.” These are Galtung’s cultural violence, Arne Naess’s deep ecology, and John Rawls’s reflective equilibrium. My approach was not to privilege one over the others, but to

integrate aspects of them all within my interview protocol. I have not used them to explain but to help us understand the dynamics of the real estate development process.

### Urban Growth Coalition Theory

Harvey Molotch first developed this theory in the late 1970s. Molotch and others have conducted empirical research indicating that coalitions form to champion growth and development in local communities (Bassett 1996; Charlesworth and Cochrane, 1994; Krannich and Humphrey 1983; Low 1994; Molotch 1976 1993; Molotch & Logan 1990; Molotch and Vicari 1988; Rosentraub & Helmke 1996; Strom 1996; Zekeri, Wilkinson, and Humphrey 1994). Members of the growth coalition can include bankers, local public officials, newspaper editors, and realtors, as well as I assume real estate developers. The emphasis of this theoretical framework is on the mobilization of the *rentiers* – those who own property – with local business owners and others who stand to benefit from increasing the number of people in the geographical or economic boundaries of the community. It is the action of this coalition that leads to local development and growth.

### Regime Theory

A contending theory is that it is not the people, but their rules – such as tax laws – and institutions – such as regulatory agencies – that explain development. Oran Young has written extensively about natural resource

regimes(Young 1982, 1989, 1999). The emphasis is that the actions of individual actors do not determine behavior as much the underlying rules and institutions within which people must operate. Hence, to understand growth and development, one must look at rules and institutions.

### Cultural Violence

Although Galtung's theory is not yet part of the discussion between coalition and regime theorists, I believe it should be. My view is that both growth coalition and regime theories are convincing and well founded, and that rather than choose one over the other, we need to embrace and accommodate both. I believe these theorists are people and that their rules and institutions are part of a complex, interactive, mutually influential system. Further, I believe that Galtung's theory of cultural violence can encapsulate the two theories. I see the norms and values that are acted out by members of the growth coalition, as well as those enacted into laws and institutions, are part of the cultural violence toward nature.

## Deep and Shallow Ecology

Naess said his notion deep ecology was inspired by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962). Deep ecology is the notion that life on Earth has intrinsic value and that humans are one part of larger processes that we need to understand, respect, and work with and within (Bodian 1982; Naess 1983, 1984, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1996; Rothenberg 1993; Witoszek and Brennan 1999). Humans are not apart from, but a part of and deeply connected to nature. Shallow ecology views humans as separate from nature, and values nature in terms of its usefulness to humans. Nature is something that can be interfered with freely.

I view Naess's notions of a shallow ecology as a prime example of cultural violence toward nature and the predominant American norm. Indeed, I believe shallow ecology is perhaps the most potent cultural lens resulting in violence toward nature. If nature is invisible, if land is vacant, how can we consider the needs of other species? Deep ecology is the substructure and footing of this work; I breathe it; it lives, aches deep within my bones. In our culture, deep ecology is a radical concept—a "relational, total-field image" (Naess 1989, p.28)—and holds radical implications. Philosopher Jack Turner wrote of his reaction in *The Abstract Wild*,

In 1973 a colleague stopped me outside my office at the University of Illinois in Chicago, handed me a copy of *Inquiry*, a then somewhat-obscure philosophical journal, and said, "Turner, you are the only person I can imagine who would possibly be interested in this. Naess has lost his marbles." The article marked for my inspection was "The Shallow and the

Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary," by Arne Naess, a philosopher I knew mainly from his work in mathematical logic and as a fellow mountaineer famous for his first ascent of Tirich Mir, a 7,690-meter peak on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. I went into my office and read it twice. Then I looked out the narrow, tinted, unopenable windows of my office at the grid called Chicago and said, "I gotta get out of here." I felt like Rilke confronted by the statue of Apollo and it saying to him, "You must change your life." I did change my life. Over the next few years I drifted out of academia and into the Himalayas; eventually I returned to Wyoming and a life of climbing and guiding. I have never regretted the change. I still view the world through the lens of Naess's brilliant essay and the ideas now associated with deep ecology, a new intellectual tradition.... (Turner 1996 p. xv)

### Reflective Equilibrium

The final theoretical perspective I find compelling is that of wide reflective equilibrium. This notion originated in John Rawls's discussion of reflective equilibrium in *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971). Wide reflective equilibrium represents what we would attain if our moral positions not only formed a consistent, integrated body but also resulted from reflection on all of the possible theories and arguments that could affect our positions one way or another. The closer we come to this, the more justified our opinions become. Such a (preferred) movement toward reflective equilibrium requires openness to new facts and reasons, as well as the use of our imagination to explore other perspectives. It emphasizes the way information can bear on our moral views and is open to the on-going challenge of human conversation and life.

I used this concept to create a series of questions asking developers what went into their selection of projects. I asked them to share the types of

information, theories or principles, tax laws, zoning, and other rules, and just when they knew a project was a “go.” I included this purely as an experiment and will look at this more closely in future work. For now, it was useful to get a sense of the width and depth of developers’ approaches to making decisions about their work.

### Using the Theoretical Approaches

My approach was to incorporate critical aspects of all five theories within my research objectives and interview questions. Briefly, this means I asked developers how they did their work and whom they worked with (growth coalition and cultural violence); whether tax laws, zoning, and other rules affected their choices (regime theory and cultural violence); paid attention to what metaphors and language they used (cultural violence and shallow ecology); and what factors they used to make decisions (wide reflective equilibrium). However, this study was highly inductive, and although I used these theoretical lenses to help craft research objectives and questions, I did not testing them or use them to present my findings. They were used only to help inform and guide my queries.

In terms of the actual practice of real estate development, none of these theories pertain specifically to the individuals who carry out development. Some studies have indicated that community efforts to slow, control, or stop development have had mixed success (Schneider 1996; Warner and Molotch 1995). We do know something about the structure of real estate development

firms (Bhambri et al. 1991), and there are journalistic and biographical accounts of how developers amass power and wealth (Caro 1974; Goldenberg 1981). There has been at least one discussion of the ethical dimensions of land use policy and planning (Beatley 1994). What we do not know very much about are the developers themselves as individuals and as players in larger social processes.

As far as I can determine, no one has interviewed real estate developers to find out how think about and carry out their work, or why development is meaningful to them. Although developers are but one part of the growth coalition and operate within institutionalized opportunities and constraints, they are particularly important because their projects activate and steer the process of development and the growth coalition. If we want to work collaboratively with developers to protect habitat and species, we need to know more about how they view their work and nature, why they develop land, and what “sustainable” development would look like to them.

In this study, I conceptualized members of growth coalitions, including developers, as *operating appropriately within the widely held norms and values of mainstream culture*. It is my contention that the roots of the biodiversity crisis are not mysterious, but are embedded in our commonly held and widely accepted norms and values about the “good” of development. These norms devalue “undeveloped” land and biodiversity, while valuing the development of land with its concomitant habitat fragmentation and loss of biodiversity. In effect,

these ecological losses are rendered invisible. As previously discussed, Johan Galtung would call this cultural violence toward nature and Naess would attribute the invisibility to a shallow ecology. Rawls might see that our decision-making processes were closely held and not open to scrutiny.

Although we often think of development in abstract, economic terms, this dissertation approaches development as a tangible building project that includes the extraction of gravel, trees, and soil and the altering of natural systems. The growth-coalition literature emphasizes the workings of the urban political economy. The literature does not look at how development impacts nature, or how developers interact with and perceive nature when they “do” development. By interviewing developers, I was asking developers to share narratives that would reveal the cultural norms that lead to the development practices that drive landscape change.

Land development is big business. One small example is that \$705.3 million was spent in the U.S. in 1991 just on insurance and real estate *advertising* (Almanac 1993). This accounts for nearly 19% of the total \$37.8 billion advertising budget. Ecologically sustainable living will not be possible until we understand and alter development norms and practices that reduce biodiversity and fragment habitats. This may mean we need to change the way we conceptualize and carry out development, and there could be no better teachers than the developers themselves.

## Pilot Study and Background Interviews<sup>5</sup>

To prepare for interviews with high-profile developers, I conducted a pilot study consisting of four interviews. The notion of doing a pilot study occurred to me while reading several articles in *Studying Elites Using Qualitative Methods* (Hertz and Imber 1995). Authors in this volume pointed out that elite interviewing requires distinct strategies because elites are difficult to reach. Their social position or line of work allows them to create distance between themselves and others. This challenge has forced researchers to develop special tactics to gain access to elites. One such tactic is to become expert in the terminology and subject matter of the elites to be studied. Once he or she is expert in the jargon and issues, the researcher can more easily convince the elites to be interviewed. By doing a pilot study in advance of even trying to *contact* the actual developers for a planned case study, I hoped to be more successful at gaining access to them. I also hoped that this expertise would improve the quality of my study and point to a productive line of questioning in the larger future study.

My approach to finding the developers was to go to the real estate development pages in the telephone book and copy down the names and telephone numbers of all companies whose business name included the word

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<sup>5</sup>Plans for the pilot study and background interviews were reviewed by Michigan State University's University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) before I conducted the fieldwork and the later interviews (see Appendix D).

*development* and did not include other words such as *builder*. I reasoned that there was a greater likelihood that real estate developers as opposed to builders would rely exclusively on using the word *development* in their name.

Because as it turned out I was familiar with the names of some of these companies, I followed Ostrander's recommendation to "start with the top" (Hertz & Imber, 1995). I targeted two prominent developers and focused on reaching and interviewing them. It took several telephone calls and much persistence, but I was able to gain entry. One of the individuals knew me, and this helped me establish trust early in the interview. I found the pilot study beneficial. Not only did I gain the intended skills and knowledge, but also it led to a complete change in my dissertation topic and the beginning of a transformation in my personal beliefs about developers. I was fascinated by talking with developers, and I decided to make them and their work the primary focus of my dissertation research. As I talked with the developers, I felt unconsciously held stereotypes vanish as I entered their world through the stories they told. This experience helped me better specify my research objectives, refine my interview questions, and find the courage to ask for help in figuring out how to protect nature.

I also conducted eight background interviews with key informants, including several planners and planning commissioners. Readings and observations had led me to suspect that local planning offices are the primary "stage" where all actors converge to negotiate development deals. This is the arena where attempts are made to align public and private interests. These

interviews also proved fruitful and helped shape this study. The interview data from the pilot study and background interviews are included as part of the analysis in the dissertation.

### Research Objectives and Interview Questions

My primary research objective in this study was to *uncover the cultural drivers of development as revealed by developer narratives*. Gaining a thorough understanding of what drives development is critical if we are to craft effective public policies that are truly protective of nature. People often assume that developers and the process of development are driven purely by the profit motive, so researchers focus attention on financial incentives and disincentives. I do not doubt that economics are an important driver of development. Indeed, as one developer in my pilot study stated, if you want to understand development just “follow the money.” However, my pilot study and early research indicated that this assumption might not be entirely accurate. Indeed, the same developer, when I asked him to tell me how he got to be a developer, replied that he originally went into international development to help reduce poverty and hunger. The other developer I interviewed started his career at the age of eight by going to job sites with his father and uncle. This developer’s first motive was not to make money but to enter a family business. Even Donald Trump is a third-generation real estate developer (Barrett 1992; Blair 2000; Hurt 1993;

O'Donnell 1991; Trump 1997; Trump and Leerhsen 1990; Trump and Schwartz 1987).

I found the situation to be even more complex because there are other nonmonetary forces that may be subtle yet potentially potent drivers of development. For example, during a background interview with an elected township-planning commissioner, I learned about the role of planning-staff incentives. He told me that volunteer, elected commissioners such as him depend on planning staff to recommend positions on development proposals. He found that during annual performance reviews, planning staff who moved more developments through the approval process could be looked on more favorably than those who were less “successful.” If their raises were tied to increasing the number of project approvals rather than, say, adherence to the community’s master plan, there was little or no incentive for them to recommend denying projects. During a background interview with a county planning director, I learned of another subtle potential driver of development. He explained that the national code of ethics that he and other planners adhered to advocated that planners seek the “highest and best use” of the land, not its “nonuse.” This planner saw little help from the planning profession for the protection of nature, and his solution to me was simply to “buy it.”

With these complexities in mind, I believe that the unquestioned acceptance of money as the principal driver of development might lead to simplistic or even counter-productive public policies. Therefore, my purpose in

this study was to create a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the range of potential drivers of development by interviewing high-profile real estate developers. To move closer to this more sophisticated understanding, I established the following research objectives, with their attendant interview questions (see Appendix C for the actual interview protocol):

Research Objective 1: To hear the life histories of elite Michigan developers and the context of their development practice. This objective relates to the importance of narratives, discussed in the Methods section. I framed the life-history question as an opening *global* question (Spradley and McCurdy 1972). I found that this question elicited rich reflections:

Interview question: So how did you ever get to be a developer?

Research Objective 2: To elicit the language, guiding metaphors, and mythic tales developers use to explain their work and its meaning. This objective relates to the growth coalition literature and to Galtung's notion of cultural violence to nature. The following interview questions related to this objective yielded fruitful insights

Interview questions:

As a developer, what exactly do you do?

In your own words, what is development?

Could you tell me how you select projects? What are you looking for?

Can you think of a project that was particularly meaningful to you?

Have you ever had any regrets about any of your projects? <sup>6</sup>

Research Objective 3. To ascertain whether developers think about sustainability and, if so, how they conceptualize it. This objective flowed from the various critiques of the notion of “sustainable” development (Bunker 1988; Daly 1989, 1996; Engel 1990; Meadows et. al. 1992; Norgaard 1994; Ophuls and Ophuls 1992; Redclift 1987; Schnaiberg and Gould 1994). I couched the question in language I believed would not embarrass them if they had not heard of or thought about the term. I also placed it at the end of the interview protocol, so we would have come to know each other better and have developed some rapport:

Interview question: I don’t know if you have ever heard of the term, but some people talk about having “sustainable development.” Their concern is with urban sprawl and loss of greenfields. What would sustainable development look like to you?

Research Objective 4. To learn how developers talk about nature, and whether they know of or think about ecological connections. This objective reached my deepest personal concerns and followed from the writings of philosopher and deep ecologist Arne Naess, development ethicist Ron Engel (Engel and Engel 1990), and others. As mentioned, Naess especially argued that

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<sup>6</sup>I added this question after a discussion with University of Michigan environmental psychologist Rachel Kaplan. She has found that people often could not envision how a development would turn out and later had regrets.

nature has intrinsic value and yet most social dialogue centers on human concerns, or a shallow ecology. I added this question during the background interviews as I grew more confident about my ability to establish trust and rapport, and as I embraced my own desire to share with developers my deep concern for the threats to nature – and to ask for their advice.

Interview question: In my own work, I'm struggling with how we can have development and protect nature. Do you have any thoughts on this?

I believe that the worst conflicts between nature and culture, land and people, are on the horizon. A rash of constitution-based takings cases and a flurry of habitat-conservation plans in Texas to try to protect endangered species are just the beginning. I believe it is imperative to talk with those responsible for land development to learn how they view the land and how we might work together to protect its inhabitants.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are.

Anaïs Nin

### Locating Myself in the Qualitative Inquiry Movement

Schwandt believed that a reformist movement of qualitative inquiry began in the 1970s as a reflection of larger disagreements over “the underlying purpose, value, and ethics of intellectual labor” (Schwandt 2000). He presented three epistemological stances: interpretivist, hermeneutics, and social constructionism,<sup>7</sup> and I located myself most closely with the latter. Like interpretivist and hermeneutics scholars, social constructionists believe that the purpose of social research is not to discover causality in the positivist tradition, but to *seek understanding* of human actions (Schwandt 2000) and interpret at the level of relationships and how this influences the unfolding of cultural life (Creswell 1994; Denzin 1997; Geertz 1983; Rabinow and Sullivan 1979). Schwandt went on to say that social constructionism opposes “a naïve realist and empiricist epistemology that holds that there can be some kind of unmediated, direct grasp of the empirical world and that knowledge (i.e., the mind) simply reflects or mirrors what is ‘out there’” (p. 197).

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<sup>7</sup>Various scholars have identified and named different traditions or epistemologies. For example, John W. Creswell presented five theoretical traditions (Creswell 1998) and Michael Quinn Patton (Patton 2002) outlined sixteen including autoethnography.

Within a social constructionist epistemology, then, our understanding of the world – as reflected in worldview; cultural norms, values, and ways of life; moral knowledge and belief; and so on – is formulated and shaped by dialogue. Meaning is social not individual, and, as Longino argued, “effective criticism of background assumptions requires the presence and expression of alternative points of view . . . [which] allows us to see how social values and interest can become enshrined in otherwise acceptable research programs” (Schwandt 2000, p. 199).

My ultimate purpose was to lay out a fresh approach to thinking about real estate development that was not created from abstract theoretical concepts, the ideal conditions of a laboratory, or the hands-off approach of survey research. My aim was to bring together the thoughts, values, and beliefs of those who actually carry out development with my own lived experience. The cornerstone of my approach was in-depth personal interviews with 15 elite real estate developers who practice in the state of Michigan. I met face-to-face with those who I believed held values and had interests radically different from mine. I wanted to expose and make conscious my own background assumptions and thus free myself to the possibility of collaborative, creative solutions to protect nature in the world of practice, a slight shift from Longino’s.

### Finding Autoethnography

Earlier I said that once I found autoethnography I felt great comfort to have a name for my research approach and experience. Autoethnography felt like an authentic and connected way to carry out research; it allowed me to express my experience of research rather than lurking about in the shadows. Furthermore, autoethnography, as modeled by Ellis and Bochner (2000), merges the researcher with his or her culture of study, as well as enjoining research with the reporting of research. This added tremendous complexity to the structure of my dissertation and multiplied the decisions that I had to make about what to include and discuss. In the end, I believe it was worth it and do not believe I could have done it any other way and have it be such an integral expression of my life.

### A Narrative Study

A critical aspect of the research design was to pose questions that would elicit developer narratives. Narratives can be thought of as the stories we tell ourselves and others to make sense of the world and of our experiences. As I asked for narratives, developers talked about their work and its meaning within their own conceptual framework. As previously discussed, when I talked with developers during the pilot study, I felt hidden stereotypes vanish as I entered their world through the stories they told. I realized that these stories flowed naturally when I asked “global” questions (Spradley 1972) such as “So, how did

you ever get to be a developer?" On the other hand, when I asked sociological or theoretical questions such as "What role do developers play in society?" I got flat, meaningless responses: "Well, I suppose I should say 'to make a better world.'"

Chase (1995) argued that by inviting stories, the narrator – in this case the developer – retains responsibility for clarifying relevance. This approach contrasts with that of asking for "reports" such as by posing sociological questions. In this case, the responsibility rests with the interviewer, and directly asking sociological questions can be stifling:

The questions I posed to the women were sociological, and women responded in that mode, giving me answers that linked sociological variables to personal militance [the construct of interest] . . . Their answers were as abstract and uninformative as my own thinking. (Chase 1995 quoting Sachs 1989).

Critics may suggest that researchers will not be able to find answers to questions about social processes with this approach, that direct questioning is needed. But from my interview experiences, I found that important social processes were revealed. I had suspected as much after the pilot study and had revised the interview protocol to ask more directly for narratives. This was corroborated by Chase (1995), who wrote that when "Sachs dropped her sociological questions and began asking for life stories – something she had no intention of doing when she started the study – when she realized that the general processes she sought to understand are embedded in women's lives,"

There were a few women whose constructions of their life narratives and analyses became exemplars of how family learning empowered women to rebel, and whose experiences became central for developing that model. *This happened when I finally asked them how they learned about work and what it meant to them.* (Quoting Sacks 1989, emphasis added by Chase)

In Chase's own studies, she found that asking sociological questions often led to dead ends. She found this type of question was "too external to women's experiences...[and they] distracted us from the deeper and broader life story the interviewee had to tell." When Chase herself was a subject in a research study, she found herself "offering sociological responses to...sociological questions...[that were] not a description of my own experience but a summary of what I assume to be many women's experiences," Chase concluded that, by switching to narratives, that our task as interviewers is then:

...to provide the interactional and discursive conditions that will arouse...desire to embrace that responsibility. We are most likely to succeed when we orient our questions directly and simply to life experiences that the other seeks to make sense of and to communicate. [Further,]...our task...includes listening for gaps, silences, or contradictions, and reiterating the invitation through questions that encourage fuller narration of the complexities of her story.

As I discuss more fully below, I used these techniques for the interviews. Yet I concur with Chase (1995) that narrative analysis goes beyond technique to that of theoretical orientation:

We learn about general social processes through analysis of specific narratives. From this standpoint, narrative analysis is grounded in a particular theoretical commitment: Understanding general social processes requires a focus on their embodiment in actual practices,

that is, in actual narratives....We serve our theoretical interest in general social processes when we take seriously the idea that people make sense of life experience by narrating them.

### Preparing for the Interviews

#### Elite Methods

High-profile developers are considered business elites because their position, power, and influence allow them to form a protective layer between themselves and society. Among the various types, business elites are considered the most difficult to reach:

Business elites have been traditionally the most difficult....to gain access to by social scientists. The hierarchies of business organizations are designed to protect those who work there and to deter outsiders from learning more about how they operate. The popular assumption remains that business maintains trade secrets, that professionals protect their own, and that politicians have everything to hide. (Hertz and Imber 1995)

I knew going into the study that gaining access and rapport would be challenging. During the pilot, I tried several things to increase my chance of success. I learned that elite developers are people of action, and they were not interested in long explanations of the purposes of my research. I heard from the pilot developers or their assistant, "fax me something." I devised (and later expanded and refined) a two-page combined purpose statement and consent form (see Appendix B). I found that elites preferred seeing a short write-up ahead of time before they would commit to an interview, and often before they would even talk with me on the telephone. Faxing the form before requesting

participation worked very well and I believe increased participation by the elites (see Appendix A).

### Sampling and Recruitment

I used extreme-case sampling (Patton 2002) to create a purposeful sample of 15 high profile, successful real estate developers. I chose this method to ensure that I would be talking to the developers who were most likely to have the greatest effect on nature. Extreme-case sampling thus allowed me to address larger questions concerning the overall direction and likely impact of the current course of development in Michigan. To keep the state and federal policy context constant, I interviewed only Michigan-based developers (although several have done developments in other states).

I confined my interviews to developers in the three most heavily populated regions of the state: southeast, mid-, and west Michigan. Recruitment was difficult because there is no statewide database of Michigan real estate developers. Whereas builders are licensed and regulated, developers are not, and the three trade organizations and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation did not have any way to identify real estate developers, either individually or as a group.

I finally located one business publication that compiles a list each year of top developers (by dollars and square footage) for a 16-county area. I talked to the reporter to find out how she obtains the information, hoping that I had

missed an important source. However, she told me that she actually drives around the 16 counties looking for real estate development signs. She then calls the telephone numbers on the signs to ask for interviews. During the interviews, she asks basic questions about number of employees, private or public ownership, place of business, and number of square feet developed, and then ranks them. I used this list successfully to locate and interview the top developers in that region of the state. Of the ten I contacted, I interviewed six (three said they were too busy, and one said he was not interested).

I recruited developers in the other two regions in several other ways. First, I had been clipping news articles about developers for several years and had identified four I wanted to interview. I was able to interview two of the four (the other two indicated through their personal assistants that they were not interested). I also contacted the Michigan Home Builders' Association and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. However, this led to only a few names, and I was not convinced they were major developers. Because of my luck with the business reporter, I contacted two business journalists. One was an excellent source for the big names in real estate development, even providing the telephone numbers and in some cases the names of the developers' personal assistants. Of the five I contacted in that region, I was able to interview four of them.

I handled all of the information confidentially. There were few high-profile elite developers in the state, and I wanted to protect their rights to

privacy.<sup>8</sup> I purposefully did not use snowball sampling because I did not want any developer to know or suspect whom else I was interviewing. Several developers asked whether I had talked to a particular developer, and I would reply that I while I would love to tell them, I was keeping everyone's identity, including their own, confidential. They seemed taken aback for a moment, but then they may have realized, and appreciated, the depth of this notion of confidentiality. Furthermore, even though several developers practically insisted I use their names (one said it would make this a "valid" study), in order to protect their rights to privacy I kept the identities of all developers confidential. I will not use their names or any distinguishing characteristics in any published documents.

Once I had a list for each region, I began to fax the information about the interview process to the developers. As I had done for the pilot study, I started with the most prominent developers. Frequently I spoke to a secretary or personal assistant, and about half the time I had not talked with the developer before our appointment. This proved problematic twice when I showed up and the developers had no idea who I was or what I wanted and had not read the purpose and consent form. I had been given an appointment only because they let their personal assistant handle their schedules and she had thought it worthwhile. One of these developers gave me only a half-hour of his time, and I

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<sup>8</sup>See Appendices B and D for the human subjects information for this study.

did not turn on my tape recorder during the interview because he had not yet signed the consent form (I dictated from my notes immediately after I left). In the other case, I spent about 10 minutes introducing the purpose and procedures. As a result, we did not finish the questions in the time allotted, although he did agree to a follow-up interview. We did finish the interview a few weeks later.

I never used personal contacts or pressure to “get in” to any developer’s office, but only went in “through the front door”. I faxed information to twenty-one developers and interviewed a total of fifteen – four from southeast Michigan, four from mid-Michigan, and seven from west Michigan (where I had the best and longest list). No one from mid-Michigan turned down an interview, but three from southeast Michigan and four from west Michigan did.

I was persistent and sincere in my desire to interview these developers. However, I left participation open and did not press if there seemed to be a lack of interest or an extremely busy schedule. However, I always left the door open by asking developers to feel free to call if something changed and they would be able to participate in the research. This resulted in two west Michigan interviews several months after the initial contact. I did turn down one developer because he could see me only after I had finished the last interview and his assistant called to say he would only give me an hour.

### Easing the Burden of Participation

During the last few years, I have conducted more than 100 in-depth personal interviews for qualitative research and evaluation projects. Perhaps because there were so many, I became acutely aware of the significant burden social science research places on those who agree to participate. Indeed, most often I was, at best, an uninvited guest at their table. In light of this, I did what I could to make the developers feel comfortable, unthreatened, listened to, and respected as I entered their offices and lives. I thanked them immediately for agreeing to participate and, with a smile on my face, looked them in the eye and warmly shook their hand. Repeating what was on the purpose and consent form, I assured them that I was not looking for anything and that there were no right or wrong answers. I also promised to send them a short summary of my findings later in the year. As soon as I returned home, I sent each developer a personal handwritten thank-you note.

### Interview Protocol

I asked developers a series of open-ended questions in three areas:

- How they became a real estate developer, and how they thought about and practiced development
- How they chose projects, what gave their work meaning, and what, if anything, had caused them to feel regret

- What sustainable development would look like to them, and how they would resolve tension between the goals of development and protection of nature

The interview questions flowed from my research objectives (see Appendix C for the complete protocol). During the interviews, I stuck closely to the protocol to create a similar discursive framework for each interview. This provided a consistent structure during the analysis process. However, within the protocol, I used a dialogic approach to obtain out a fuller understanding of what they meant (see Dialogic Approach below).

### The Heart of this Study: The Interview Moment

For each interview I endeavored to create a sacred space for the developer to share his stories and for me to deeply hear them. I call this the interview moment. I was fully prepared with my purple bag organized and holding extras of everything. I was at least a half-hour early out of respect for the developer's other obligations and because I usually faced more than an hour's drive to get to his place of business and did not want to be late. All of the practical matters were taken care of so that all I had to do was focus on the interview moment. Yet I found myself intensely nervous before each interview and asked myself more than once just what it was I thought I actually enjoyed about qualitative research. Right up to the first moment of contact, I felt ready to bolt.

### Our First Exchange

As soon as I actually saw the developer, I relaxed and knew why I was there. My “data collection” began with this first conversation with each developer, although impressions formed from the first contact on. After a handshake, introductions, and a smile of welcome, I handed the developer my business card. I went over the purpose of my research and the two copies of the consent form to ensure that he understood what we both then signed. I signed the form first to indicate that I was committed to upholding the agreement as outlined on my form. I left one original with the developer and took one for my records. Most developers had already reviewed the form, which I had faxed ahead of time. However, several had either not seen it or not reviewed it carefully. Regardless, I did go over the form each time before we signed it and before I asked the first question.

### Let the Developer Lead and Actively Listen

One of the aspects I adhered to closely was, within the constraints of the protocol, to let the developer lead. Wherever he seemed to want to go in our conversation, I went with him, asking for clarification of words and ideas as we went along. I focused intensely on this being about him, about his stories, his experience. At the same time, as I discussed above, I did want to enter into dialogue. This meant that the interview moment was a continual dance, a

rebalancing of self and other, and an inner questioning of myself and the experience I was going through.

Reading through transcripts, I found I was saying confirmatory “okays” repeatedly in every interview. I paid close attention to the developer’s words and often rearticulated what he had said to make sure I understood. Again, I found myself using many mediation skills like active listening and walking in his shoes. I trust that the developers felt my deep interest in truly understanding their perspectives and learning from them.

### Dialogic Approach

Only in a dialogical encounter with what is not understood, with what is alien, with what makes a claim upon us, can we open ourselves to risking and testing our preconceptions and prejudices (Bernstein 1983; in Schwandt 2002)

To enhance opportunities for narratives, I used a dialogic approach during the interviews. I asked questions to elicit narratives, then entered into dialogue so the developers and I could co-construct a more profound expression of their life world and thus challenge my own. I found that my ability to enter a space of true dialogue varied greatly depending on the person I was interviewing. By dialogue I mean an open, interactive give and take—a shared space where both people participate—rather than a your-turn my-turn, back and forth telling of disconnected messages.

Some developers asserted strong control over the interview, and others were open and relaxed. Some had certain things they seemed intent on telling

me and just wanted to get it all in whereas others were curious about me and a few even asked me questions. Most were in the middle, allowing me in a little. All but one of the most intense or driven developers did soften, relax, and open up during the course of the interview.

### Tape Recording and Note Taking

To enable me to listen intently to the developers yet still capture their exact words, with their written consent I audiotaped each interview. I was able to tape record the interviews with all but one developer, but I did not make this a condition of the interview. I did turn off the tape recorder a few times when we were interrupted and several times when requested. Here is an example of a developer who wanted to tell me something that he did not want tape-recorded:

K: I can take this off if you want.

D1: I don't think I'll tell the rest of the story on tape. I'll turn this off (tape off).

In this instance, I did not even put what the developer said into my fieldnotes after the interview.

During the interview, I took notes of major points while trying to maintain a solid connection with the developers. I did this in case technical problems arose and also because it helped me start to process what they were saying. I asked for clarification of any words or concepts that I did not understand or that seemed to mean something different to the developers than to me. I noted in brackets in the left margin important concepts or potential themes that emerged

as we talked. I also noted any needed follow-up. For example, one developer mentioned he thought there were three paradigm changes. I noted the number in the left column, and, sure enough, he mentioned only two. With a gentle probe, he talked about the third. I sometimes also noted an idea that I wanted to ask more about, but did not want to interrupt at that point to ask. I sensed the developers appreciate being listened to with such close attention to what they said. I thanked the developers for seeing me and sent them each a hand-written thank-you note soon after the interview.

I used a professional-quality Sony tape-recorder that recorded on both sides of the audiotape without having to turn the tape over. This meant that I could do a 90-minute interview without interruption. The recorder was very sensitive and picked things up very well even in a noisy situation or if the developer walked around the office showing me maps or drawings of developments. During the interview, I checked occasionally to make sure that the tape was still turning. I had one technical problem and was not able to tape one interview.

I identified each developer's file folder and audiotape with a number (e.g., D4 for the fourth developer). I made a duplicate copy of the audiotapes and sent the original tapes in batches of six to a professional transcriptionist by priority mail and kept the duplicate. The transcriptionist sent me the transcript by e-mail and returned the original audiotapes by priority mail. The transcript had a wide 1 1/2-inch right margin for making notes. I printed one copy of each transcript

and put them in a four-inch binder. I stored the audiotapes, fieldnotes, and protocol in a file cabinet in my home office, and no one else had access to these materials. I will keep the transcripts indefinitely but will destroy (not reuse) the original and duplicate audiotapes once I have verified their accuracy and defended my dissertation.

### Fieldnotes After the Interview

Immediately before all but a few interviews, I dictated fieldnotes of my impressions and reactions while sitting in my car. I paid close attention to the setting and the interactions between myself and the developer as well as any others I came in met. I also transcribed my immediate reactions after the interview right onto the original audiotape. Usually these fieldnotes contained my reactions to the experience, questions raised, and new or emerging themes. Often I had one or two ideas about methods. At the end of the last two or three interviews, I dictated sections I used in the actual dissertation.

### Analysis: How Will I Know What I Know?

The question "How will I know what I know?" came to me as I sat with 800 pages of transcripts, 1,600 books, and several file drawers worth of notes and information. There was not only the sorting issue, but also the one of relevance.

### But What Are Data?

This was the first question I struggled with. I was struck by the insistence in qualitative research texts and among qualitative researchers to stick to only “data” during analysis. As I became more and more of an ethnographer, I grew acutely frustrated and questioned just what others might consider my “data.” It seemed that interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and participant observations were data, but what about a paragraph by the editor of a house magazine publicly complaining for the first time about mansionization, or the news article in my local paper talking about the “rebirth” of a neighborhood? What about the sign on the highway announcing “vacant land for sale” or the enormous multistory crane with a small American flag on top that I saw and photographed on vacation in Atlanta, Georgia? Were these not data, or did they not count because they were serendipitous, part of my daily life, and not preplanned?

I believe that the line between what is and what is not data is indistinct. I do not believe it is necessary or even appropriate to put data collection in a box, to be taken out at only the appropriate times. I believe in the value of serendipity. As I mentioned under my assumptions in the introduction, I assume that research is an embodied, visceral, lived experience and that all of this is data. I like the notion of *bricoleur*, of learning by messing around. That is how I learn best, and it was an important part of conducting this study. I do not see a clean line between data and not-data.

## The Process of Analysis

What I looked for during analysis was similar to the rich cream rising to the top of the milk bottle – a concentration of the constituent elements of the interview text. I developed a process of analysis that was systematic as well as highly intuitive. Upon reflection, my process of data analysis seemed amazingly parallel to the process of mediation by involving (a) a consistent set of rules of engagement, (b) a basic structure, and (c) trusting the process.

Rules of engagement. In mediation, the rules of engagement are simple: each person gets an equal amount of time to talk, there is no name calling, and there should be respectful listening. In analysis, my rules were similar: equal time and weight to each developer, respect for individual viewpoints, and deeply entering their life world.

Structure. The structure of a mediation session is also simple. Usually two co-mediators sit across from two participants. Each participant is asked to tell his or her own story and is given exactly the same amount of time. Next, the mediators ask the two participants to tell the other person's story (as they understand it). At this point, the participants begin walking in each other's shoes, a process that is so emotional that I sometimes witnessed men cry.

I created two structures that I used consistently throughout the analysis. First, I created a "milk bottle" matrix to capture and compare the "cream" or essence of what each developer said in response to each question, cutting and

pasting his exact words from the transcript into one box of the matrix, as shown in Figure 2.

	Developer A	Developer B	Developer C
Question 1			
Question 2			

Figure 2. Milk-bottle matrix.

I modified this about halfway through the interviews to what I called a linear matrix because the responses were too lengthy and the matrix became too cumbersome, as shown in Figure 3.

Question 1
Developer A
Developer B
Developer C

Figure 3. Linear matrix.

At the very top of the linear matrix I added two items that were not part of my interview protocol. One was what I called a yellow sticky note for each developer: What one new important thing did I learn from the particular person? Originally, I had written this information on a little yellow sticky note (hence the

name), which I then placed on the first page of the written transcript. When the transcripts got too bulky to use, I moved these “notes” to computer file. The other item I added at the top of the matrix was the particular information about this person, such as the type of development he did and other facts and figures about his business. The content of this linear matrix was the basis for Chapter 4.

The second structure I devised was a computer document of themes. Many of the themes emerged during the interview process itself and I captured them in fieldnotes or noted them during the interview. Later as I read through each individual transcripts and fieldnotes on my computer screen, I would cut and paste relevant sections into themes as they emerged. Over time a long list of themes grew and gradually I was able to “clump” these into a smaller set of meta-themes. The resulting themes from this highly inductive process formed the basis for Chapter 5.

Organizing my life and trusting the process. I think this final stage – the mucking around in the data – is why people give up on or never do qualitative research. The only way to analyze qualitative data is by *doing it*, and this means *going through it* and the only way *through* the data is *a mess*. I suspect that anthropologists wax romantically about “rich description” only in hindsight. When doing analysis, sorting through hundreds or even thousands of pages of that “rich description” is absolutely overwhelming.

I literally had to pick up the guts of my dissertation and move everything up north to eliminate nearly all of the distractions of daily life. I had to sit and

feel stuck and take breaks and find distractions for a week or so, having no idea how best to work. I strongly resisted any notion of forcing this baby to be born. I knew deep down that I had to trust the process and do it with heartfelt love. Something else would guide me, and my task was to “show up for the page.”

Eventually I did find a rhythm of sorts. Until the last crazed week, I would wake at seven, just after sunrise and completely rested after seven hours of deep sleep. I would do the original writing and thinking first thing, skipping breakfast and working until 11 a.m. Next I would have brunch either at my apartment or in town. Then I would spend an hour or so doing small errands in town or reading a magazine on the patio overlooking Lake Michigan and the Betsie River Valley.

By mid-day I would start again and work until dinner, around 6 p.m. This was the period when I would laboriously, tediously go through the latest transcript line by line. This was work I had started down state, but had not quite finished. I had three files open on my computer screen simultaneously, and I would cut and paste short and long quotations from the transcripts onto one or both of the linear matrix and the thematic files.

By seven or eight o'clock, I would head to Lake Michigan for a three- or four-mile barefoot walk by the lake. Echoing my dissertation, I walked exactly at the ragged edge, the place where water meets land, the area of greatest movement, disruption, diversity, and life. I would wade thus for a mile or two, taking in the experience of the shoreline as completely, as wholly as possible,

letting it seep in and through every pore and permeate the very fabric of my being. Sometimes a sandpiper would walk ahead, catching microscopic morsels off the very edge of the last receding wave. Often monarchs flew and glided, as well as smaller yellow butterflies. Once I saw a deer having an evening drink of water in the distance, and I slipped my fingertips into her hoof prints when I got to where she had drunk. These walks were not separate from analysis, but fundamental to it. Indeed, these walks allowed or enabled the analysis to happen--as ideas seeped, synthesized, gelled, and emerged as new thoughts, categories, and insights at some deeply unconscious level.

### Paradox

As I mentioned earlier, as a qualitative researcher, I seek to reveal not reduce complexity. I let myself seep in the ideas and language of those participating in this study. I tried, as I have also asked of you, to hold onto the seeming contradictions and then to look for the paradox. . A paradox is something that seems absurd or self-contradictory. Paradox means that even what seems to be the opposite is, at the same time, true. A good example is the first theme that emerged: development is and is not about money. I could have argued, perhaps, that development is not about money. I do have more examples of the ways in which it is not about money than the ways in which it is. I could have recategorized, reshaped, or even dismissed developers' talk of making a good living and ignored the elegance of some of their offices. But I

chose instead a holistic approach that embraces the seeming contradictions that create or embody paradox.

### Metaphors

I began to pay attention to metaphors early on. This was not something I had planned, but it became important after the second theme emerged: Women have babies, men have buildings. What had struck me was the language and metaphors the developers used to describe their work. I had become sensitive to language earlier while reading one of Donald Trump's autobiographies (Trump 1997). I had kept track of the way he talked about his work on a conceptual map on a single piece of paper. Much of his language compared development to a poker game, boxing, and deal making.

As I grew interested in this and began to read and hear similar language and metaphors used by other developers and journalists reporting events, I began to pay close attention to metaphors. I read Lakoff and Johnson's classic text, *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), and a more recent one by Haskell (2001) that also discusses deep listening. Although I did not make this the focus of my work, I did use metaphors to inform my analysis.

### Resonance

During the analysis, one constant was to wait for and be open to resonance. If something did not resonate, did not ring true, I did not use it.

### Openness with Resistance to Labels

Rather than reach early conclusions, I remained open as completely and as long possible throughout the data collection and analysis. The names of the themes seemed to have their own lives and came to me unbidden.

### On Judging the Validity of this Work

Due to our origins as biophysical science wannabes, validity has always loomed large as a critically important issue for social scientists. We so wanted the elegant experimental approaches of the biophysical scientists. We coveted the certainty of finding the right answer to our questions, if only by accounting for and eliminating everything else. This led social scientists to create methods that mimicked those in the biophysical world. We used hands-off approaches such as the statistical analysis of large nameless faceless databases. We drew on census data and conducted survey research. Interviews, when used, were formal and structured with no smiles and no personal interaction. I know. I suffered through them. We seemed down right ashamed to be different.

Importantly, social scientists adapted concepts of reliability and generalizability similar to those used by the biophysical scientists. However, our efforts to control and account for our findings ran afoul of the vagaries of

human nature and social interaction. Still we resisted the notion that the study of people is inherently messy, Eventually we began to admit this, which split social scientists into two camps. Quantitative social science researchers working with numbers differentiated themselves from qualitative researchers working with texts. Quantitative researchers adhered to that of distant observer and the goal of objectivity. Qualitative researchers were beginning to question distance and objectivity. As if embarrassed to seen with an eccentric cousin, the quantifiers wanted distance between them and qualitative researchers. A war began that went on for decades.

Fortunately, by the time I began my dissertation the war between quantitative and qualitative researchers was – as Michael Quinn Patton<sup>9</sup> relayed quoting another colleague – over. While not everyone knows that this war is over, those following and taking part in current methodological discussions do. Some things are appropriate to study with numbers, and others need text. One is not inherently better than the other, but merely different and capable examining different things. Furthermore, some scholars began to say that some things cannot be observed at a distance, but only up close and vulnerable (Behar 1996) or even through friendship (Chinas 1993; Grindal and Salamone 1995).

Unfortunately, a new war – or perhaps it will prove to only be a skirmish – has started, but this time within the qualitative research camp.

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<sup>9</sup> American Evaluation Conference 2001.

Researchers are experimenting, forming splinter groups and specialties, and facing uncertainty while dozens of types of qualitative methods emerge. I find the variety and discussions healthy and enjoy the polycentrism. Within my own area of autoethnography, Patton (2002) lists 30 different types. Not unexpectedly, the question of validity remains central: how *do* we know if our research findings and conclusions are valid?

Beginning as early as the 1970s, Stake (1978) and others began to change the tenor of discussions about validity. Stake and Trumbull (1982) introduced the notion of naturalistic generalizability. Rather than the researcher seeking to generalize findings to any given situation, a naturalistic generalizability would give that responsibility to the reader, or, as Lincoln (2000) says, consumer of the research. For example, if the discussion in my chapter four resonates with your experience of developers in your state, or if you think there is transferability or similarity, then this would be a naturalistic generalizability. Denzin (1997) emphasized the “truth effects” of research: “the critical, moral discourse they produce”. For example, if when you read my text and are stirred toward action, then using Denzin’s criteria we could say this work has validity. This is a very different notion from the broad generalizations previously sought by social scientists.

When qualitative researchers began to look at their own work without comparisons to quantitative research, new concepts and language became necessary. Lincoln (2000) and Guba found themselves “restating” rigor criteria

as trustworthiness, then later as authenticity: “At the time we devised the trustworthiness criteria (Guba and Lincoln, 1982), we realized they were rooted in the concerns of positivist inquiry, but were not certain how to proceed with breaking free of those mandates.”

More recently, Lincoln (2000) Lather (1993), Richardson (1999), and others have used new powerful metaphors and evocative language such as Lather’s (1993) “fertile obsession”, “rupture validity”, and “rhizomatic validity.” The new language fit with, as Lather relates, of ethnographies as constructed rather than found or discovered. Researchers seem to tie the notion of validity to the reader’s direct, visceral, vicarious experience – not abstract passive consumption – of the thick descriptions of ethnography,

I would like you, the reader, to assess the validity of this dissertation in three ways. First, I would like you to consider its *authenticity* (Guba and Lincoln 1985). Do you feel in your bones that I conducted this research as I said I would: as a peace worker traversing the edge between nature and culture? Was I transparent about my intentions, values, conduct, and ethical dilemma? Do you believe I am telling the truth? Do you think I really care what the developers think and that I want to find ways to work with them? Evidence of its authenticity is that the one developer thanked me for interviewing him. He said he had never “put it all together before” and enjoyed the opportunity to do so.

Second, I would like you to estimate the *truth effects* (Denzin 1999) and *catalytic validity* (Lather 1986) of this work. Does it inspire a sense of urgency?

Do you see development, sustainability, or Nature differently? Do you feel the pain of my witness? Has it been a visceral experience and might it move you toward action or involvement? Several outgrowths of this dissertation point to truth effects and catalytic validity. For example, a land use professor came up to me after my dissertation seminar and asked me to do a “two-hour version” of the 45-minute seminar at the monthly meeting of Michigan State University’s land use experts. She said they would pay my expenses to fly back from Washington, DC where I was about to begin my new job. Other outgrowths were being asked by one of the planners I interviewed to give a talk to a group of Michigan planners; being invited and giving a paper at a national conference; and being asked to write an article for a special issue of a planning journal

Finally, does this autoethnography embody what Laurel Richardson (Richardson 1999) calls a *creative analytic practice* (CAP)? Is it creative *and* analytical, or, to use my own words, is it, as I hoped, both poetry and scholarship? Does this work, as Richardson asks, “invite people in and open spaces for thinking about the social that elude us now?” Are process and product “deeply entwined” and both “privileged”? I specifically would like the validity of this work to be judged using Richardson’s five CAP criteria:

- Does it make a *substantive contribution*”, one that is deeply grounded”, such as have you gained a better understanding of how developers do and think about their work and what it means to them?

- Does it have *aesthetic merit*, such as being a pleasure to read when I describe the butterfly on my desk or the wind blow on my face?
- Is it *reflexive* about how I came to this work and what it means to me so you can “make judgements about point of view”, such as when I discuss my fears of setting up developers to fail?
- Does it have an *impact*, cause you to react emotionally, such as wincing when you learn that development is called “assembling dirt”?
- Does it have a *reality*, what Richardson describes as an embodied, lived experience, such that the developers seem believable, almost like you walked into their lives with me?

These new ways of conceptualizing validity mean that you have a larger personal responsibility and role in judging validity. I am not presenting confidence intervals, but rather complex questions that invite – no, force – reflection. While I have given you examples of what I believe show I am meeting these criteria, in the end you must decide. I wish to erase the power differentials and equalize knowledge between you and me. This means that I especially appreciate the new language and approaches presented here that can directly involve you in the consideration of the validity of this particular qualitative study.

## Findings and Discussion

In the next two chapters, I have distinguished as much as possible between what the developers told me – the *emic* – from my way of understanding and synthesizing what they told me – the *etic*. *Emic* and *etic* are concepts from anthropology. *Emic* is what emerges from the people the researcher talks with – their actual words and concepts and way of viewing the world--and this forms the summary of responses in Chapter 4. *Etic* is how the researcher hears, interprets, and constructs what is said; and this forms the themes in Chapter 5. I believe it is important to distinguish between these two concepts as much as possible. However, it was not possible or preferable to draw clear lines for this work because this is an autoethnography and I used a dialogic interview approach. I do not think this is problematic because one of my aims was to co-construct meaning during the interviews as part of my own lived experience.

## CHAPTER 4: DIALOGUE WITH DEVELOPERS

### Entering Their Worlds

I hid my car before each interview because my license plate suddenly seemed to scream the word “Islands,” and my window stickers proclaiming “Some Things Are Too Precious to Lose” and “The Nature Conservancy” stuck out prominently. Even though these words did reveal important things about myself, the complexity of just who I am and why I was there could not be understood solely by reading them. Having such a short time with each developer, I knew I would not be able to get beyond a less-than-favorable first impression if they happened to see my car. Because I was always early for our appointments, I feared I would run into them in the parking lot or they would guess it was my car if they in came after me. I did not want them to misread my intentions, to feel spied on, or feel a need to be guarded. So before each interview I backed my car into a parking spot as far away from the comings and goings of the entrance as I could.

This may be why I noticed the other cars in the parking lots. Except for one or two black luxury cars, most were brand-new over-sized sport utility vehicles and enormous trucks. There were no signs of dirt on any of the vehicles. Some of the developers had offices in their own industrial or business parks. These buildings ranged from plain-Jane, pole-barn types with short, well-kept green lawns to more lavish brick-faced ones with bright flower gardens and

mature trees. Several developers had downtown offices on the first or second floors of restored buildings with soulful remnants of old brick walls and creaky wood floors. Several others had sleek corner suburban offices in four- or five-story buildings that they had developed and built. One had an impressive taupe brick building with a slate roof, surrounded by stately brick walls and manicured gardens with graceful curves. Several had American flags or banners announcing awards waving by their entrances.

### The Interview Moment

Inside, most of the developers' offices were a typical business arrangement with a small waiting area with a female receptionist who offered me something to drink after she announced my arrival. In some waiting areas, the furniture was posh; in others, it was strictly business. In one office a gas log burned in a fireplace, and in another I was surprised to see a motorcycle sparkling in the sunlight. I noticed copies of *Fortune*, *The Builder*, *Golf*, *Time*, and local business weeklies. I picked up and browsed through a book on local history in one office, and scanned through a well-worn photograph album filled with thank-you letters from appreciative customers in another. Usually there were marketing brochures for one or two of the developer's latest projects, which I also read. About half the time the developer himself came out to greet me and walk me to his office or conference room. The other half of the time, the receptionist or developer's personal assistant ushered me through what seemed

like layer after layer of offices nested one within another. The developers who greeted me themselves seemed the most friendly, open, and easy to talk with.

Only one of the developers kept me waiting, and his interview ended up being the shortest. He had just returned from vacation and had no idea who I was or why I was there. His personal assistant had made the appointment in his absence. I got to listen to him talk politics on the telephone and watched him slowly sort through his mail, feet up and shoeless, for ten minutes. He finally came and sat on a gorgeous modern couch near me, still shoeless. We breezed through the questions in twenty minutes, with only one telephone interruption, and then I was on my way. One other interview started out similarly, with the developer not knowing who I was or why I was there, but that interview turned out better. Because he had not read the fax I had sent to his personal assistant, the developer was somewhat tense. He also had not allowed enough time and had to leave for a prior engagement. However, he loosened up during the interview, and we scheduled another session a few weeks later to finish up.

Some developers seemed to have all the time in the world; others squeezed me into their day and sometimes we had to cut short our conversation. Twice I had to return to finish the interview on another day. My longest interview was with a rural second-home land developer, who happened to be the farthest distance away from where I lived. He greeted me himself with a broad smile and a friendly handshake. He was dressed casually in a red-plaid shirt and jeans. He was just finishing a meeting, and he introduced me to his staff. Then

he walked me to his large, unpretentious, welcoming office where every surface was chock-full of photographs of his wife and children. He sat in a chair just like mine, with a small round table between us, and we talked for two-and-a-half hours. He was extremely professional and thoughtful. He shared spreadsheets listing all the actual factors he looked at before taking on a project. He surprised me by having the Michigan Natural Features Inventory on that list, something I had not thought any developer would even know about, let alone use. The Inventory lists the location of species of particular importance and rarity.

Most of the interviews lasted an hour and a half and took place in a wide range of situations. Frequently, we talked in a conference room within a small suite of offices. Sometimes this room appeared to be ready for a formal presentation, with straight-backed swivel chairs and dark wood tables. Other times it felt more like a workroom, with pencils, paper, and calculators on the table, or even building supplies on the floor nearby. The walls usually were covered with site plans, aerial photographs, or artist renderings of the facades of houses or office buildings. Several developers displayed family photographs of their fathers, uncles, cousins, or grandfathers standing smiling in front of the first houses they had built. One developer had framed his father's small business card, now yellowed with age, and placed it prominently on the entry wall.

More than once an interview was interrupted, with apologies from the developer, by pressing business. I found this fascinating and was not bothered in the slightest. I simply switched off the tape recorder, smiled, relaxed, and

waited for the developer to take care of what he needed to do. During one interview, the developer's father knocked on the conference room door and peeked in to ask a question. At this point, the developer talked his father into sitting with us for a few minutes and talking with us about development. Tears stung my eyes as I witnessed the pride and fervent love of this son as he involved his father in our interview.

During the pilot study and other in-depth interviews, I learned that I could cover only about eight questions in an hour using a dialogic approach. So I tried to play a trick on myself. Although I had only eight major questions, I also included a series of subparts. Yet I knew, deep down, the interview would take longer than an hour. Thus, I wisely revised the purpose and consent form to say the interview would take "an hour to an hour and a half." This might have stopped a few developers from agreeing to an interview, but I did explain on the form that this would allow me to delve beyond a surface understanding. A couple of developers did limit our time to about one hour, but most were prepared and were willing to let the interview take its own course. Most interviews did last an hour and a half; three or four went for close to two hours, and one took two and a half hours.

During the interviews, some of the developers were dressed in suits and white shirts, whereas others wore slacks or jeans and sport shirts. Most offered me something to drink, either coffee or water, but I accepted only if he was already drinking something. Sometimes the developer sat next to me, but

usually he sat across the table or desk. I purposefully let the developer lead. I sat where he indicated and made myself comfortable there. I kept things simple and took with me only a small lavender bag containing a clipboard with one file folder, a tape recorder, and extra supplies. I immediately handed the developer my university business card, and this usually elicited his card. I gave him as much information up front as he asked for before going over the purpose and issues covered on the consent form – such as confidentiality, ethics, and tape recording – that we both signed. I signed both copies first and then handed them to him to sign. I gave him one original and kept the other for myself.

Some developers were very curious about the purpose of my research and wanted to talk about that first. Others had read the form carefully and were ready to get right into the interview. I followed the exact order and wording of each question (which I had memorized), but again I let the developer lead. One wanted me to read him all the questions first so that he would know what to cover under each one. This developer was brimming with ideas and things he wanted to tell me and he immediately took command of our dialogue.

I maintained eye contact with each developer and tried to stay relaxed. This meant talking about whatever the developer was interested in pursuing in responding to the questions. I listened carefully to everything he said and, when necessary, asked for clarification and confirmation that I had understood him correctly. I also would add things from my own experience and life when it seemed relevant so that the interview would feel more like a conversation to

both of us. I wanted to be able to walk in the developer's shoes as much as possible and had learned how to listen deeply from years of mediation and group-facilitation activities. However, this deep listening was more than just a technique. The deep listening was the "face" of my deep commitment to this research project. I tried to create a sacred space within which we could consider the questions.

### The Developers

All but one of the developers I interviewed were white males; that one was an African American male. I tried early on to find at least one top female developer, but I did not identify any in Michigan. At the end of my last interview, I finally asked the developer, who had been in the business longer than any of the others I interviewed, whether he knew any women developers.

Here is our conversation:<sup>10</sup>

K: I wanted to ask you one more thing. I've been meaning to ask somebody this. I have not found any women developers. Do you know of any women developers?

D15: Hmm, good question. No, now that you mention it, I don't. There are builders, their wives will be the interior decorator and that type of thing. But that's more in the building than the developing part of it. I don't know of any women in the area that are developers.

K: Okay, I just thought maybe I was missing something.

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<sup>10</sup>For purposes of clarity, I lightly edited the interview transcripts to remove "ums" and "ahs" as well as redundant words and sentences that were not essential to the meaning.

D15: No, I don't know any. I'm going to think about that, though. If I think of someone, I'll call you.

K: Why do you think women are not developers?

D15: I don't know. It's not an easy type of business to get into, developing. Most of the developers, a good share of them in this area anyway, are builders that started developing some of their own land, but most would really prefer to just buy lots and let someone else worry about the developing because land development is probably the riskiest part of real estate that there is. And every once in a while, we'll find some builder goes through all the hassles of getting it developed and when they get done they say, "Hey, you develop them and we'll buy the lots from you."

K: I thought I would be interviewing people like you; you're really a land developer. You are a front-end person.

D15: Yeah, we're the front end.

### Route One: From Father to Son

While not locating any female developers raises important gender issues, as D15 noted and I suspected the historical reason for the paucity of women real estate developers is that many developers came into the business because their families were involved in the building trades.<sup>11</sup> Even if more women are involved in the building trades today than in previous eras, it may be generations before they become real estate developers. Slightly more than half of the developers I interviewed came to development as a second- or third-generation builder-developer or one who was a third-generation farmer.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup>One developer did have a woman working in his real-estate-development arm who had worked for him about ten years.

<sup>12</sup>This developer inherited a 150-acre farm, which became the site of his first development.

other half came to development through some type of opportunity, although even then they seemed to have ties to the building trades, such as financing (D5 and D11) or a friend who was a builder or developer (D3 and D12; see Opportunity and Interest below).

Climbing a “ladder of achievement.” During my research, I noted a fascinating progression of developers moving up what might be thought of as a “ladder of achievement.” The progression usually started with the developer’s father or grandfather learning a trade such as carpentry or brick masonry and working for a builder. Once his father or grandfather had mastered the craft, he moved one step higher toward work that was more challenging and complex by becoming that builder. The father or grandfather might have started by building a family home with relatives on weekends, as in D2’s case, or just by quitting his job and starting on his own, as D10 did:

As the story goes, they wanted to make my grandfather a manager of some operation and he quit. He said, “If I’m good enough for that, I’m good enough to go on my own,” and that’s how he got into the business.

Here are a few more examples from my interviews:

D2: My dad got started in it, and I guess his brothers. The first house that they built was my family house.

K: Really? For the family.

D2: Yeah, then they built another house. My dad and uncle started in somewhere between 1956 and 1958. One thing just led to another and they just kept going with it. So here we are.

K: So it really is a family business.

D2: Oh yeah. It really is. All in the family.

D10: My father was a builder. On both sides of the family, everybody was in the building business.

Once a house was completed, the father or grandfather might have continued to build houses, but sometimes the ladder stopped there for that generation, as was the case with D6's father:

D6: Well, my father was a builder, and he passed away and I got into the business. I got in when I was 17 years of age.

K: Where was your father a developer?

D6: He was a builder in Hathaway<sup>13</sup>. He was more of a builder. He never became a developer. He was a builder, building on lots that are already done. He didn't get to the point of development, of developing the land.

At other times, the developer's relative continued on to become an actual developer:

My father started in the building business in the early 50s. He moved back up to this area in 1955 and started developing what was then Passage Township, and now it's the city of Passage. And he was probably the biggest developer in Passage for numerous years. (D4)

Developers who shared this family history seemed to start up a little higher on the ladder (D2 and D6), or at least moved up faster by not having to learn a trade or even build a house first (D10 and D14). At an early age, these developers, as

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<sup>13</sup>A pseudonym, as are all other place names in this document.

sons<sup>14</sup> involved in a father's business, enjoyed the fruit of their grandfathers' or fathers' efforts: long-standing relationships, knowledge about construction and finance, and perhaps even capital and land

The long-standing relationships that a builder or developer has with people he can count on to help him finance and build houses are valuable assets. Builders or developers who thought that their sons and grandsons would come into business with them may have begun their careers with a long time frame in mind. Here is an example from D14's story of origin:

My father started very young. I started very young. We always had concern about, not tomorrow's project, but the project 10, 20 years from now. You have to have some of that foresight and sustain your profession. You are an independent contractor. You are accountable to yourself, and therefore you want to make certain that you don't burn bridges with any communities that you are involved in, even though you might like to. That attitude, by the way, of wanting to burn bridges, it's not about the community. It's about the politicians and the bureaucrats that are narrowly focused and misinformed. It's a vocal minority and it's deep, it's diseased. But my father had six boys and I have four boys, so he was very cognizant that if any of his children were to enter the business, that they could stand on a solid foundation and use his developments as examples of lasting value. And we're doing the same thing today.

At this point in the ladder of achievement, and not before, the top developers in Michigan whom I interviewed were ready to tackle large projects. For example, D14 was tackling a series of seven integrated, master-planned communities covering a square mile of land, thus taking advantage of his father's "strong foundation" and "examples of lasting value" laid out before he was born.

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<sup>14</sup>D4 had his wife and daughter working with him; they did supportive bookkeeping and clerical

## Route Two: Opportunities and Interest

Fewer than half of the developers I interviewed had come into real estate development through some kind of fortuitous opportunity combined with some existing interest. One developer, a large international dealmaker, had studied the public-finance aspects of farmland conservation in graduate school:

I was in public finance and was very concerned that we were not using tax incentives properly to conserve land. That was my first issue. There are ways to share revenue and get rid of some of this crazy competition. Some communities do. I was doing my research and my graduate work on the Farmland Open Space Preservation Act. The problem was, when we first put it together, the DNR guys went over the rules committee with 83 or 84 rules that didn't allow any flexibility at all. The farmers were signing up, not realizing that they couldn't get out. We wanted the incentive not to develop, but we didn't want to penalize the poor farmer. The DNR, in trying to do the right thing, hurt a lot of people. So we went back and amended the law. So farmers can escape now, and it's done a wonderful job in preserving a lot of open space. (D1)

A rural recreation land developer (D3) had graduated from college with no idea what he wanted to do:

Development was something that I never aspired to do when I finished school. I graduated from college in 1986. I had been looking for a job but not terribly actively, and a friend of mine in Massachusetts called. She was talking about her job and how she just loved it, and she mentioned that her boss was coming out to the Midwest to set up a division of this company, the same type of developer that we are. It sounded very interesting, so I called the guy and arranged to meet him. He and I met and hit it off, and I started work that afternoon.

This developer went on through up his own ladder of achievement:

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work. D14 was one of six sons and had four sons of his own.

I was commuting and selling land for that company in Michigan. Then we ended up opening an office in Michigan, and I ended up the sales manager there. Pretty quickly I went into their executive training program and went out to the home office out East. I trained there for a while and then became foreman in Northwest Illinois and really enjoyed it. I was doing that for a couple of years, and then the economy got kind of soft – especially in the Northeast, where a lot of this company’s inventory was located – so their capital got very tight. We started to feel the effects in the Midwest, even though we were doing pretty well. So I decided that I was better off doing it on my own. I had some resources, some financial resources. I was doing it all myself, basically, anyway.

Another developer (D15) became a major developer of land with an eighth-grade education, one bulldozer, and experience in the “school of hard knocks.” Two developers (D5 and D11) came to development as financial advisors to real estate developers and believed – and proved – that they could do it better than the people for whom they worked. But even the developers who entered the field through opportunity and interest learned the business – gained skills, developed relationships, found land or customers, and raised capital – and worked their way up their own ladder of achievement.

## The Practice of Real Estate Development

### What Is Real Estate Development?

At its most basic level, real estate development is about subdividing land: “I just take a big piece of land and make it into little pieces” (D9). Before or after you subdivide the land, you create a vision of the end product and use: “You look at a piece of raw land and you develop it – put in roads, sites for other

builders, or build office parks, shopping centers, or industrial sites” (D10). As one developer said, “it’s like creating something out of nothing” (D7).

When I asked developers to tell me – in their own words – just what development was, they talked about one of two aspects: (a) improving or making more productive use of the land and (b) building homes and communities.

Improving the land. In the interviews, I repeatedly heard developers refer to development as *improving* land, or taking “raw land” and making it *more productive or valuable*. One developer even laughed when he found himself sounding like a capitalist:

Taking the land and putting it to a more productive use. I guess that’s a bit of a capitalist angle on it [laughter], but a more productive use or more for residential or commercial or industrial purposes. (D3)

Another developer (D6) put the same idea a little differently:

It’s taking a piece of real property and figuring out the highest and best use of that property, and then developing it into an asset. That asset could be a house for a family, an office building for a group of people and then the building is sold to somebody, an industrial park, a golf course – it could be anything. A real estate developer is somebody who develops real estate into hopefully what he or she considers the highest, best use of that property.

Building homes and neighborhoods. The other aspect I heard repeatedly was that development is about building homes and neighborhoods: “We create neighborhoods for people in communities” (D4). One developer simply said he “sees vacant land and visualizes housing or something that meets the needs of

people” (D8). Another developer felt strongly about this aspect and shared many thoughts about how privileged he was to be building homes:

I think it’s a privilege to be involved in this business. We’re not building houses, you know, ultimately we’re building somebody’s home. We’re building an individual house that becomes somebody’s home, where somebody wakes up to Christmas morning, where somebody has a birthday party. Every house has memories attached to it. It’s a place where people have their children. It’s a place where they watch their children grow up. It’s a place their children remember with fondness. Children have a tough time when parents sell the house and that’s because there is an attachment. So I find the business to be one of building community, building a place where people actually really live. Not just shelter, but they grow there, they nurture families there. So the development business is – it is business, there’s no question about it. We are in it to make money. But it’s a privilege to be involved in a business that not only can you make money but you can meet people and create something that is very, very precious to them. (D5)

Closely tied to building homes and neighborhoods is the pride it brings: “Our primary focus isn’t maximizing dollars necessarily or income. We want it to be something that we’re proud of when we drive back in 10 to 20 years from now” (D3).

### What Real Estate Developers Do

One developer compared the role of a developer to that of a movie producer: “You organize things, you control the design, you time the building, you put the financing together, you operate the project, and you hire a director” (D8). But every developer I interviewed talked about taking advantage of opportunities to guide growth and meet market needs:

A developer goes crazy [laughter], develops land. I guess you would like to think the developer has the vision as far as where the community is

growing, works with the different governmental bodies through their processes, and solicits tenants. We guide growth. Market conditions are obviously going to dictate what the developers do. (D2)

We go out and find land where potential clients want to have a home. Then we explore the parameters from the government side, their standards for developments. (D4)

The role of the land developer is [to] try to understand what the market needs are and the demographics of his neighborhood, wherever he is building – what is a product that is needed that nobody is fulfilling. We end up trying to understand the need for the product and who the customer is. We always start our developments with an idea of what the customer is going to look like and back into a price range and even decide what size the home site is going to be and what the home is going to look like on the home site. (D9)

The two major tasks of a real estate developer appear to be (a) to provide vision and (a) to implement the vision. Many developers said they created a vision of what could be done to meet the needs of “the market” and then found the practical means to implement that vision. One developer actually had a partnership in which he and his partner split these two tasks. His partner did the detail work, like pricing things, while the developer I talked with did the visionary part, like realizing that they could make money redeveloping brownfields:

My partner could have never pulled this off because he wouldn't have thought about it. So that's where I came in and created the idea. I know the owner of that company, and with our accounting firm that represents both of us, we sort of all came up with this idea. And that's being an opportunist. (D10)

Whom developers work with. Developers mentioned a large range of people with whom they worked; one said, “We work with all different kinds of

people” (D7). Many first mentioned either engineers or brokers (i.e., realtors or real estate brokers). Developers worked with surveyors, engineers, architects, and landscape architects to “design the site for the particular use” (D2) and with realtors who “bring us the tenants, bring us the land.” (D 10). One developer estimated that half of his lots came through brokers. One developer mentioned title companies, banks, and insurance companies: “I borrow an awful lot of money. That is one of my primary functions” (D3). Another said he worked with “brokers, farmers, attorneys who might have an estate with a piece of property they want to sell” (D5).

The developers to whom I talked only needed to pull together small teams to start the development process:

On the development side, we don’t have a lot of people involved in it because we just do the planning and our excavating company takes over the excavating and so we have one engineer, we have myself, and a realtor who works exclusively on our projects, and then we hire all the engineering work done. (D15)

However, larger numbers of people are needed for the construction end of the business. This same developer employed about 160 people and owned 70 major pieces of excavating equipment – “bulldozers and trucks and backhoes and graters and scrapers. It’s a pretty big operation.” He also used 200 people and 90 trucks in doing Ready Mix work. Many of his workers were his children and close relatives: “We probably have 20 to 25 relatives – cousins and nephews and this type of thing – that work here.” These discussions fascinated me because information on the construction

end of development was missing from the growth-coalition literature. In

response, I compiled a list from the Lansing Home Builders’ Association 1999

Directory in Table 2 to determine the extent to which construction entities were

involved in the real estate development process. I imagine that people in all these businesses have a heavy investment in the active continuation of real estate development as a building project.

Table 2. Members of the growth coalition from the building industry

<u>Utilities</u>	Plumbers & plumbing supply
Electric	Pond construction
Natural gas	Pools & spas
Propane	Roofing and siding
Sewage (local government or septic)	Security
	Sprinkler & irrigation systems
	Tile
<u>Building Trades &amp; Materials</u>	Trusses
Asphalt paving	Water treatment
Awnings	Well drilling
Bathtubs, sinks, & tubs	Windows & doors
Bulldozers	<u>Design &amp; Engineering</u>
Brick, block, or stone	Architects & engineers
Carpenters and lumber yards	Interior designers
Carpeting, flooring, & tiles	Surveyors
Concrete & poured walls	
Countertops	<u>Finance and Insurance</u>
Drywall	Banks
Electricians & lighting supply	Mortgage companies
Excavation	Insurance companies
Fencing	Title insurance
Fireplaces	
Floors	<u>Real Estate</u>
Framers	Realtors
Glass & screen	Appraisers
Gravel & gypsum	Home warranty
Ironworks	
Landscaping & garden supply	<u>Government</u>
Hardware & builder's supply	Community development office
Heating & air conditioning	School employees
Insulation	
Masonry	
Painters & paint stores	

Other Organizations

Chamber of commerce  
Habitat for Humanity  
Home Depot  
*Lansing State Journal*  
Urban Options

Miscellaneous

Equipment rentals  
Graphics & signs & blueprints  
Advertising  
Printing companies  
Travel  
Management companies

Cell phones  
Trash disposal  
Moving companies

Home Furnishings & Services

Appliances  
Audio  
Carpet cleaning  
Central vacuum  
Closets  
Furniture stores  
Kitchen and bath stores  
Window cleaning

How developers finance projects. A surprising number of developers relied heavily on their own funds (D2, D3, D4, D9, D10, D11, D12, D15) as well as bank loans and, for the larger projects, institutional financing through insurance companies and pension companies (D3, D5, D7, D9, D10, D11, D12).

Theories and principles to guide them. Developers often mentioned what might be called rules of thumb to guide them: “Buy the land at a reasonable price” (D4), “a good site, good location, and be able to market from this,” (D8), and “award-winning projects usually go broke” (D10). One mentioned location theory (D1), and another joked “seat of your pants” (D2).

I admit I was stunned to hear several of the developers immediately refer to deeply held *personal* principles (civic, moral, or religious) they used to guide their daily practice. One developer picked up a cube from his desk and read to me the questions he and his staff asked before deciding to take on any project:

I think I've always done this, but I've been a Rotarian now for five years. One, is it the truth? Two, is it fair to all concerned? Three, will it build goodwill and better friendships? And four, will it be beneficial to all concerned?" (D3)

He later said he always tried to do his "moral true thing" by asking, "Is it the right thing to do?" Within that framework, he considered—as did several other developers—his vision of what was right for the community.

Another developer said, "First of all, we don't deal with anybody that we don't trust. If we find somebody is dishonest, no matter how good the lead looks, we wouldn't buy it. We always keep our word. The bankers know that everybody within this organization doesn't lie" (D5). The themes of honesty, keeping one's word, and completing projects even when not making a profit were mentioned many times. Another developer said,

We're a Christian company, and so we like to make sure that our witness is in our work and that we do what we say that we're going to do. Our key guiding principle, the foundation of our company, is that we want to walk our talk. We are a small, locally small company—developers for the most part are small entities anyway; they may be covering a lot of projects, but they are relatively a small company. We're not doing this with thousands of people, we're doing this with a team of about 25 people, so we have to be leaders.

Another biblical concept is we work like we're a body. There are different parts of the body; some have to be the hands and some have to be the feet, and some have to be the head, and some have to be the heart. The fact is, we all have to have fun in what we're doing, so we need the heart and soul of the organization, and so we all feel like we can take enjoyment in what we're doing.

Another basic principle is to be very tough on ourselves in the way that we manage our financial situation. We take pride in paying our bills on time. We take pride in making sure that those people who work with us, the vendors that work with us, feel like they are being fairly treated. And

frankly, we're not an easy company to work for because I have high expectations of those people who work for us. I don't like change orders, and I don't like punch lists. I get very frustrated if we have to do something twice because that means that somebody is paying for it. And it breaks my heart if somebody else is paying for it as much as if I'm paying for it. I mean, this is an industry where there are a lot of false starts, so what we try to do is we try to take this broad plan, and we really take on the focus approach so everybody knows, and you can only do that with a team approach. (D7)

Finally, one developer echoed something I heard a great deal from other developers: "When we start a development, we finish a development, even when we really didn't make any money on the project. Reputation is extremely important" (D9).

How developers find and obtain land. To developers, land was important because it represented a location that could meet a need of the "market." One developer referred to "leveraged land opportunities" (D7). He went to a customer to learn the needs and then found the location (i.e., land) to fit those needs. This is perhaps where a primary clash between nature and culture begins, for certainly land is more than location, more than a site.

One developer told me that the only way to find land for shopping centers was through market analysis (D7). But the rest of the developers talked about a wide variety of ways, with brokers, farmers, and word of mouth being mentioned most often: networking through brokers (D3), direct mail (D3), the Internet (D3), word of mouth, "we put feelers out, we'll check with realtors, but most of ours have been word of mouth" (D4); "brokers and farmers and looking for sale signs (D6); buying from landowners (D8); "courting farmers" (D9); and

telling brokers what they want (D10). In interviews with planners and key informants, I learned that farmers were extremely important yet hidden real estate developers and might become even more so in the future as they are often the major landowners in a community in terms of acreage.

To several of the developers, land meant more than a location or site. One of the main reasons one developer enjoyed his work was that he loved to be outdoors (D3). In the fascinating narrative that follows, another developer told me he never made a decision about a project until he actually walked the land and tried to figure out what the land wanted to “give”:

I say to my people – I learned some of this from a good consultant – to first say what is the land trying to give you. And you’ve really got to look at the land, and we need to be on it. I love walking land. My favorite part is just walking out to sites that we are getting ready to develop. There is something about feeling it under my feet and looking at it.

We’ve got certain capabilities from engineering and machinery to make the land give you more or less. But there’s a point in which you push the land too far and I think it rebels against you. And, you know, I put my economic hat on to see where can I push the land to give me some more. And sometimes the land pushes back and says, “You’re asking me to do too much.” It’s kind of weird, but I can’t look at a site plan without knowing the land. I spend a lot of time on the land, and I really enjoy it.

In the long run, if you destroy what the land is trying to give you, you’ve destroyed some of the economic value of the land. And then my customer feels they don’t know why, they just don’t like what I did. They can’t quantify because they didn’t know it was there before. They come in and go, “Well, this is just okay, but this isn’t what I wanted. There is nothing here.” If I can take from the land what it wants to give me, it generally presents a form that the customer says, “I like this.” And they are not sure why, they just drive in and go, “I like this, this is nice.” And then they buy it. And typically they’ll buy it at a price higher than they would have bought in a place . . . they go, “This doesn’t make sense, but I guess we’ll

buy it.” So again, I go back to the economics, the land, what it wants to give you. (D5)

The natural resources that developers use. I was stunned to get absolute silence and furled brows when I asked the developers what natural resources they used. After a few moments I would be asked, “What do you mean by natural resources?” (D9); “What natural resources – not what we are preserving, but what we use? Well, our road contractors use gravel. Asphalt.” (D3); “Well, my underground contractor is the one that does that.” (D4); or “Can you explain that a little more?” (D7). Eventually, one developer said he used manufactured goods, not natural resources: “We do things the right way. But we don’t use natural resources other than what we buy from manufacturers”(D10). This helped me understand that the real estate developer is one or two layers away from the people who actually do the construction and use natural resources like gravel and sand.

What developers liked best. Several developers could not think of anything they liked best about development because they said they liked everything about it: “I like it all” (D2). Quite a few developers said that they liked the challenge:

The challenge – buying the land at the right price, at the right location, getting it through the planning commission, getting it built, understand the customer and that once they see your vision they are going to buy it. (D9)

Well it’s the challenge. There’s not anything that I really don’t like about this business. This business is a marathon, not a sprint. We’re not 100-yard dashers. We’re marathon kinds of runners. (D7)

One developer liked “getting outside, enjoying wilderness” and said that the financial incentives were good (D3). One just liked being in control: “I can control the whole thing. It’s that simple” (D4), whereas another said, “I like the deal” (D7). But throughout this interview process, I found developers as a group were drawn to the creative challenge [“it’s very creative, I have the ability to look at a piece of land and know how it’s going to look” (D10)] and the complexity of the work.

What developers liked least. Two developers could not think of anything that they did not like (D9, D11). Several mentioned not liking to deal with local governments (D2), “uneducated planners” (D6), and “unprofessional land planners and unprofessional people on the board” (D9). One mentioned “the client from hell” (D4). Another said he liked just about everything, even the conflict, but found it stressful in years when they lost money (D3).

How developers selected projects. Projects seemed to be initiated when the zoning of land matched a market need within a developer’s particular niche. The developers I interviewed operated within clear, defined niches. Sometimes this was a broad niche, like doing the entire development process from acquisition to building and sales (e.g., D10). Other times it was narrow, like only developing the lots for second-home recreational use (D3). But in the interviews every developer said, albeit in many different ways, things like “What drives everything is the market sector. If there aren’t people that want a home for a

million dollars, you're not going to build it" (D4). One developer said he considered "Where does the customer seem to want to be going? Why are they going there?" (D9). Sometimes it was more abstract, like "Do we really add value?" (D7) or a simple "one with the best return" (D10).

Information developers used to select projects. Several developers mentioned market research (D6, D7, D9) or knowing "where the growth is going" (D2). Others mentioned something particular about the location, such as dynamics of the site (for instance, slope) (D4) and "whether there is water and sewer available, what school district, what municipality, soil conditions" (D10). As I discussed earlier, one developer mentioned using the Michigan Natural Features Inventory. This was the only developer who mentioned looking at information about nature, and his reason was,

What we're selling isn't the square footage. A tract developer or a commercial developer, they are selling square footage. We're selling the environment. So it's real important to us to preserve wetlands and to preserve the waterfront. (D3)

How tax laws, zoning, and other "rules" affect project selection. I included this question to try to get at regime-theory issues. With regard to tax laws, I received a full range of responses, from "very much" to "not at all." What I suspect is that tax laws form a given set of rules that some developers might just accept and forget about and that others are aware of and use to make decisions. For example, one developer most enjoyed restoration of old buildings and talked about how the tax benefits work (D11). This developer also explained

how developers end up paying no taxes. Another developer told me that if I wanted him out of green fields (I hadn't said anything about that), just change the tax laws; he did not care where he developed (D1). One developer mentioned taking advantage of tax opportunities such as renaissance zones, "I don't know if you've heard of renaissance zones, but there are special grants and funding on certain projects, and we have to run those numbers in our analysis" (D7). Still another said, "We cannot do anything about tax laws" (D9).

In terms of zoning, more developers recognized this as affecting their work, "Tax laws, no. Zoning, certainly, very much so for it dictates how a piece of land can be developed. And if it can't be developed in a certain way, we won't make any money" (D3). Another said, "Sure, because it will affect the price of the house" (D6), and still another responded, "Zoning obviously is going to let us know what we can and cannot do and what it would take to make changes" (D7). One developer still did not see zoning as an issue: "Zoning is not that much of a problem. Most communities that we deal with today are willing to consider a planned unit development, and so you go in with a project based on the creativity that you want to bring to them" (D9).

When a project is a "go." Several developers mentioned a "gut feeling" (D4) or "when everything falls in line" on his three-page checklist (D3) in what might be the matchmaking or balancing between the needs of the market (and what people are willing to pay for) and what something costs (D6). One simply said, "The best test is if you can actually get it financed, if at the end of the day

the project stands on its own two feet financially” (D7). He went on to describe a clearly worked out scenario:

There are three components of a building that we look at, study, and measure. First is initial cost, you know, what does it cost and what’s the initial cost in the product? The second is the life cycle cost – what’s your cost of energy, of ownership, of managing a building for the long term, of making changes to that product, you know, maybe what you’ve designed it for today is going to be different five years down the road. The third component is user satisfaction and delight in a building. We are focused on all three of those because there are three different areas of a project that can measure the cost of those, and you are also measuring well how do I make cost decisions. (D7)

A planner had a different take on the situation: “There is kind of a community perception whether it is something that they think is a good idea or not” (P3).

Meaningful projects. Several developers mentioned that their most meaningful projects had been the most complex ones: “My favorite was the most difficult project that I’ve been involved with in my entire career, “ (D7) and “I really enjoyed the most the one that was the most complex” (D3). Several mentioned that their first project had been the most meaningful: “The first one was the most meaningful. We did cutting-edge things, put in a community swimming pool and tennis courts, created new wetlands, took care of our storm water differently” (D9). One mentioned that the most meaningful was “a project that I didn’t do”:

We were going to develop a piece of property, but we decided to donate the property instead to a Christian school, and that was quite meaningful to me, to be able to do that. And now there is a beautiful school on the property. I can always go out and find another piece of property to develop. (D15)

One developer couldn't pick the most meaningful project; he just said, "They're all like my children." Another surprised me by talking about a manufactured-housing project:

The most meaningful project is that which is the most needed: manufactured homes. Anyone can build a house for a rich snob, and we do that too, by the way. That's not meaningful. It's very rewarding when you are building homes for hundreds of families; moving 2,500 people in a location in 18 months' time is very rewarding. Building one "McMansion" takes 18 months. So for that same 18 months you can get 600 or 700 families into their own little places. They can drive up to the entry to that community that is as impressive as the entry of the multi-million-dollar-home neighborhoods we do. They drive up the boulevards, and the focal point is the clubhouse, which has all these same dynamic amenities as these posh million-dollar homes. So you have these grand rooms in the library and social rooms and exercise rooms. And they have the grand swimming pool that backs up to a natural feature, and so it's their country club. It's very important that, no matter, we treat them all the same, with the same sense of pride. (D14)

What developers regret. Most developers did not regret anything; rather, they said things like, "I couldn't say I have regrets. I would just say I have experiences that I've learned from" (D7). He went on to say, "I think for the most part developers are pretty positive minded, so I'm guessing you don't get a lot of good answers for this." I agreed, and told him that most developers had said that they did not have regrets, at least "not of any significance." (D4). One laughed and said, "I wouldn't start anything if it wouldn't be successful" (D8). Another said, "Well, for certain developments you could say we could have done this better, but overall I'm pleased" (D9). The only big regret, mentioned by one planner that I interviewed for background information. He was concerned about the spin-off effects of a "big box" shopping mall:

The big box shopping malls turned out differently, and from the standpoint of community planning they are not as successful as I thought they would be. I think the traffic that has been generated and how that's been handled has not been real successful. I think the spin-off development you get with a big box mall going in, well I don't think that we were really prepared for that. (P3)

### Attributes of Sustainable Development

As I had suspected but even more so, most developers were not familiar with the term *sustainable development*. One asked, "Are you talking about in-fills, is that what you mean?" (D9). Even one of the developers practicing what I view as the closest thing to "sustainable" development was not very familiar with the term; he said, "I'm not sure I'd be able to define that. I don't know what they are trying to sustain." Quite a few developers asked me to define *sustainable development*, but I resisted. I went back to the words in my question about urban sprawl and loss of greenfields. I was seeking their conceptions of sustainable development:

D10: You tell me. I mean, what is it by definition?

K: Well, there are lots of different definitions. That's what I'm trying to tickle out – the dimensions. If you wanted to develop sustainably, what does it look like to you?

D10: Do you mean going into the cities and into the infill? Is that what you're talking about?

Once we got past the confusion, most developers were able to give me some ideas of what they thought would work: "If it's open space, then either

municipalities or conservancies buying other park lands” (D3). But as this same developer pointed out, development is still development:

Some would say, “Come on, there is no such thing as sustainable development.” Take our latest project: We cut a ton of trees from that property to create some of the views, and some people were absolutely appalled by that and would not say that is in any way sustainable development. But I would say that they are absolutely wrong. This was the last piece of residentially zoned property in the township and we could have done high-density development, which we did not. We believe it was much better to do it in a controlled fashion and create these nice trail systems than to do it in a haphazard fashion.

One developer put it bluntly: “All development sits on the other end of the scale from environmental issues, by definition. You want to create a balance. But it's the reality of the planet, too; people are trying to live, people are trying to strap themselves up. You just have to find the proper balance between development and environment” (D1).

One developer told me that without sprawl he would be out of work: “If there isn't urban sprawl, we won't be developing” (D10). Another thought it was all “market driven,” and because of population increase and land area staying the same, there would be problems (D4). He went on to say that “having decent laws on the books that have good conservation and use of the land” was important. He strongly encouraged “mixed-usage zoning” and “more permissible vertical construction”:

What I mean is, it doesn't have to be a high rise, but to be able to have what was very prominent back at the turn of the century, particularly with family owned businesses. They had the family grocery store or shoe store on the main level and they lived up above it. That was the main domicile of that family. It's not really creative thinking; it's reverting to what we

used to do quite effectively. It can be an acceptable practice. And here again, when you have more permissible vertical construction, that reduces your land usage. (D4)

This developer believed that “Most people want their own little piece of the world. Now maybe it’s only 50 by 100 or maybe its only 25 by 100, but it’s theirs.”

Other ideas were “efficiency of design and efficiency of construction.”

The same developer said,

I think sustainability comes from being a steward of the land that you have and to see the land like the farmer sees the land – that you treat it fairly and produce a yield. You can treat it unfairly and you’ll probably get a super yield – for a short period of time. But you need to treat it fairly and get the highest possible yield, a sustainable yield year after year. We think that we can do that in our development process. (D5)

But upon reflection, I wonder, with land area being finite, just how this might be accomplished. This developer also talked about experiments with passive solar, earth sheltering, and “super insulation.” He said, “One of the first elements of sustainability is if the house is an efficient product.”

Several developers talked about working around trees and following the landscape. One developer said he did not think people should do any development that does not “work with nature”:

If you have a site with rolling hills, you develop with those in mind. You put snow fences around the trees. You don’t tear that up. You respect the community of nature. Never do a development plan or a development that hurts the environment. You have to work with nature. (D8)

This developer did not think there should be any “environmental arguments” because the environment is what makes a piece of property attractive. He

thought that people have to redevelop the “housing stock and commercial properties that are degrading. Fifty years ago they might have been great, but the world has changed.” He said he “worked with nature and put in the river trail,” and it sounded like these were things he enjoyed doing.

Another developer said the first step is to improve urban communities, implying that people have moved to the suburbs mostly because the big cities are unpleasant:

It’s a very simple thing. When the urban communities make the environment desirable to live in, people will live there. People don’t want to keep driving out and driving out and driving out. There is a segment of our population that wants 100-foot lots or farms or ranches. But there are more people who want the convenience and want the extra time that they have if they didn’t have to drive to the boonies. However, they do it because they can’t find communities where the environment is conducive to their lifestyle. (D6)

One developer, who appeared to be ahead of the curve, taught me what he had learned about global ecology problems a few weeks earlier at a seminar organized by the local community foundation. He ended by saying, “But you know what is the best sign of sustainability? The ecology” (D11). He added that he had left the seminar feeling guilty about his work, yet he said, “The good developers out there these days want to do the right thing.” He believed that changes in “financial constraints” would be a tremendous step toward increased sustainability: “A perfect example is that if you were able to go out and get a 40-year loan, you could use more expensive materials.” But, I asked, would

developers actually do this? He replied, “I think they would, I absolutely think they would. There is a payback on doing the right thing.”

### Thoughts on Having Development and Protecting Nature

I put this question at the end of the interview to make sure that I had developed sufficient rapport with the developers to ask this without my feeling uncomfortable or their feeling threatened. I added this question to my protocol after I learned in the pilot study that developers might be willing to discuss the protection of nature with me as partners. Before I asked the question, I relaxed and let them know it was the last question. By then we had been talking for more than an hour, and in some cases two, so we were both a little tired. I looked the developer in the eye and, from memory and a place deep within my heart, I would say, “In my own work, I struggle with how we can have development *and* protect nature. Do you have any thoughts on this?” After I asked each developer this question – the question that encompassed the underlying reason I was there, above and beyond all the other reasons – I just sat and waited, open and calm.

The developers came through with many ideas; several did not think having both was difficult to do. One was vehement when he said, “America will respond if they are given a chance” (D1). He suggested that educators should “start in the first grade and you teach people how to have respect for the land.” Another said, “We do a lot to protect wetland, and to tuck the homes in the

woods to preserve some of the open land. But then we also create covenants that you are not allowed to cut more than 50 percent of the trees greater than a certain size" (D3). He said "from an economic perspective, you won't be able to do a development at all if you try to preserve all the lakefront and build all the homes back because you just cannot buy the land at a price where you can still make a profit."

Several suggested and stuck to the idea of market incentives "rather than to take somebody's property and make it less valuable" (D3). This developer was "not in favor of any kind of major state regulation," although right after he said that he thought for a moment and then said,

Well, I *am* in favor of the Department of Environmental Quality and the permitting process, there's got to be some controls on those things, like some of the issues with farmland preservation. But I'd rather see the market sort of dictate those things. As much as I like to see rolling farmland, I think that as more of it gets developed, it will become more valuable as farmland and a good chunk will be reserved just because of supply and demand.

Yet later this developer seemed to bristle at the idea of being forced to do something: "I don't think it's difficult to do, but I do think it is difficult to mandate. You know it would be nice if the marketplace demanded that. Do you know what I mean?" (D3). This developer wanted to see planning and zoning incentives that "allowed smaller lots or more lots rather than saying so many lots on the waterfront." This was the same developer who actually used the Michigan Natural Features Inventory to learn what was important to protect, and then did so:

If the environmental consulting firm we hire sees anything, we'll locate it and preserve it. In most cases, we would look for something and name our development after it and try to use it as a marketing thing and protect it—you know, for dual purposes.

If he was unable to find a way to protect something, as occurred once with a bald eagle's nest, he just did not take on the project. "If this whole property has really important habitat, we'll walk away." This was possible because he used the Inventory as part of his three-page list that he went through, line by line, before starting any project. He said, "If we find out early enough, it doesn't matter to us. But if it's something manageable, then it's a plus and we can alter our plan." He was the only developer I talked with who mentioned looking at natural features as part of his decision process. He was one of only two or three who used the word "habitat."

One developer cautioned that "As developers, we will take the path of least resistance to make a project work" (D4). I responded, "That sounds like human nature." He went on to say,

I fought on some issues because it was stupid and regimented. People don't want to be in the same box, at the same distance from the street, with the same house looking at the front. But if you provide adequate flexibility in the design-development criteria to get reasonable density and make it economic and feasible, then I think you will find a lot more good use of the land to get the densities that you need to not use up land at the rate we are now.

He believed,

One of the worst groups raping the land is the farmers themselves. If they don't have the next generation taking over because of market conditions, farmers will use whatever is on the books to permit them to sell it. It's human nature; they want to get the most they can out of it. And just

selling the land as is ain't always the way to do it. You need to split it up somehow.

Many developers told me that large-lot zoning "eats" or "consumes" land. They believed that this type of zoning, combined with the demands of the market and population increase, has caused urban sprawl.

One developer talked being involved in a ten-year conversation with environmentalists:

Our homebuilders association is probably more on the forefront because we've had this committee for ten years and we've said this works. We talk with our counterparts, who say they're just going to butt heads with the environmental people and they cannot agree with anything we're doing. But we say, "You know, guys, you ought to try getting together for a while instead of just saying we hate one another. Find some common thread and work towards that." (D5)

He talked about some of his approaches to having both development and nature:

We will look at a site and we literally will say what can it support economically? What can we produce in there that is saleable? Can we manage and maintain the trees? What wetlands can we work around? Can we make the wetlands an asset? Are there some wetlands in our way that we think we will argue about and we're better off to move some other place? We don't mind mitigating. But we'll work with the Department of Environmental Quality and try and convince them that there's a better forum.

He shared some of the economic benefits of "giving land away":

We like to find open space and give it away if we can. We've been in the process of giving away lots in what we think is very, very sensitive open space. We have a 280-acre site along the Belle River,<sup>15</sup> and we're developing 88 acres of it and we're giving 192 acres away to two townships, and over one mile of the Belle River. It's a beautiful site.

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<sup>15</sup>A pseudonym.

We got the planning all done and, candidly, when we looked at it we said, You know let's deal with the tax side of this. We think that there is a tax advantage for us to give away the site. We can utilize the tax right off, and it fits right into the township's park plans. We created trails and parkways through it and actually made a deal with them. They said it's just so much cheaper for us to build the trails than us go through all of our government stuff. In fact, in about two meetings, they voted to pay us to do it.

So it was really a good move for us, and we are going to get the value for that. The township is getting 192 acres of open space that they wanted to add parks and a mile of the Belle River that nobody is going to develop. We also added in a little school segment, and we gave a site to the school for a boating club.

When I was a mediator, I found that once people moved beyond their position on an issue to look more closely at their underlying interests and needs (Fisher and Ury, 1981), a rich array of possibilities can be found. As this developer said, searching for a "common thread" can open up creative solutions. I suspect that it was this developer's ten years of experience meeting regularly with environmentalists that opened him up to find a way to make money, preserve parkland, and even give something to a school. In his words,

You step back from your picture of what you've got and say, okay, how can this site be used? The first thing is to ask what is the land trying to give to you? Stewardship issues don't cost money, they cost you time. You have to be willing to spend whatever it takes to get a handle on what the land is going to give to you.

He shared a fascinating story of trying to figure out what to do with a 300-acre site when he brought in a consultant from the West:

We had our engineers do a plan for the 300-acre site. I didn't like it, and I knew it was wrong. First thing the consultant did was ask if we had surveyed all the trees. I said, "No, I never survey all the trees first." Then he said, "Well, you've got to know where all the trees are." I said, "Okay, we'll go survey all the trees." It seemed like a lot of work to me. As we

started to lift our thoughts and our minds higher, looking over the land, we started with the mosaic on the 300 acres, and then we could see we had all 20- and 40-acre pieces of farm fields with tree lines, and that's where I found all my villages. They all fit within the pieces of land.

Getting this new, higher perspective allowed this developer to turn a problem into a series of opportunities:

Some of those tree lines have some 100-year-old oak trees. The way the engineer designed it is to take down all those trees. The consultant says, "I don't think we have to do this." So we used the oak trees and all the tree lines as dividers between our little communities, and we ended up saving the trees.

Then when we started building this site, there was overgrowth where one farm field had been let go for 20 years, and so we moved out all the 15- to 20-foot-high maples. We moved almost a thousand trees before we got to that piece. We moved them because we knew that we were going to lose them when we developed it. It cost us \$125 a tree, but if we were to buy those trees it would be \$500 to \$600 a tree. So, you know, we spent a lot of time with trees.

I was curious about his approach, saying it sounded like "a different side of the balance sheet." He responded,

It's just right brain, left brain. It's context and it's art. And you get a lens: What's the land going to give me? That's not something that the banker would say. You know, a banker wouldn't ask what does this land feel like when you walk on it? He would say, What do you mean? But you're feeling it through your shoes and it comes through your body. You need the maps and everything to get oriented, but then you're going to say, "Ah, I get it, I get it! If I can do this and this and this, this will back up like this, and I can create some views." And creating views in my business creates value. So I found that the environment, the economics, and the art, they can all melt together to a really much better bottom line if you allow them all to come together. Sometimes, if you can get them together, they all come together on their own terms very well.

Conversations with other developers, those who had not been working on this type of balancing, went quite differently. One developer asked, "Well, first

of all, what do you mean by nature? Define what you mean” (D6). I responded, “Habitat for wildlife, for other animals and birds, for living things other than humans.” After making a joke, he responded with some ideas from the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). Our exchange went like this:

D6: First of all, do you know what percentage of land is occupied by humans in the State of Michigan?

K: No, I don’t.

D6: Take a guess.

K: 20%.

D6: How about 5%.

K: 5%?

D6: 5%. New Jersey is the most populated state as to land, and it’s about 27%, maybe a little over 30%. So in other words, this whole thing about land is so blown out of proportion that the reason for urban sprawl does not – should not be – well, we’re burning up too many farms. More farms are going down and going back to forest than are being developed because we don’t need the farms anymore. They’ve got these farms that produce ten times the amount of food from one farm. Farmers are going broke. We’re having to support farmers.

K: Yes, I know that.

D6: That’s because there are too many farmers, okay? So the whole thing is this expression is ass backwards. We burn up in this country right now, these are facts that NAHB<sup>16</sup> has come up with, so this is fact. We burn up in this country .005% of our land mass every year, which means that 50 years from today we will have burned up 2% of our open land. And that’s if we keep going the way we’re going. Now will more of it go back to the urban areas? No question. But the way it has to work, it’s very simple –

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<sup>16</sup>National Association of Home Builders

K: Okay, that's what I'm trying to get, the idea.

D6: There has to be choice.

This developer did not mention habitat or the lives of other species, concentrating instead on issues of open land and farmland. He said,

The supply and demand must work. Now should public money buy certain sites? Yeah, no question. No question. There are certain things in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan—I watched the state trying to buy a piece of timber property in a beautiful pristine area in the Keewenaw Peninsula—a piece of land that was virgin with waterfalls on it and it would be a shame—because if it went for development it would have just been small parts of it, nobody needs it up there. Finally the state did buy it. Paid \$7 million or whatever it was; it was a small amount of money to them, and they took it off the market. That was the thing to do.

Several developers had ideas on how development and nature can “coexist,” although I might challenge what one developer (the third-generation farmer, D9) meant by “nature”:

D9: Development and nature?

K: Yeah.

D9: Well, I don't think that's a real problem.

K: Okay.

D9: Most of the nature that we have around here—your turkey and deer and so forth—don't need a very big wood lot to be sustainable. There have been a lot of studies by the—what's the bird-watch group, Audubon<sup>17</sup>?

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<sup>17</sup>As an interesting aside, the professional transcriptionist had typed “Autobahn” each time instead of Audubon. Autobahn is the famous German highway system with no speed limit.

K: Audubon.

D9: As a matter of fact, I have an article in my desk from a Denver newspaper when I was out in Vail, that the Audubon Society was challenged by the bird watchers in this particular community and saying let's go and look at birds in our habitat, which was fence rows and let's count birds over here and then let's go into your natural habitat and count birds. It was like double the bird population in the neighborhood, where they had the fence line, creek, and birdfeeders over the natural environment.

K: Double the number, but what about diversity of species?

D9: Large diversity.

K: Really. Okay, so you can create more edge communities.

D9: I don't think you're going to get a bald eagle in there, but you have diversity between redheaded woodpeckers and sparrows and robins. And depending on again the type of feed that you're giving them, you know the large birdseed gets the large birds.

Other ideas from one developer included tree ordinances, filtering systems, deed restrictions, creating natural habitat for wildlife, and working around endangered species (D10). Another said to look at the situation from "multiple angles," especially the building materials that are used (D11). He believed that "most developers don't know that information, that ecology is a problem. But I think most developers these days really do care." He, along with another developer (D7), stressed reusing existing buildings. The other developer believed that developers would change once they learn that people want nature nearby:

I think that development and environment have to coexist because we're a world of people who have needs, and our needs need to be met. Now I think we're going to see a lot more focus on adaptive reuse of existing

buildings. I think we're going to see it make sense economically and make sense philosophically to do more reuse.

I think when we develop green field kinds of new developments or more nature aspects, we're already seeing a big change in how we integrate nature into it. I think developers who really see the opportunity are building that in. They're seeing that people like to be around nature and they are responding to a pond or an area where the birds can fly in, an area where wildlife is preserved for them.

You know, I think that's one of the reasons that the game of golf is strong. I think people like to be outside and they enjoy experiencing nature. Now you are looking at lawns that are mowed and greens that are very well kept, but I think people really enjoy the outdoors, the opportunity of being outdoors. So I think it's just a fact of life that the whole sustainability issue is going to cause us to take more and more steps, being earth wise and think about sustainability kinds of issues.

When I asked one developer how he had learned so much about habitat and the food chain, he said,

Part of it is working with the Department of Environmental Quality people, the Department of Natural Resources, understanding what they're talking about and then being sensitive to the environment. I think more developers are sensitive to the natural environment today than they ever have been in the past. I don't think developers are rapists as they describe them. (D9)

Talking with the developers on this last question meant going up and down with my feelings and back and forth with my thoughts. I was greatly encouraged by much of what they said and could see the benefit of talking with others who have very different views from one's own. But I also heard developers using information to bolster positions that tend to disrupt and end dialogue. I know that, as several forthright developers admitted, this is "always an issue. No matter what, if you take vacant land, whether it is a cornfield or

whatever, there's going to be disruption" (D10). But as he talked, I hoped that perhaps someday developers would see that the land is not really vacant.

## CHAPTER 5: EMERGENT THEMES, CULTURE, AND IMPLICATIONS

What we commonly call man – the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not – as we know him – represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect. But the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect it is genius. When it breathes through his will it is virtue. When it flows through his affection it is love.

Walt Whitman

For a nearly a day, I tried to find a thread to start this chapter. I thought I had all that I needed to begin. I had chosen the themes several weeks before. I also had a general idea of some aspects of the culture of the real estate developer. Next to me rested a 67-page document containing the quotations that I had painstakingly cut and pasted from 15 transcripts into the seven themes. Yet after I finished the fourth chapter, after the exhausting process of braiding together responses to the central questions I had posed to the developers, I felt stuck. I kept asking myself, What is the purpose of this chapter? What are the origin and meaning of those themes and thoughts on culture? What do I do with all the ideas and writings that the themes and impressions do not hold or tell?

Still stuck, I walked outside and stood in a harsh, frosty breeze. Suddenly, I felt alive, grounded, and real. The clouds were low and streaming past me. Closing my eyes, I let myself be an element in the clouds' story. Gradually, I allowed the cold and wind to penetrate; I became the cold and wind. I opened my eyes to witness the sun go down behind the trees on the distant dune ridge

and felt a sudden agony. The ending of this day abruptly connected me to a profound grief about finishing the dissertation that waited for me indoors.

As the afterglow gushed across the horizon, I went back inside. Ah yes, I thought, to finish the dissertation meant I could “get on with my life.” I could put seven years of labor behind me and feel satisfied with a thing accomplished. But the finishing also meant leaving the Great Lakes ecoregion that I had called my home for more than 50 years. In a few short weeks I would move to the Chesapeake Bay for a new home and job. In doing so, I would be leaving so much of what I have known and loved. Writing these last words meant emerging from the chrysalis, leaving the milkweed, vulnerable and not knowing what lay beyond.

Throughout the research process, I struggled with the fear that I was somehow setting up the developers to fail. I wondered whether my questions were really a test that the developers could not possibly pass. I had pushed this fear aside, for I was clear about my purpose of listening and learning from them, not judging them. And I did listen and learn. When I wrote up what I had learned, I tried to represent the developers well. I focused on retelling their stories with the intentions and meanings intact. Yet there was still something else: I wanted to challenge these stories. I wanted you to hear the voice of Violet Easton beneath and countering Sam Spade’s. I wanted to give you her story, my story, the story of the monarchs.

Yes, there are two stories here to grasp. Even though we can never completely experience or understand another's story, we must try. Will you try with me now? Will you hold both stories like precious jewels, secure within outstretched hands, toward a final integration? Will you watch each jewel sparkle in the sunlight, will you let them catch and refract the packets and rays of light into brilliance all around you? Can you carry a penetrating image of not one but two jewels throughout the turbulence of what is yet to come?

### Development Is and Is Not About Money

The paradox that development is and is not about money began to form during the very first interview in my pilot study. I had not known that I held the view that developers were fixated on making money, yet when I heard D1 say at the end of our interview, "I got into this business trying to look at saving the world. I thought I would go to the World Bank or something and build dams in Nigeria so that we could lift that country up" (D1), I was surprised and drawn to his sentiment, although I might argue with his tactics. This developer's work was meaningful to him.

The idea that development is not just about money grew stronger during the second interview. This developer's very identity, his entire family history, was tied to his work. Just as I was a minister's granddaughter, this was a builder's son. When I was catching bumblebees in hollyhock blossoms to listen to them buzz, this developer was deftly pounding nails into two by fours to

frame a window. As I listened to him tell me his story of origins, I felt the last remnants of a belief that developers only care about money shatter.

Nearly all of the developers mentioned ways in which development was about money. Indeed, in practically the same breath when D1 told me he started out to save the world, he said that if I wanted to understand development I should realize that:

D1: It all goes back to one issue, who gets the cash?

K: Who gets cash.

D1: Tax revenue, township versus city, city versus county, state versus state, country versus country; just figure out who gets the cash? Follow the money.

I had run right into a paradox, although it took me some time to express it this way.

I found many ways in which development *is* about money. When asked about project selection, D10 just said he was looking for “the best return.” D3 looked for a gross profit margin of 55%. D4 ran decisions past his “numbers people.” D7 told me that “developers are seeking revenue streams. That’s what they do.” Several developers like D4 stressed that they must make a profit: “If I’m going to be in this business, I’ve got to make a profit to eat. It’s that simple. So I’m not going to enter a project if we’re not going to make money.” Taxes and tax policy were critical issues that several developers mentioned. For example, D1 said, “It will always come back to a tax issue,” D10 talked about finding

opportunities in brownfield redevelopment, and D11 discussed the tax benefits of historic preservation.

Nearly all of the developers talked about development in ways that had little or nothing to do with money. I have already mentioned strong ties to family history. I have described how developers craved the challenge, complexity, and creativity of their work. Many seemed to love to solve problems (e.g., D7). Others loved being outdoors (D3) and connected to the land (D5).

Several developers talked about the fun of making the deal. Although this aspect can be closely tied to making money, it also can hold its own meaning. One developer (D 11) talked about some developers who were “deal addicts,” including one he used to work with but no longer was in business. Of course, in his autobiographies, Donald Trump talked extensively about the “art of the deal.” Here are some of the ways developers talked about the deals:

What I have fun doing is putting deals together. That's satisfying, knowing that you just put together a 5,000-square-foot deal or sold a house to somebody. Sometimes it is just closing on the deals. Whatever size they may be, that is fun. (D2)

I like the deal. We basically create good deals for investor money and then in probably 50, 60, 70% of the cases, we are the investors anyway. We have one hat that puts the deal together and we have a different hat as an investor and will bring in investors along with our own investment to either own or develop projects. (D7)

Developers also enjoyed the actual developing and building process, including making something they saw as beautiful:

I like creating something very tangible. Not so much as some other developers who are creating some big structures. But – and you may

think this is pathetic sounding, but—and I'm not the only one who feels this way. It's really cool to see a road getting cut into the woods. It really looks cool, a nice winding, bending kind of road. (D3)

I really like getting on the construction sites and being involved in the building. (D2)

It's fun to know that you know what it takes to really put it all together. There's a lot of satisfaction, and you provide buildings. (D7)

I took a boat ride with somebody this summer. It was dark and getting towards evening, and I saw a house that I had built on this lake. Well, from behind, they're gorgeous. I knew the people on the boat, but they didn't know who I was. I said, "I built that house," and I drove the boat a little farther and said, "I built that house." And we came upon another one and he said, "That is gorgeous," and I said, "I built that house." I built about 40 houses on that lake. There's a lot of pride in that. (D12)

Several developers gave me detailed explanations about how they definitely were not after every last penny:

My principle is to be honest and fair and always leave something for the other person. Don't try and squeeze the last dime out of a property owner. They need to be able to hold their head up after the project, too. The older I get, the more this principle is stronger in my mind. I'm sure I can make a lot more money, but money is not my primary goal anymore. It never was, I guess. (D15)

D3 said, "Our primary focus isn't maximizing dollars, necessarily, or incomes.

We want it to be something that we're proud to drive back to in 10 to 20 years."

D10 put it a little more succinctly, saying with a smile, "I'm not developing for the last buck. I'm just working for the first one."

The reasons people develop the land are many, varied, and complex. As a group, the developers I interviewed greatly enjoyed their work. Approaching them with a simplistic notion that their motives center on money is a grave

mistake and will not serve us well if we are to work together to find common solutions to the complex issues and problems we face.

### Women Have Babies, Men Have Buildings

I still remember the moment this metaphor emerged. I was sitting in the fourth-floor office of a real estate developer during the pilot study. He was the second developer I interviewed. I remember writing in my fieldnotes how absolutely, completely relaxed he looked, like someone doing exactly what he was meant to do. He was telling me about the apple orchard that had stood on the site of his building when he was a child. He talked about developing the land and constructing the building we were in. All of a sudden, as he talked, I could see the very building I was in growing right out of the ground. I do not know exactly what it was that he said that created this image in my mind. I suspect it was as much how he said it as what he said. I think it must have had something to do with the way he went to the window and pointed to the earth and described the processes of conception and construction.

This image, this memory, haunts me and has made me sensitive to how people talk about development and building. Developers as well as journalists often use words to describe buildings that make them sound like living things. I cannot pick up a newspaper without reading about the "rebirth" of a city or the "growth" of an area. I felt the potency of this metaphor when one developer (D1) called the Michigan Economic Development Corporation the Michigan

Economic Growth Authority. I found a striking visual image that, to me, fully expressed this metaphorical theme when I was glancing through photographic images at a museum of photography in Tucson. The image was a vertical photograph with one image superimposed on another. The lower part of the image was the stem of a flowering plant. But, through the technique of double exposure, “growing” out of this stem was not a flower but a building. Exactly, I thought, exactly!

Last fall I was in St. Louis for a few days to attend a conference. Because it was too dark to walk outside alone, I spent half an hour early each morning walking fast around the inside perimeter of the building. The second morning, I saw a man kneeling on the carpet and examining a blueprint. Because of my fascination with architecture and floor plans, I stopped and peered over his shoulder and asked about the drawing. He told me it was actually the plan for his own house, which he was about to build. We started talking, and I told him about my research. He was enthusiastic and asked many questions. He had been a builder for more than 25 years and had been “working on” remodeling this hotel for 12 of those years through various corporate owners. I told him about what I thought I was seeing, that buildings were to men very much like babies were to women. He considered this for a long time. I thought he was going to tell me I was being silly. Instead, he said he agreed with me, and added “women are having buildings, too.” I asked him what he meant, and he explained that “DINKs” (dual incomes, no kids couples) had no place to put

their money. Some had made huge gains in the stock market or had inherited money from their parents. He was finding that women in such family structures were heavily investing their money in the building and furnishing of huge new homes.

Then during the tenth interview, when I asked the developer to tell me about a particularly meaningful project, he could not pick a favorite. Instead he said, "They are all like my little children." He went on with the metaphor: "It's like having a kid: You conceive an idea, and then you lay out a plan like parents do, teaching them first you do this and then you do that. You come up with an idea or theme for a development and then watch them grow." I felt like I had struck a vein of gold.

Development holds deep meaning for developers. They feel a strong pull to create something of value that lasts beyond their own lifetimes.<sup>18</sup> Criticizing their work is like telling a woman her baby is ugly or that she is greedy for wanting to make babies. Although I believe we need to radically alter the way we think about and practice development, I hope we can capture the creative energy of those who develop our land and protect their deeply held feelings about their work.

At the same time, we need to become conscious of the ways we equate development with growth. It is easy to accept the notion that developing land

and growing communities is a “matter of life and death.” One township planning commissioner told me that saying in a public forum that one is against growth is akin to being anti-American (P1). I suspect this metaphor finds its power in the notion that, as one developer said, “If you don’t grow, you die.” (D2). I challenge us all to embrace the complete metaphor of the cycle of birth, growth, decay, and death, and not just one part of it. To fight or deny decay and death is to search for the fountain of youth, which brings its own dangers. It is better to accept that death is as much a part of life as growth is.

D7 wisely said that he thought we would begin to start assembling buildings rather than constructing them. There is a model for this notion in Detroit at the Center for Creative Arts, what some have called the Tinker-Toy building. With cranes, the supporting systems and panels can be picked up and moved, to expand and change the building over time. To me, beginning to think about assembling buildings implies a healthy acceptance of the need to adapt and change over time, to flow more easily with the cycle of life and death. We may need to think of our cities more like turtles carrying shells on their backs, poking their heads in at night and moving on during the day.

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<sup>18</sup>However, when I mentioned this to them, several developers specifically rejected any notion of creating monuments to be remembered by, and criticized developers who had “big egos”.

### Wildlife Is Invisible Unless Protected by Law or Public Interest

Most of these themes are about things that I heard. This theme is about what I did not hear. As I interviewed the developers, they often talked about working with nature and creating roads around trees. Many developers mentioned wetlands and endangered species, which are protected by federal law. But about two-thirds of the way through the interviews, I realized that the developers were talking about land and vegetation, but – except for federally protected species – not about the creatures living there. One developer (D9), a third-generation farmer before he became a developer, did talk about wildlife and wildlife habitat. He spoke of the value of hedgerows and his frustration when he went back to a development and discovered they had been cut down. Yet when I asked him where he obtained some of this information, he told me it was from the Department of Environmental Quality.

I had expected to find the invisibility of nature and had seen evidence of this since childhood. I had heard people talk about “empty lots,” but the “empty” lot on the next block was where I spent joyful hours running up and down small inclines, catching grasshoppers, and picking Queen Anne’s lace. I knew the lot was not empty. For years I had also seen roadsides dotted with signs announcing, “Vacant Land For Sale.” This invisibility is but one symptom of a shallow ecology. But somehow, I did not expect nature’s invisibility to be so pronounced.

Last year I attended a village meeting at which people were considering a development proposal. Before the meeting, two planning commissioners were talking. One of the commissioners said to the other, with biting words, “I don’t care if we run over all the piping plovers eggs! What a nuisance!” Piping plover are a protected Great Lakes coastal bird species. They are a shore bird that unfortunately lays its eggs right on the beach where people and their dogs walk. As humans have taken over more and more of the coastlands, the numbers of plovers have dwindled. Although I had known intellectually that there were people who were not concerned about the extinction of another species, I had never before witnessed this. It was sobering!

Yet I actually believe there is what Carl Jung would call gold to this shadow of American culture. Despite the comments by the planning commissioner, I believe that although developers may resent it, most will respect federal legislation that protects nature. One developer (D11) said we need to strengthen the laws that protect the lives of other species, and that he thought developers – “the good guys” – would respond. I think we need to increase funding of programs that inventory our lands and create better plans to protect and preserve the variety of life on earth. I think developers would contribute to this effort. Developers will become full partners as they – along with the rest of us – learn more about ecological connections and expand their vision to a deep ecology.

I am not naïve enough to believe that all developers, or perhaps even most of them, will cooperate. When talking with friends and colleagues about my research over the past few years, I was told many stories about the “dirty tricks” of developers. I cringed at these tales, but I believe that dirty tricks are part of any business and one of the vagaries of human nature. But this study was not about uncovering dirty tricks or creating utopia. This study was about finding common ground so that we might find practical, achievable, and effective ways to work together to protect nature. I do believe that we can count on many of our nation’s most successful developers to cooperate, and to serve as consultants to help devise more effective protection strategies.

D11 and I engaged in an interesting dialogue about what sustainable development would “look like” to him. He was probably the youngest developer I interviewed and was already wealthy. I found him to be energetic, enthusiastic, committed, and open-minded:

K: I’m not sure why we had all the strip malls go up in the 50s, 60s-

D11: 50s, 60s, 70s. It’s just terrible stuff. Do you know what I mean?

K: Oh, I know.

D11: You know, big parking fields, blacktop everywhere.

K: I don’t know the history of that.

D11: That was primarily because of, like, the Walmarts, K-Marts, in the world. But the sign of sustainability that I think is the best thing to hear about—I learned about this from a speaker here in town a month or so ago—is the ecology. When we build a shopping center and we take away so much farmland—and the macro issues about the environment—it is so

far out of my scope of expertise, but it's fascinating to listen to and it's somewhat shocking when you hear some of these statistics. But I think at some point ecology is going to become the issue.

K: How so?

D11: Well, I think if we're not careful about what we do, if we continue to do the amount of damage that I'm hearing we are doing to our planet, you know, things are going to go downhill pretty quickly.

K: That's what got me into this topic.

D11: Is it?

K: Yeah, because-

D11: It's so staggering.

I was moved to hear him finish my sentence with "it's so staggering," just as I would have. I was not hearing "spin." I could tell when developers were toeing a party line or trying to look good or press a point. This developer was trying do the right thing and have fun doing it, as I believe many other developers are. As D11 said, "The good guys, the good developers, care and want to do the right thing and want to have quality projects."

Developers told me that as public attitudes have shifted, so have their practices. They care very much about and only follow market demand.

Our president, our governor, and so forth are leading big policy issues, but little by little people are really responding and they're going to say, "You know what, it's the right thing to do." And there are enough people working in most big corporations or big organizations today that are saying, "I want to be more, you know, environmentally conscious in what we're doing." We're finding when we go out and talk to new customers about a product and then you mention a lead, whether or not the company itself is a committed green company, it's hitting a note. It's hitting a familiar note with them, they're responding also. (D7)

This suggests that the other clear path to involving developers in the protection of nature is through a change in public interest in a deeper ecology. Developers do not want to do what is unpopular and have shown that they will respond to changes in public values. Through conducting this research, I have come to believe that we need to conduct an extensive, comprehensive “anti-sprawl” campaign similar to what has been successfully done to reduce smoking. As we increase our ecological awareness, we will be better able to increase our ecological fitness. But changing public attitudes about nature will not be easy and will require a generational commitment. One developer (D9; a third-generation farmer) gave me a realistic understanding of some of what we are up against:

D9: We have continuous problems with condominium associations. We believe in leaving the scrubby old trees and dead trees along the fencerows for wildlife habitat. But when I go back five years later, there are no fencerows, there are no dead trees, there is none of the scrub. This really irritates me because the natural habitat that we left there, which is a natural screen, should still be there to take care of the habitat. But condominium associations want to clean it up

K: It's gone.

D9: Yeah, they want to prune it and have it cultured all the way to the back, absolutely destroying the environment. That's what they think beauty is: pruned-up trees with grass mowed. But many times it's the branches of the trees that come up in all different directions, based on the species of the tree, which is the beauty. And particularly if there is an ice storm, and then all of a sudden you start to see how the branches all come and hang on there, and that's the beauty of it.

K: Yeah, it's beautiful.

D9: And then you're going to have the undergrowth that's coming up, and that's all part of the habitat.

### Land as an Instrument for Human Purposes

Land is the alpha test for the real estate developer, the first piece he must assemble in the development process. Land is important to real estate developers as a location to meet market need or suit a customer. As one developer said, "We always start our developments with an idea of what the customer is going to look like" (D9). Each developer had a unique niche and concentrated on meeting the needs of his particular market segment through the purchase of a particular type of land. For example, a developer of a second-home recreational area looks for attractive or even pristine nature, with interesting topography (but not too steep), trees (but not too many), and, ideally, access to water or at least a water view. At the other extreme, a commercial developer wants level, cleared land at a location with easy access to "the market" (i.e., mass numbers of people) and especially close to freeway ramps.

Land is viewed as a blank slate waiting for human use: "I see vacant land and I visualize housing. See something that meets the needs of the people" (D8). Common phrases are "land use" and "land-use planning," symptomatic of a shallow ecology. To get the land ready for human occupation, vegetation is removed to make room for buildings and cars. Clearing and flattening the land is not personal, just business. Again, the amount of clearing varies by developer

and development niche. Sometimes trees and shrubs are brought in to increase the attractiveness of bare land such as a farm field. People expect it now.

There are two physical phases of real estate development: the horizontal and the vertical. During the earlier horizontal phase, the land is cleared (“site preparation”) so that the roads and “undergrounds” can be put in place. The undergrounds consist of the utilities, water, and sewer or septic system. Some developers specialize in getting through the horizontal phase to where the lots are ready, and then they stop. The lots are sold to builders or individuals who hire builders. The second vertical phase then begins, and the house, office building, or commercial building is built.

To D1, “real” developers take on the risk of the development without a customer in hand. D1 did not consider “build-to-suit” developers as the “real” developers. Because of his comments, I tried to interview only “real” developers. However, because my criterion was for the top developers, I did interview several who specialized in build-to-suit activities. Indeed, D8, who said he always started with a customer, insisted that real estate development is *not* risky: “This is not a high-risk business.”

Several developers mentioned building around trees and nature: “I just build around nature” (D8). This practice may very well vary by location, and occur mostly in the high-end developments where people expect nice landscaping and can pay for it, mature trees may be saved. Earlier I talked about D5’s moving and replanting hundreds of trees. Although I was not able to get

interviews with any national commercial developers, the developers I talked with who did some commercial development explained the need for flat, cleared land. If trees are part of the commercial site plan, it is easier for the developer to plant new trees around the parking lots and buildings – which take up most of the site – after they are built.

Several developers talked about land as if the land itself even wanted to participate in this process. Two developers talked about “what the land wants to give me” (D5) or using “what nature gives me” (D8). D5 talked about “pushing land” with “economics” to give more and more until the land pushed back.

The value of land rests with being used, and humans increase that value when they develop the land. D13 talked about developers as adding value, especially in the early visioning and analysis phases of development. To one developer (D8), it was ridiculous not to use nature: “This whole damn thing they’ve got about forestry in this country is ludicrous. The idea of not cutting timber down is just stupid.” I did not find any of the developers, or planners for that matter, conceptualizing land other than in terms of its value and use for humans.

However, our relationship with nature has changed and is still changing. I remember reading a news article about a study of the growth and change in children’s attitudes toward wolves. Once considered dangerous (remember Peter and the Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood?), the wolf is no longer so feared, and it sometimes, as with my niece, becomes a favorite stuffed animal. As we

have studied these creatures, we have demystified them. As we have created safe havens from ferocious beasts, we have ventured out to understand them.

As our relationship with nature has changed, so has our language. D10 reminded me that it was not that long ago when wetlands were called swamps: “Some wetlands – we used to call them swamps in the 70’s – are still swamps, and they should be filled in. You know, the mosquitoes.” Although our idea of wetlands has expanded, we still tend to conceptualize their functions in terms of human purposes or benefits. For example, wetlands are useful because they remove toxic materials, filter sediments, and “grow” ducks for hunters. I hold onto the faith that deeper notions of ecology will follow, such that wetlands will be valued just for providing a home for the ducks themselves, even if humans do not or can not shoot them. Nature is more than a set of resources to use; it is our life-support system. “Eco” means home, and nature provides the home linking us to all creatures in a timeless, mysterious chain of interrelationships that we sever at our ecological and spiritual peril.

### Planning as Part of the Solution *and* the Problem

To me, a stunning finding was the problematic nature of many aspects of the planning process. I first became aware of this during my first interview with a planning commissioner (P1). He explained that, as a volunteer, he depended on the analysis and recommendations of planning staff for all his information and guidance. Over the years he had found hidden incentives for planning staff

to increase the rate of development in his community. For example, annual pay raises of planning staff were tied to the number of projects they had been able to move through the system. The possibility of promotion, as well as future retirement income, was similarly tied to a more-is-better “growth” criterion. Finally, a colleague told me that these same quantitative performance criteria could be found in the employment contract for the planners in her city. I was surprised that adherence to the master plan and zoning guidelines appear to have nothing to do with being a successful planner. Pushing developments through did.

Several developers complained that “uneducated planners” and large-lot zoning were causing sprawl:

The real sprawl creators are the minimum ten-acre lot sizes. Interestingly, as they were battling our development, at the same time they respected our knowledge and so we almost consulted with them. We tried to stress to them that that was just an enormous mistake and there are better ways. They would have accomplished the same things such as clustering the lots without creating sprawl. (D3)

As I wrote in another chapter, one developer (D4) would like to see more allowable vertical construction, and several mentioned higher densities.

Although one may argue that these changes would be in the best interests of developers, they do make sense: The more we vertical and dense, the less land we “consume.”

I uncovered another serious planning issue while learning to use geographic information technology during a training session. I attended the

workshop as a participant observer for this dissertation to learn how local officials use geographic information systems based on ArcView. We used real data from a Michigan community. When it came time for us to work individually with the software, I ran into a snag. I was trying to plan for a park in this community. No matter what I did, I could not figure out how to do it. Finally, the instructor came over, and I explained the trouble I was having. He immediately knew what was going on. He explained that the reason I was having trouble was that this particular community had not chosen to have that data layer on its system! I was stunned to learn that nature – even as human-centered an aspect as parks – is an optional layer in geographic information systems.

I have witnessed the interests of nature being ignored and ridiculed at many venues, so we should not think that this is just a problem of planning. Here is an interchange with a planner, in which I first learned about the problems with “highest and best use”:

K: I’ve gone to the Michigan Natural Resources Commission meetings and seen people who talk for nature. They say they don’t want the Department of Natural Resources to do something there because the deer live there or birds live there, and I’ve seen the people who say this ridiculed in public meetings.

P3: Oh yeah, yeah.

K: Have you ever experienced that? People that talk about places that bears can live in?

P3: No, I guess I haven’t seen that. But what I guess comes back to me in this conversation is that planning and zoning, in order for it to be

successful in Michigan, it has to start with a promise that private property rights are the most important thing. So you'll never hear a planning commission say this property shouldn't be used for anything. You know, there is a use concept, the term "highest and best use."

K: Good, that's just what I need to learn.

P3: That's the founding concept of planning and zoning, that everybody has a right to use their property. We can set reasonable limits. We can set an idea of reasonable uses. But there is no such thing as-

K: Not being able to do anything.

P3: Exactly.

This was the planner who taught me that the planning code of ethics<sup>19</sup> he has promised to uphold calls for the highest and best use of the land, not for "no use" (i.e., for nature).

Another way that planning is part of the problem is that very few people understand or even know about the master plan for their community. During real estate transactions, this information is not transferred before or along with the deed and the money. The master plan, which is supposed to represent the will of the community and certainly charts its future, is at best poorly understood. And as I learned from the developers, the master plan is considered changeable; it is not sacrosanct, and perhaps it should not be. We are learning that the way planning has been going for the last 20 or so years has been erroneous. We have isolated and separated where we need to let grow more organically and naturally. At the same time, we have been responding to the

awfulness of strip malls. As we drive through communities in America and witness their decay, we can see the results of not caring whether quality and beauty accompany economic development.

The elected planning and zoning commissioners who serve small communities that include some of the last remaining farmlands and wildlands have a crucial role. Many commissioners, who volunteer their time on top of full and busy lives, have had little or no education in planning, real estate development, economics, ecology, or conservation biology. To counteract this deficiency, a new educational effort is under way in Michigan, called the Citizen Planner. Although I have not reviewed the curriculum for its potential effects on nature, this effort does hold promise as a model customizing educational activities for local planning and zoning officials.

As I reflected in my fieldnotes after interviewing the third planner, “I see that planning might greatly increase the loss of nature and biological diversity and species. When we have all our communities zoned and everything is for a human use, there is going to be even more of a patchwork system for nature.” Whereas a benefit of planning is a longer timeframe, this can also be a flaw, as P3 pointed out: “Planners create plans, implement the plans, and then 10 and 20 years later they find out whether or not it was a good idea.” To plan simply

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<sup>19</sup>The National Association of Home Builders’ code in Appendix E sounds amazingly similar.

means to think before doing. We should not blindly depend on planning to be the magic bullet.

Plat Maps, Master Plans, and Zoning Ordinances Reveal and Frame our Destiny

Our nation's destiny is revealed and framed by the plat maps, master plans, and zoning ordinances in each and every township, city, village, and county office throughout the country. Even the hundreds or thousands of acres of open lands or forest we see are not wild and free. Virtually every square inch of land you see has a deed with the name of a person, corporation, or public agency on it. We do not have a blank slate before us. We no longer have the freedom of a *tabula rosa*. What you see before you is what I call *predeveloped* land because attached to each parcel is someone's dream of how they want to develop and use it. The parcel of land might hold a farmer's retirement plan, a Japanese financier's 20-year investment plan, or just your own dream of building a house or adding on a garage, garden, or "granny flat" for an aging parent. To be human is to dream and to develop, to want to "improve" the land, especially when it is the land we own.

One of the planners (P3) I interviewed said we all have a little bit of a real estate developer in us. I believe he is right and that real estate development is closely tied to our vision of the American Dream, to the rags-to-riches Horatio Alger myth. We do not want to lose this. Our Constitution protects this. Takings lawsuits do not refer to taking of the land, but taking the economic value

of that land if it were developed. One developer talked at length about what he called the “settler mentality”:

I’ve always been fascinated by the West and the whole process of settling. Fascinated by our Constitution, fascinated with the settling of the United States. In our business, I often think about the constitutional rights for property. I never looked at the manuscripts myself at all, but I’m told that the original Constitution wasn’t for the life, liberty and the pursuit of *happiness* on Jefferson’s and Hamilton’s first draft, but I believe [it] was life, liberty, and the pursuit of *property*. People really came here because they wanted the land. I really think religious reasons were secondary to saying we don’t want to be under a serf system anymore. We want the land. And when we honored people in all of our early wars – the Revolutionary and the Civil Wars – we gave them land. Everybody wanted land. We are very drawn as a country to the land, and that is actually probably why we’ve sprawled: Mentally, it’s a 200-year-old country and we’ve always had these theories: Go west young man, go west. If you’re dissatisfied or disenfranchised, just get out of here and go west. Go settle some other place. We don’t tend to see it that way, but when you go to Europe or other countries where history is so much longer, you can see it. We’re really a settler mentality, and I think that shows up in our forms of development and the reason why people sprawl here: it’s just available. I’m not saying that that’s the right answer. I think there’s some real potential problems with that. I think we have to be very careful, particularly if governments mandate sprawl by bureaucracy and by ordinance. That really frustrates me, but I think it’s within us to move and certainly within us to go west. It’s certainly within us to settle.

As D5 pointed out, other countries do not necessarily share the American notion of private property. For example, when I stayed in Norway, I learned of something the Norwegians call “every man’s right” [*sic*], which is an old tradition codified into federal law in the 1950s. Freedom of movement is so important to Norwegians that the only place it is inappropriate for “every man”

to go is literally on the front stoop of someone else's house.<sup>20</sup> When I was visiting Norway in the mid-1990s, there were few fences. Norwegians live what they call "the natural life." One way every man's right plays out is that you can camp anywhere in the country for up to three days. This means you can just stop alongside the road on land owned by a stranger and set up your tent. At my cousin's mountain hut, not even the cows were kept on individual plots of land. We drove up to a wide gate and let ourselves into an area where the entire small collection of primitive mountain huts and old farmhouses were collectively fenced in. The cows walked loose down the middle of the dirt road, causing my cousin Turid to say, with a twinkle in her eye, "The cows are taking a walk!"

### Conversations and Change Are Under Way

I did not expect that the developers would volunteer so many examples of their attempts at innovation. One developer (D5), who called himself a "right-winger," told of experiments with solar and wind energy. Also, he had been meeting with environmentalists each month for ten years in an attempt to find ways to understand each other and work together. He also talked of a new project he was undertaking in cooperation with the Department of Environmental Quality. D6 was one of the first developers to go back to

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<sup>20</sup>The one legal exception is special protection afforded to farm field. Because only 5 percent of the land is arable, this land is off limits to other uses.

redevelop in urban areas. At the time of the study, he was creating a highly affordable new condominium complex for young professionals.

Another developer's project in the LEED silver award category. He cautioned:

D13: You know, you can do things that are so off the deep end and then you take too many arrows in your back. When you take too many arrows in your back, then you're going to go down and you're not going to survive to be able to do—

K: The next project.

D13: We have to take it a step at a time.

Although these and other efforts raised my hopes, I have a caution before we become too optimistic too soon. I have seen no evidence that any of these efforts, or any of the national models, are being critically evaluated for their effects on such things as biodiversity and the cumulative impacts on the lives of other species.

I believe it was Margaret Mead who once said never to doubt the ability of a small group to change the world; indeed, that is the way it has always happened. I had strong evidence during the interviews of the power of one-on-one discussions to affect and transform lives, such as the following example:

K: How did you learn all of this? How do you know all this about habitat and food chain?

D9: Well, part of it is working with the people at the Department of Environmental Quality and the Department of Natural Resources, understanding what they're talking about and then being sensitive to the environment. I think more developers are sensitive to the natural

environment today than they ever have been in the past. I don't think that developers are rapists, as they describe them.

My most enjoyable times during the interviews were when a developer would teach me something. In the following dialogue with D9, he made it clear that "people friendly" land is not necessarily "animal friendly." Even though his message was bittersweet, I felt encouraged and sat back and let him teach me:

D9: You know, water creates a habitat, as well as fence rows. I'm working with a landscape designer who is really into wetland. She's doing a lake wetland right now where she's putting logs into the water for the turtles.

K: Oh, okay.

D9: Yeah, and when you think it through, the natural habitat of where you see turtles, it's normally sunning on a log.

K: Right.

D9: When you clean up a lake in such a way that it is people friendly, it's not necessarily animal friendly.

K: Okay. So what do we do about that?

D9: We try to understand nature, and we plant bushes and things along the shoreline. We put a log in the water, and we say, "This is animal friendly."

K: So you probably have to do parallel development; you have to have a pond with nothing in it for the people so they can float things like canoes?

D9: Right. We developed one small lake, which is connected with other lakes, but two-thirds of it is only a foot and a half deep. We put topsoil back into the lake bottom on top of the sand.

K: Okay, to make it organic.

D9: So it was organic and could grow weeds. It's a reproduction area for the fishery, but it's also good for bottom-feeder ducks. And so if you understand what the food chain is all about, then you can create the habitat for fishes, fisheries, turtles, ducks, you name it.

K: So are you doing that then?

D9: Yeah, we've even got one project that we did that about 14 years ago.

K: Really?

D9: Yeah.

K: Now how did you learn all of this? How do you know all this about habitat food chain?

D9: Part of it is working with the Department of Environmental Quality people, the Department of Natural Resources, and understanding what they're talking about and then being sensitive to the environment. I think more developers are sensitive to develop to the natural environment today than they ever have been in the past. I don't think that developers are rapists, as they describe them.

I included this exchange, including that last part again, to underscore what I believe is a critical finding sprinkled throughout this dissertation: Developers respond favorably and are open to change if they are brought in as partners and not adversaries. Many developers seemed to respond especially well to one-on-one relationships – including, and perhaps especially, the friendships that develop – with consultants and state environmental agencies.

### The Culture of the Real Estate Developer

In addition to the seven themes, I had some general impressions about the culture of the real estate developer. Culture is the set of values, norms, beliefs,

and accepted ways of living and doing business of a group of people. Culture, like the background material of a hooked rug, is nearly invisible yet provides the underlying structure of a society. Culture seems invisible because it is just “the way things are”. In fact, culture becomes most visible when it is violated. For example, taking cuts in line is not acceptable in our culture. To take cuts violates a very common norm and challenges our notion of fairness. Yet this is not something we think about until we feel shock or outrage when it happens. In other cultures taking cuts may be more acceptable or even to be expected.

In order to “see” culture, then, it helps if the culture is different from one’s own. Indeed, cultural anthropology began as the study of people in distant lands, of “the other”. The study of one’s own culture is a fairly recent development. However, within larger cultures have always been subcultures, such as automotive mechanics, drug dealers, or university professors. While my own autoethnography is, by definition, a study of my own culture, I did interview people I believed to be in a subculture that would think about and treat Nature very differently than I would and thus illuminate differences.

However, while I did find differences between the developers and my own perceptions of Nature, I can only conclude that the aberration from the social norm is within me and not the developers. The real estate developers, planners, and key informants I interviewed all viewed land through a utilitarian lens that I now believe merely reflects our American culture. I found this same lens in real estate guidebooks and works on the history of real estate

development in the United States. My own relationship with Nature is one of passion and intimacy. My Nature-loving, Norwegian-born father<sup>21</sup> and my mother's father – a Congregational minister who taught me the lore of the woods, christened me by a wilderness lake in Maine, and wrote like a Transcendentalist<sup>22</sup>--opened me to the beauty and mystery of Nature when I was still an infant. It has taken me a very long time to understand that this view is not widely shared, understood, and sometimes not even tolerated.

My impressions about the culture of developers are described in the next few pages. However, I want to emphasize a few things. First, these are impressions of their culture, not a definitive picture. My study was not designed to elicit a robust picture of the culture of the real estate developer, but anthropologist Jacob Climo of my guidance committee thought I would be remiss not to share what I did find. What I present here seems to stand out as either unique or somehow distinguishing of real estate developers from other professions. Second, I do not sense a stagnant culture, but one in process. I want to avoid rigidity and do not want to freeze the culture of real estate developer at this point in time. With one exception (discussed below), I sensed movement and change among the developers as well in the larger culture to which we all belong.

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<sup>21</sup>See Reed and Rothenber {Reed, 1993 #255} on the Norwegian roots of deep ecology.

<sup>22</sup> I have included the christening service my grandfather wrote for me, his first grandchild, in the preface to this work.

### Work: The process of real estate development

The real estate development process is the stage where the culture of the real estate developer is played out. Real estate development takes place in the context of the economic development of a community. Real – meaning fixed, permanent, immovable – estate – one’s possessions or property – consists of both land and buildings.

Real estate development usually begins when land is subdivided into smaller parcels that are either sold or developed. Each division of land commonly increases the total value of the property. For example, a 20-acre piece of land might sell for \$100,000. But this parcel could be divided into four 5-acre pieces that each sell for, say, \$40,000, or into eight 2.5-acre sites selling for \$30,000 each. With a just a few more lines drawn on a map, the \$100,000 land value becomes \$160,000 as 5-acre sites or \$240,000 as 2.5 acre sites. In Michigan, as in other states, following the legislative history of the Subdivision Control Act of 1967 (P.A. 288) and recent 1996 Land Division Amendments to the Act (P.A. 591) highlights the big players in the subdivision game are farmers, the home builders association, and others who own or control large tracts of land.

Each real estate developer works somewhere along what I call the real estate development continuum. The developers I talked with seemed to each have a unique niche that, as one said, only they can fill. Some developers only do early front-end land speculation, which is buying up land and, with little or

no “improvements”, selling it to someone else for a profit. This is the group I had expected to interview, but only one or two were doing true land speculation. One developer told me there just are not many land speculators left. Next along the continuum is what developers call the “horizontal”, or the “undergrounds”. In this phase, infrastructure is put in place that allows the next phase to take place. This phase includes surveying, engineering, soil testing, clearing of the land, building roads, providing utilities such as electrical, telephone, and natural or propane gas, water and, most difficult and most important, the sewers or septic systems. Nearly all of this is fairly easy to do, but without sewers development just is not going to happen. Water can usually be found and utilities brought in, but not being able to remove human waste can easily be a deal killer.

Next is “the vertical”, or the actual construction of homes, offices, stores, and factories. Not all developers do the vertical. Some stop with land speculation and others after the undergrounds. Some do various pieces in the middle, but some work along the entire spectrum. A few do the entire spectrum as well as retain ownership of the property, such as a commercial building or business park. I did not find one of these variations prevalent, nor could I easily see a tie to success.

Each of these phases includes conceptual work – what do we want to do with this land? – as well as financial analysis – will we make money, and if so

how much? The entire growth coalition<sup>23</sup> may be tapped at various points along the continuum. Real estate agents seem particularly important. Some developers depend on realtors to find good parcels of land and, more commonly, to sell lots, “spec houses” (houses built on speculation, i.e., without a confirmed buyer), and plans for new houses in subdivisions. Several developers had their own real estate agents or even entire divisions in their companies. Leasing agents to find tenants was also common.

### Individual beliefs

I consistently found several sets of personal beliefs that distinguish the real estate developer. I found hold outs from our hunter-gatherer days with reference to the lure of the chase and “I’m just an old fisherman”. Some developers believe that they are making new wealth, like the natural wealth from trees, making something out of nothing, one said. Several talked of thriving on the challenge.

Developers think of themselves as entrepreneurs and risk takers. One developer, in fact, made a careful distinction between “real” real estate developers and those who just build-to-suit. Build-to-suit means lining up buyers before a project is begun. “Real” developers are speculators who take risks, believing in a project enough to build it and then finding a buyer or tenant. Deal making is one of the most common norms closely associated with risk

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<sup>23</sup> See Table 2 for an extensive listing of those involved in the real estate development process.

taking. Donald Trump, perhaps the most famous living developer, has even called one of his books “The Art of the Deal” (Trump 1987). Sometime this can become extreme, like the deal addicts one developer talked about.

What surprised me over and over was learning the importance of a good reputation, of being able to deliver and on time. In this way social capital is built up over time, and interestingly, seems to carry through time. One generation seems to inherit the social capital invested by the previous generation. I found this with personal relationships, reputation for competing projects, and capital.

### Family and identity

Perhaps the strongest sense of culture I felt during the interviews was in the area of family and personal identity. As previously discussed, developers came to their work in one of two ways: through family ties or personal interest and perhaps chance. For developers who came to real estate development through several generations of family members in the building trades, their identity seems closely tied to their work and the way it has always been done. For example, the values and beliefs of the homebuilders are so closely aligned with their work that it seems to form their very identity. I sense this could be a strong repressive force resistant to change, and that those without their identity so closely aligned with family business.

### Community relations

Developers seemed to conceptualize community in several ways. There was an amazingly strong sense of almost philanthropy, or of a notion of community wealth. Some of the literature points to the origins of the real estate developer as a community builders (Eichler and Kaplan 1967). One developer walks house to house telling the occupants “I’m going to change your life as you know it.” He is so certain that his development is good for the community he wants to sell each and everyone on the concept. Another developer goes even further to actually run the community through a design process so they are actually co-creating the final design. However, I believe we need to ask the question of just who gets to decide what is best for the community, and does this fit with our notion of democracy? Furthermore, who represents the interests of Nature?

### Rituals and ceremonies

While my study did not look closely at rituals and ceremonies, I did want to point out a few. First, there is the “groundbreaking” ceremony complete with a special shovel for the occasion. In one office an engraved, gold-plated shovel hung in a plastic case. Another is the “ribbon cutting ceremony”. I asked one developer what this was all about, and he laughed and said these ceremonies were to make politicians feel good. He, himself, tried to avoid them. Another final, important type of ritual is that of planning commission meetings. I felt a

common ceremonial feel to each I attended no matter where I traveled in Michigan.

Interestingly, the culture of the real estate developer nests within a larger culture with definite ideas about the process of real estate development. One finds that real estate development is revered while the developer is often reviled. In American I suspect one cannot really be *against* development. As one planning commissioner pointed out, this is rather like saying I'm against America. At local planning meetings you can often hear someone saying something like, "I'm not against development, I'm just against this particular development". Americans generally believe that growth is good, and more growth is better. Growth is believed to bring jobs, prosperity, and, importantly, keeps the schools running and filled with children. This assumption is rarely challenged and almost never measured or evaluated.

I believe the cultural elements in each of these schemata are rich areas for future research. Many are old stories of, for example, the forces of change clashing with those fighting for continuity. Unfortunately, too often these clashes are often framed as between the forces of good and evil. When we privilege one over the other, we lose our ability to make conscious decisions in the best interest of the community. Our task, as I see it, is to make these deeply unconscious narratives conscious so that we can enter into dialogue in new ways.

### Finding a Common Thread

I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of a man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavour. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. Henry David Thoreau [as quoted in (Horder 1908), p. 253]

These seven themes and impressions about culture emerged during a lengthy, intense process of research and reflection. Some substantiated what I had suspected; others shattered old ideas that gave way to new ones. By recording them here, I hope to make you more conscious of the norms and values surrounding the practice of real estate development in America.

The themes and impressions, along with the paradoxes and metaphors, express some of the subtle yet potent social drivers of landscape change. Communities are planting seeds of change all over our nation in a frenzied effort to counteract the unpleasantness of urban sprawl. But for change to germinate and flourish, we must first become conscious of the stories and myths that drive development. I believe these norms and values must now be challenged and changed if we are to enjoy a richly diverse, connected life. With Thoreau's words quoted above in mind, we need to build buildings with full consciousness if we are to enjoy their full glory. I believe it is imperative that deep ecology becomes a thread in all of our stories, a lens with "corrected vision" through which to

consider our decisions about the land. D5 taught me that finding a common thread is possible when we give it enough time.

Nature is the essential element of our lives and makes everything else possible. Americans have begun to understand that we are *biological* creatures. We have learned that we need to get a certain amount of exercise and to eat certain foods and avoid others if we are to enjoy physical fitness and good health. But we have yet to comprehend that we are also *ecological* creatures. This is understandable because our ecological connections are less clear. Few of us grow or gather our own food or build our own homes from the trees that we ourselves cut down. Most people do not hike or backpack in wild areas and thus learn the joys and dangers of living simply and close to the earth.

Out of ignorance, denial, and fear, we have created institutional structures based on ideas that are ecologically unfit and cannot sustain life. Global warming, deforestation, desertification, extinction of species, and toxic contamination are but a few symptoms of the lack of ecological fitness. Most people do not understand the simple concept that the air we breathe is a gift from green plants that transform the energy of the sun into oxygen through the process of photosynthesis. We live a life of shallow ecology, in a culture several steps removed from the embodied experience of nature. We are not conscious of our dependency on and axiomatic connections with nature. We need to find our way back home.

## CHAPTER 6: ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

Barn's burnt down...now I can see the moon.

Masahide

### Emergence from the Chrysalis

I started this dissertation out of despair as I witnessed the steady, seemingly determined destruction of nature. I was not trying to be heroic; I was desperate. In bits and starts, I interviewed those who would destroy what I most love. I gathered my courage and forced myself to open up my mind to hear their stories. When I sat one-on-one with the land developers, my heart leaped with joy when they shared their excitement and pride in their work. I felt wonder when I heard them delight in the same creativity and complexity I crave. Yet at other times my heart went dead when soil was called "dirt" to be "assembled" into "sites" (PO1<sup>24</sup>). I remember cringing when learning about "land flippers" who buy and sell the Earth for the pure profit of it (D11). My age of innocence came to an abrupt end.

The hardest thing I have ever done was to force myself into the lives of real estate developers then to stay open and centered, to listen and not judge. At the same time, being with them was the most magnificent thing I had ever done. I was privileged to be welcomed into their busy lives, honored that they gave me

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<sup>24</sup>PO stands for participant observation.

hours of undivided and respectful attention. After studying real estate development for five years, I envisioned ending this dissertation with a message of hope that would erase all despair. It has not worked out that way, for my sense of despair has intensified while my sense of hope has deepened. Another paradox, perhaps the final one.

### Liminality

Today on my beach walk I picked up a second monarch butterfly. As I laid her on my desk next to the first one, I noticed she had fewer white dots and her orange panels were not nearly as brilliant. In fact she looked quite dull in comparison, something I would not have thought if she had been alone. I believe it was Rousseau who postulated that humans first left the blissful state of “noble savagery” when we started comparing people: more or less beautiful, strong, or intelligent. Yet as much I resisted, I could not help but see the differences in color between the two butterflies and be drawn to the brilliance of the first. The white and orange caught and held my eye.

This is the same tug I feel toward a model of development emerging in my mind. I sense the new model will pale the way we presently talk about and carry out development for this model rests in a liminal space holding nature with culture. But a part of me resists comparison, not wanting to diminish the brilliance of those doing development today. I planned and wanted to leave you with only a series of questions, but I must leave you more. I must describe for

you the distinctiveness of the first butterfly by sharing my concept of *ecological* development. I hope you will discern rather than judge the differences.

### From Sustainable to Ecological Development

The challenge is to persuade ourselves, and persuade our neighbours everywhere, to make the gradual policy changes that will slow down the rate of ecological degeneration and that will even reverse the ecological degeneration of the historical past. The challenge is a vital one. And it calls for refinement and good will. (Ravaioli and Ekins 1995), pg. 122.

The notion of sustainable development arose from decades of discussion and hand wringing over the collision of population and economic growth with the carrying capacity of our planet (Meadows, Meadows, and Randers 1992; Milbrath 1989; Miles 1976; Ophuls and Boyan 1992; Udall 1963). The idea of sustainable development is to balance economic growth with environmental protection. The concept has roots in the earlier notion of ecodevelopment (Glaeser 1984; Riddell 1981). Ecodevelopment is concept that Riddell (1981) described as encompassing “economically equitable, socially ennobling and environmentally balanced” development. The term *sustainable development* was popularized in the 1987 book *Our Common Future* (also known as the Brundtland report). In this influential book, sustainable development is defined as that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Development 1987).

Currently, there is a huge array of publications addressing the issue of sustainable development (my personal library alone contains 54 titles). Indeed, one finds *literatures of sustainability*, not *a literature*. Some offer detailed descriptions of the problem (Daly and Cobb 1989; Daly 1996; Development 1987; Ecologist 1993; Engel and Engel 1990; Hoyt 1994; Beatley and Manning 1997; Milbrath 1989; Naess 1990; Norgaard 1994; Ophuls and A. Stephen Boyan 1992; Redclift 1987; Riddell 1981; Sachs 1993; Schnaiberg and Gould 1994), and others concentrate on solutions (Beatley and Manning 1997; DeSimone 1997; Development, 1987; Goulet, 1971; Hawken, 1993; Huckle, 1996; Kakazu, 1994; Ostrom, Schroeder, and Wynne 1993; Sitarz, 1998; Trzyna, 1995). Some are very theoretical (Daly and Cobb 1989; Daly 1996; Hanna and Jentoft 1996; Norgaard 1994; Redclift 1987; Schnaiberg and Gould 1994), and some very applied (Institute, Union, and Programme 1992; Kakazu 1994; Ostrom, Schroeder, and Wynne 1993; Sachs 1993; Trzyna 1995). Some look at ethical or religious dimensions (Crocker 1991; Daly 1996; Engel and Engel 1990; Engel 1993; Goulet 1990, 1993; Palmer 1993). Some question whether sustainable development is even possible, or offer alternative concepts (Daly 1989; Daly 1996; Ecologist 1993; Norgaard 1994; Ophuls 1992; Redclift 1987; Riddell, 1981, Schnaiberg, 1994). Finally, some question whether sustainability is even a problem (Simon 1984). I believe that right now most of the developers I interviewed might fall into Simon's camp (e.g., "I just develop around nature" [D8]).

While it is beyond the reach of this work to thoroughly discuss, I offer a new preliminary critical framework within which to conceptualize, categorize, and evaluate social experiments in sustainability. I hope this will increase our clarity as we search for and evaluate critical indicators of success.

The categories lie on a continuum from proactive ecoregional activities, such as the Nature Conservancy's Last Great Places and the Wildlands Project,<sup>25</sup> to the building materials – the brick and mortar – themselves. I suggest that we place theories and practices within the categories of this framework based on their scope and reach. The goal would be to connect, embed, and evaluate each proposed development by how it fits within its own level and as nested within the other levels up to the ecoregional level<sup>26</sup>. After the bulleted descriptions, Figure 4 illustrates how the five categories of ecological development fit together conceptually.

- Ecological development projects at the ecoregional level – concerned with preserving species, habit, and ecological fitness including the conservation of biological diversity
- Ecodevelopment models at the landscape level – concerned with maintaining ecological functions and “yields” in perpetuity

- Green development models at the community level – concerned with relational issues including justice and designing with nature
- Green architecture and design models at the site level – concerned with aesthetics, efficient use of energy and materials, and life cycle costs
- Green buildings and products at the building level – concerned with production and use of energy and materials

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<sup>25</sup>The Wildlands Project, based in the Southwest, takes as its premise that if we protect the habitat of the large mammals, we will be protecting much of the rest. That is, if we provide enough land area for grizzly to flourish, the monarchs will have their milkweed. I believe it is an exemplary model attempting what most would say is impossible and many would say is undesirable. As I overheard a man say on the ferry to South Manitou Island about the possible closing off of part of a national park to protect habitat, “If I can no longer hike there, what’s the point?”

<sup>26</sup>These concepts will be fully developed in the future.

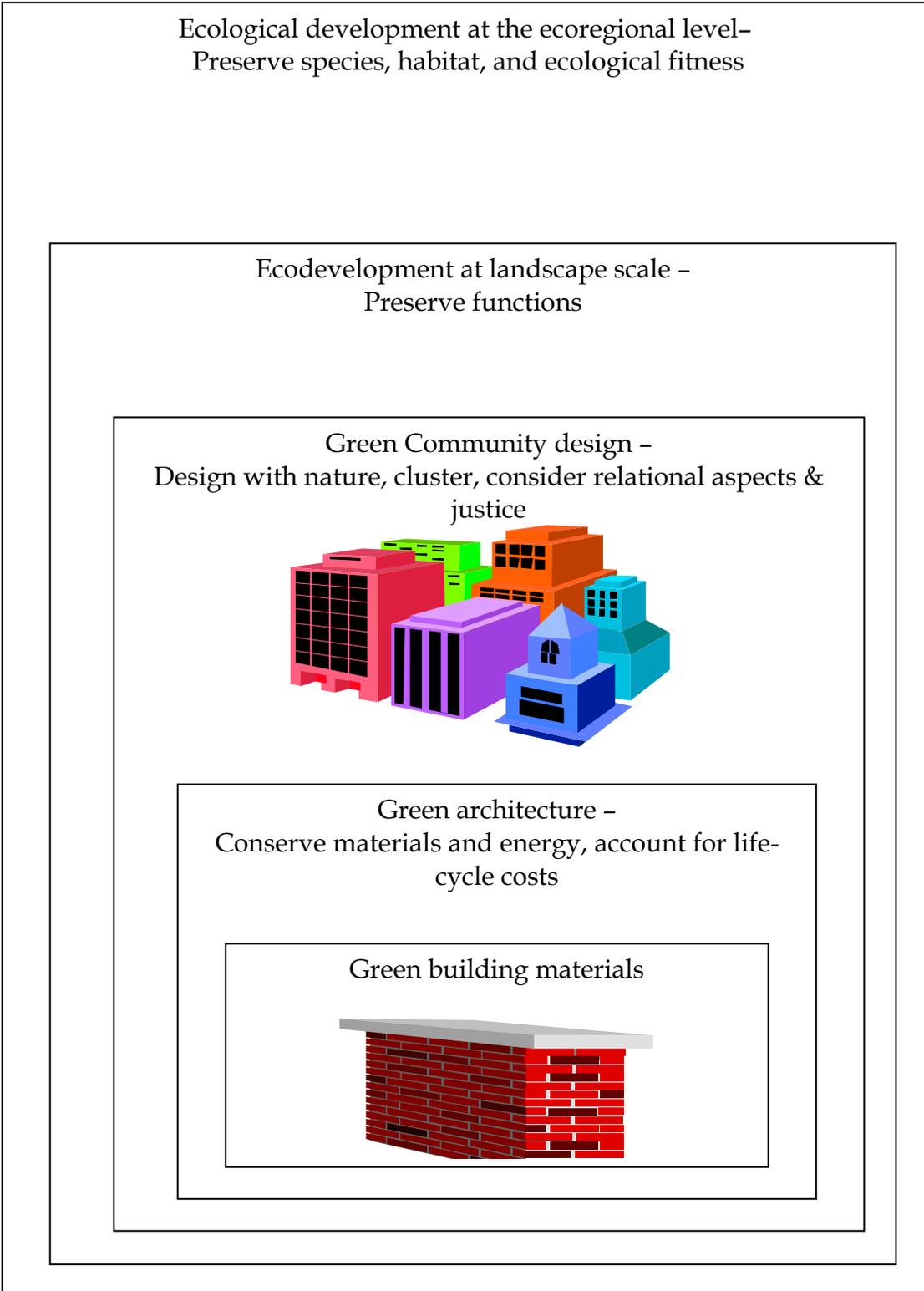


Figure 4. Nested, relational aspects of ecological development - each of these five aspects would be considered in every development decision.

Many sustainable development strategies are being tried, but there has been little or no evaluation of their impacts on the lives of other species. Furthermore, the tracking of cumulative and systemic impacts is not embedded in theory or practice. The cutting edge of this field is fast moving, and these social experiments are being carried out in advance of the scholarly literature and before reflecting on the lessons of practitioners. We need to connect the scholars with communities of advanced practice in order to integrate insights and jointly create a set of critical indicators of success.

### The Concept of Ecological Development

My use of the term *ecological development* was inspired by a talk by Wes Jackson of the Land Institute. I remember sitting up straight the moment I heard him use the term *ecological agriculture*. I thought to myself, could there possibly be ecological development? One of my committee members had asked a simple question during my comprehensive examination that I could not respond to: Is there any such thing as good development? I was absolutely speechless. I could not think of one thing. The only thing I could think about was stopping development to protect nature.

Since that time, I have thought about just what ecological development might look like. Below I have outlined some of the pieces – a framework, principles, and so on – that would be part of ecological development. For now, these are very preliminary ideas, in an embryonic stage, to advance my own

thinking and foster further dialogue. The process of moving toward ecological development – which I envision as a series of nested dialogues – will be as important as getting there. The definition of ecological development would emerge from this process.

Framework. We must get the frame right, and that must be at the ecoregional level.<sup>27</sup> We must consider planetary<sup>28</sup> and subplanetary ecological fitness and the effects of development on the lives of other species. We would need to take a systemic approach<sup>29</sup> based on open dialogue and flow of critically reflective information and thinking. The framework of the debate would follow that of deliberative democracy<sup>30</sup> and embrace and expand Denis Goulet's notion of integral or authentic development (Goulet 1995).

Principles. We will need a set of principles to help guide discussions and decisions. A good example is the precautionary principle long used in Europe. This principle is one of taking the most conservative path when faced with uncertainty. Holism would be another such overall principle for development.

Report card. We would need a way to evaluate the results and report what we were doing. In Figure 5, I present a simple (and preliminary) continuum of development placed within an ecological hierarchy of needs from most preferred to least preferred options. The development hierarchy would be

analogous to the “reduce, reuse, recycle” scale for consumption and solid-waste issues. This continuum could be used as a simple “report card”<sup>31</sup> to help local communities--as well as regional, state, and federal agencies--immediately “see” where a proposed development fits on the list. Without harsh judgment, yet while still considering planetary limits, we could become more conscious and mindful in our daily practice about the ramification of our choices.

Hierarchy of Preferences	Consumption Options	Development Options
Most preferred action 	No consumption	No development
	Reduce consumption Consumption to meet vital human needs	Green line
	Reuse materials	Adaptive reuse Historic preservation

<sup>27</sup>See the Great Lakes work of the Nature Conservancy (Conservancy 1994) including the cutting-edge work of the Michigan chapter.

<sup>28</sup>See James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis(Lovelock 1979; Lovelock 1992, 1995).

<sup>29</sup>See the work of Richard Bawden and others.

<sup>30</sup>For example, see the work of (Gutmann and Thompson 1996).

<sup>31</sup>I am developing this as a small card with the hierarchy on one side and a series of questions for communities to ask when facing development decisions on the other. This is part of the work I am doing under a cooperative agreement with the USDA Forest Service’s Central Station in Evanston, Illinois.

Least preferred action	Recycle materials	Infill development Use high-quality materials Long-term mortgages Assembling buildings
	Landfill Incinerate Litter	New development

Figure 5. Continuum of development within an ecological hierarchy of needs.

Cumulative impacts and irreversible damage. We do not have community decision processes that allow or afford discussion of these larger dimensions. We can turn to the lessons from the civic environmentalism movement to help us move forward in our dialogue. We will need to learn how to work through the discomfort of conflict and learn to hear voices other than our own: those from the past reminding us of our natural heritage, and those of other cultures, future generations, and other species reminding us of their value and needs as part of the chain of life.

Clearness committees. Quakers<sup>32</sup> have a tradition of clearness committees. When someone is faced with a tough decision, he or she can call for a clearness committee. The role of committee members is to gently ask questions, but never

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<sup>32</sup>The formal name of the Quakers is the Religious Society of Friends.

to advise. I suggest we create clearness communities to ask decision-makers and developers questions that can help them become more conscious of aspects affecting the lives of other species. I envision these committees being nested up through the state and federal policy network.

A primary goal of this dissertation was to open the door to dialogue and not close it. My intention with this chapter was to add some reflections and corrections to our practices and ways of thinking about and doing development. Below I suggest a series of questions for ecological development clearness committees that arose in my mind during my research:

- What would it take to conduct development in a holistic, multidimensional, and deep ecological framework?
- How can we change our policies and practices and ways of making decisions so that we can "see" the real impacts of proposed projects on the lives of other creatures?
- Can we issue building permits that are safer and more nurturing for all living beings?
- How do we become more conscious of where decisions are made, using what information and criteria, and by whom?
- How do we put in place mechanisms to articulate, measure, and monitor ecological fitness?
- What tools and techniques are available to ensure that our processes to make land decisions are democratic, pluralistic, open, and fair?

- Is there a role for land-ethics committees to help think about and make decisions about the land?
- How do we adjust our planning and building codes of ethics so they do not leave out the lives of other species?
- Is there a need to oversee the work of real estate developers and the important role they play in the future of our landscape?
- What would it take to establish ecological training for developers, planners, and local and county officials responsible for land transformation?
- How can we more widely distribute information and guidance for using “green” building products?

### Island Thinking

To have ecological development, we would need to think like an island. The notion of using an island metaphor came to me as I began my research into the ethics of development on islands in the Great Lakes. I was immediately drawn to the usefulness of the clear, unmistakable boundaries of an actual island. Conflict about whether and how to develop an island is easier to discuss than on the mainland because the effects of the decisions can be "experienced" personally through imagination, and understood within a spatial scale that seems human. For example, a proposal to build camping facilities on a wild island clearly brings out the cultural requirements--such as electricity, plumbing, and waste disposal--that will transform the island. An island's land area is understood as

*finite*, and that means that we can understand that we must make decisions within limits. Another benefit is that, by using an island metaphor, we can better understand and consider development impacts on other species as well as people living in the future. If we pave over every inch of the island, survival is doomed. The island metaphor helps to bound a seemingly unbounded natural world, and forces us to deal with the ethical implications of development decisions.

It is important to voice a caution when using an island metaphor. Obviously, neither natural nor cultural processes begin nor end at the island's edge. Indeed, the notion of an island, if used improperly, could impair holistic thinking. But by keeping this limitation in mind, the island metaphor can still help frame development discussions to include difficult concepts. When using an island metaphor, we "place" each development decision in the context of an island. The clear geographic boundaries constrain and amplify the implications of how we value things and make choices. Clearly, our biological and ecological needs are preeminent, and our cultural structures need to support life-giving processes. We cannot pave every inch, or have unlimited children. We cannot consume as much as we would like, or get away from or avoid our neighbors. We must live within our means, and find ways to live peacefully and collaboratively.

During the interviews, developers mentioned the finite limits of land ("they aren't making any more of it") while being vague about other limits. For

example, one developer thought we had about another 50 years before we would begin to feel real limits (D15). When D2 talked about running out of gravel, I asked him what he thought would happen when we run out. He said,

What's going to happen? There are other products out there that people use. They tend to be more expensive right now, but in 20 years, who knows? Maybe we'll have everything all developed. I don't know. Everyone is going to have to adapt and adjust as things go along. The sandpits, the gravel pits will eventually start to close up. We are developing a subdivision right now in an old gravel pit. We pretty much extracted all the gravel that we can. We've even gone below the water line and extracted it, turned it into a lake subdivision. We're working on that right now. All of a sudden, we no longer have a gravel pit.

If we begin to think like an island and through the lens of a deep ecologist, cultural violence toward nature becomes clear. People respond to the concept of an island. They intuitively understand about limits and choices. They see that they cannot do and have everything on an island. They understand the need for balance and harmony. Right now, I think we literally do not know what we are doing. Our nation seems so vast, and the boundaries are not clear. As we learn more, we can become more conscious of what we are doing. We will understand we have gradually lost vital cultural understandings that provide vital, self-sustaining links--through the land--with the living Earth. We have become disconnected from the farmlands and forests. Instead of keeping our biophysical selves healthy by working in the fields to grow food, we schedule in time at the gym for runs on artificial "roads," lifting steel "tree limbs," and swimming in chlorinated "lakes."

As long as we think we can escape, we can avoid dealing with problems. Yet even if we cannot run, some will try to hide their heads in the sand or, worse, get out their rifles. Dealing with limits is not going to be easy or without pain, but it is necessary. I have carried an image in my mind for more than twenty years that reminds me of the importance of space at a visceral level. The image came from a passage in John Hersey's *My Petition for More Space*. The book is a futuristic novel about a time when humans have so populated the Earth that they live in ten-by-fourteen-foot spaces in shared housing without walls. During the course of the book, the protagonist is standing in line for days with a petition for more space. He and his wife are struggling with privacy issues, and he thinks that if he can just get a slightly larger space they will be much happier. While standing in line, people are touching front and back. They have long conversations but are too crowded to be able to turn around and look at one another.

One passage in Hersey's novel has stayed in my mind so clearly that I recently bought a used copy to see whether I was remembering it correctly. When I located the passage, I found it as dramatic, chilling, and poetic twenty years later. I suspect this passage still stirs my sense of urgency:

I can see the upper part of the wall enclosing the Green. It is a long time since I have stood at the windows in that wall, looking in: at the empty grass, crosscut and gleaming; the score of majestic maples, standing apart, whose leaves turn to each other on stirring air, I think, and whisper, "Forest! Forest! Forest, brother leaf!"; the vaulting wire cages with great murmurations of sparrows in them; the three nineteenth-century churches ... their spires pointing the way to uninhabited regions above. The public

is not admitted inside the wall. The Green--green space, a museum of openness. The lines of citizens waiting on pavements to get to the windows in that wall, just to gaze at the emptiness within, are the longest in the whole city. One can only hope to look through the windows into the Green on a rest day. I have not attempted it for nearly a year. (Hersey 1976, p.4)

We Are All Part of the Story of Land Transformation

In a funny way, there is no such thing as a “real estate developer”; there is a real estate development process. Just by doing it, anyone can be a developer. Developers have incredible impact on the size, shape, and functioning of our built environment and nature, yet I found that there are no educational requirements, no licenses or regulations, or professional associations to guide or govern the real estate developer.

Yet in another way we are all real estate developers because we are responsible for the landscape change around us. We are all implicated in because we belong to a culture that reveres development. We have moved out of the city to buy houses with three-car garages or for some perceived advantage for our children. We avoid taking part in decisions regarding planning and zoning issues in our communities. We do not know the content of our community’s master plan. Most of us do not even vote anymore. Within our own small world, we stay locked up as tightly and completely as we can. I understand, for it is exhausting to venture forth. But venture forth we must. Each time we open our pocketbooks we cast our votes, and decisions are still made at the meetings we do not attend.

## Final Thoughts from the Field

As I drove an hour and a half to what became my second-to-last interview, tears and strong emotions punctuated my words as I dictated these field notes:

It is August 14<sup>th</sup> of 2002, and I am driving to what may be my last interview for my dissertation. I am feeling very emotional about ending this project that has been so much a part of my life for five years. I have learned and grown so very much, opened and broadened and walked on edges that are not for the faint of heart. But it is at those very edges that we must walk if we are to have a world for our grandchildren and their grandchildren's grandchildren, while saving and creating places for other species to live and grow and have their grandchildren and their grandchildren's grandchildren!

So what is at that edge in my work? The edge between the way things are and the way the human mind imagines they could and should be. Those two pieces are critically important to understand. While we can do very, very many things, the conversations about what should happen bring us to a ragged, painful edge. As those conversations are now structured, there is very little room for the voices of other living species. Those voices are heard when there are laws that stop certain actions such as protecting wetlands and endangered species, which I heard a great deal about from the developers. Local planning and zoning ordinances help modify the intensity of human development; at least that was the idea. Yet my research shows there are fundamental flaws such as hidden incentives within the planning ethic and process that portend rapid development.

Last night I went to the monthly meeting of the East End Condominium Association of which I am an owner. It was very clear in that meeting that shallow ecology is the norm in the American culture. Not only do people not see connections to the lives of other species, but also they do not see their connections to their own neighbors, nor do we have skills to discuss and handle conflicts when needs or interests clash. We certainly do not have ways to talk about development that is protective of nature. As a culture we have no idea how either our Earth works or that we are part of that living, changing process. We have incredible ignorance about even simple things like botany and geology. We seem to lack fear of the pesticides sitting on shelves next to the packets of seeds.

People who bought condominiums here bought in a heavily wooded development, yet so many would take down all the trees and plant grass. One homeowner complained about weeds next to her driveway. I guess to be “beautifully green” she must see red fescue or Kentucky blue, not English plaintain. In the unkempt vegetation behind my home I see bees and moths dance. What lives in her manicured lawn? Does she know that, as Rachel Carson showed us, it comes at the cost of all of living nature? Is this what she chooses, or has she just forgotten? I know we cannot force others to care about losing nature for its own sake. However, we can try to show them that losing nature of necessity carries with it the loss of human life, like lemmings marching en mass off the edge of the cliff.

I want to say a word about affordable housing. Many of the actions that will be protective of the last remains of undeveloped land will include redevelopment and infilling in urban areas, which will undoubtedly increase property values and taxes, which are inhabited by the poor right now. All efforts at redevelopment must take into account the lives of the people that currently live there. We must find new, creative ways to protect people on fixed incomes from losing the homes that they care for and have lived in for a long time. We must also think about the young people and have programs to help them buy homes within guidelines that move them toward redevelopment and restoration of decayed areas and neighborhoods so that when their children are born they will have improved that community. We cannot afford to have much more open land development in our nation or world. We have over 6 billion people inhabiting our planet, and many believe that number is already beyond the limits of our planet. Dieoffs, starvation, and mass disease are evident, and perhaps even war.

I do believe that if we do not address these incredibly complex and critically important land transformation issues, we will have civil war on our soils. I suspect that we will have the Wild West return. With our narrow notion of property as private property disconnected from the human community and nature, this is not a worldview that is sustainable.

I am imagining now my defense and trying to have my colleagues walk in my shoes. I imagine having a box of beach sand and asking someone to shovel that sand. Then I would ask them to feel their hands on that shovel, feel their head connected to their shoulders connected to their arms to their hands, feel their feet, smell the air, see the ivy at the window, see the birds that inhabit the ivy. I want them to understand that if we are

disconnected from our feminine, relational bodily experiences and live our lives and plan our world only through the intellect, the linear, masculine part, that we will lose our natural instinctive ways that connect us to the larger story to which we all are cast and characters. We must do development as an embodied activity with beauty and aesthetics walking with us. The plight of the animals must be foremost in our minds as we keep writing and creating the narrative of our lives.

Some things about the solutions will not be fair. Contemporary landowners and speculators of large tracts of land will have to bear more than their share of the “cost.” Such are the vagaries of the crapshoot of when, where, and to whom we are born – there is no choice of the fortunes or famine laid out before us. Our society will have to reimburse some of those costs if we are to avoid spending the next thousand years in the courtroom rather than actually protecting nature. I do believe the developers would be willing to consider and respect additional laws and regulations to protect nature if the science is there to support them. This means the science of conservation biology will need to be part of the next generation of laws and policies and be used to address the plight of the animals. (D14 fieldnotes)

### Signs of Hope

I am on the side of the grizzly sow and her two cubs in the south fork of Snowshoe Canyon; the mountain lion who tracked my favorite Escalante hollow; the raven cooing at me while I shave on my porch; the ticks that cling to me each spring when I climb Blacktail Butte; the Glover’s silk moth fighting the window pane; the pack rat that lives in my sleeping cave on the saddle between the Grand and Middle Tetons and scurries across my sleeping bag at night; the wind roaring in the mountains; the persistent virus that knocked me down this winter; the crystalline light that greets me when I step outdoors; the starry sky. I see no need to apologize for my preferences any more than those who prefer modern urban culture apologize for their preferences. As Thoreau said, there are enough champions of civilization. What we need now is a culture that deeply loves the wild earth. (Turner 1996, p. xvii)

I see signs of hope: frail bicycles clinging to the fronts of huge buses; awards on prime-time television for movie star animal-rights activists; and self-

professed “right-wing” developers pushing local planning commissioners to accept terrain-hugging, multi-use, and multigenerational developments.

Conversations are happening, and change is in the air. If Richard Norgaard is right – and let us hope he is – social learning, like coevolutionary forces in nature, not only will happen but also *are* happening (Norgaard 1994).

As I utter those words, my hearts cries, but will this be enough to address the plight of the animals? We cannot wait for the next generation. We must invest significant amounts of money to purchase the remaining wildlife habitat, buy up the Last Great Places, and tie up land for the grizzly. We need to increase the numbers and conditions of laws and regulations to protect nature. We must create new tax laws to increase incentives to developers, planners, and local communities to do their work in ways that are least harmful. We can create new partnerships linking communities with ecoregional efforts. The Nature Conservancy has spent ten or more years developing and investing in community-based activities, and several of them are now being implemented in the Great Lakes ecoregion. We need to build on that work and ensure that our planning and zoning regulations become ecologically fit. Nature should not be an optional layer in our geographic information systems.

The road ahead, like all roads, is never ending. The road ahead, like all roads, is not straight. The road ahead, like all roads, holds promise for a better tomorrow. But we need to stay centered and deeply present so that as we take

each step along this road we will make decisions based in consciously articulated values within an informed, thoughtful, and inclusive decision framework.

In the Time of the Butterfly Yet to Come

Every artist must choose between fighting for freedom or slavery. I have made my choice. There is no turning back.

Words on Paul Robeson's tombstone

I started out by describing how the books on my coffee table show my suitability for the task of examining the struggles between nature and culture. Conducting this study profoundly agitated my internal struggle of wanting them both because I had to traverse a squishy, frightening liminal space that never quite seem able to hold them both at the same time. When I started writing this dissertation, I could not have started the abstract with the words "as a deep ecologist." I felt shame to care as much about a baby manatee as I did a human child, and someone I admire and care about has vilified me for this. But as I read and reflected, I became aware that I have always been a deep ecologist. I did not choose this, decide to be this way, I just am. By expressing this here and now, I am merely being true to myself.

I am struggling to learn how to live as a deep ecologist while staying connected to those who are not. Like Paul Robeson, I choose to fight for freedom. I seek to topple the values, norms, and ways of life that render nature invisible, silenced, managed, damaged, and unable to survive as *the wild*. I seek

liberation from ignorance while withholding harsh judgment of others. I believe in the value and possibility of a just peace between people and other creatures. I choose to walk a path off the “treadmill of production” (Milbrath 1989), and to pick myself up, over and over and over again, when I stumble. I choose to have a vibrant, connected life. I choose to live with monarchs.

## EPILOGUE

### Deep Ecology and Environmental Pragmatism

During the oral defense of this dissertation, my committee asked for a few new paragraphs in three areas. Two of the new sections fit seamlessly into the body of the dissertation. One is the piece called “On Judging the Validity of this Work”, the section near the end of chapter three. Committee member and qualitative methodologist Laurie Thorp, herself a former student of Yvonna Lincoln, helped me thoughtfully and deeply reconsider the issue of validity. The second is a completely new piece on the culture of the real estate developer near the end of chapter five. Committee member and anthropologist Jacob Climo worked with me on that section. I sat down with him for several hours to tickle out the categories and discussion you find here. But the third new section was so fundamental to this dissertation that it needed to be treated differently, hence this epilogue.

During my oral defense, committee member and philosopher Martin Benjamin raised concerns about deep ecology, concerns I am familiar with and have been loathe to take on. As a philosophy or approach in the work-a-day world, many believe deep ecology is inherently problematic. Martin reminded me of the discussions of environmental pragmatism as an alternative to deep ecology and asked me to address this in an epilogue. The writing has languished. In the end I settled on writing about the personal meaning of deep

ecology and its role in relation to environmental pragmatism in terms of addressing environmental problems.

### Deep Ecology

When I first read the words of Arne Naess I felt like I had come home. As Naess might say, I felt an “Aha!” The concept of deep ecology, as I understood it, helped me explain, validate, and find peace with own my life experience. So what do we mean by deep ecology? Naess might shudder if I tried to closely define the term, for he prefers of a more intuitive understanding. Naess’s notion, first introduced in 1973, is full of interesting complexities and nuances, weaving together notions of community and ecology. What I present here are my own views of deep ecology deeply influenced by Naess.

As I understand it, the concept of deep ecology is rooted in connection, knowledge, and love of nature. Deep ecology holds that nature has intrinsic worth apart from its usefulness to humans. Humans are one element of nature, important but not “the whole story”. Deep ecology views the long-run consequences of the destructive human actions as rooted in a shallow ecology that views nature only in instrumental terms. I believe that the separation of the instrumental from intrinsic value of nature creates a conceptual schism between humans and nature that has led to human institutions that are unfit to sustain a full range of life on Earth.

A few stories from Naess's life might illustrate how a rather obscure philosopher from a very small country came to the concept that inspired, and continues to inspire, a global environmental movement<sup>33</sup>. Arne Naess, now in his eighties, is a philosopher and professor emeritus of the University of Oslo. Trygve Vigmstad, my own Norwegian father who is now deceased, seems to have shared many of Naess's interests and proclivities<sup>34</sup>. Norway is an astonishingly beautiful country whose people tend toward informality. Norway is long and narrow with mountains forming a spine the entire length. Mile-deep fjords of breathtaking beauty frequently cut the mountains. Norwegians live and revere what they call "the natural life". I remember looking into the baggage room at the Oslo train station only to see row after row of colorful backpacks without a suitcase in sight. On the weekends Norwegians head to nature.

Naess organized his life so he spent only two days a week in Oslo teaching and carrying out his professorial duties. Then he would board the train to Bergen to head home. I have been on this train, which reaches fairly high altitudes above the tree line passing through the beautiful land of glaciers. As far as you can see are scruffy wildflowers, low-lying heather, and lichen-covered rocks with an occasional blue-green glacial lake. When I was there in July there was still snow at the town of Geilo and people were cross-country skiing.

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<sup>33</sup> These are stories as I remember them from the fascinating biography, "Is it Painful to Think? Conversations with Arne Naess" by David Rothenberg.

<sup>34</sup> See Reed and Rothenberg's edited *Wisdom of the Open Air: The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology*.

I do not know which small town Naess would come to, but he would get off the train and then, as his biographer Rothenberg describes, walk three hours to his home in the wilderness mountains. This home was lined with philosophy books but has no central heat or water. I recall Naess would wake up in the morning and jump up and down to get warm. This reminded me of my own father who, as a child in Norway, would break the ice on the wash basin so he could wash his face. Naess was at home in the mountains and he was a superb mountaineer of some reputation. Naess didn't create an abstract notion of deep ecology; he lived deep ecology.

Figure 6. A shallow ecological lens within a deep ecology.

This illustration, drawn for me by friend and illustrator Barbara Hranilovich, captures my understanding of the difference between the concepts of a deep and shallow ecology. At the left you see someone, who could be a developer, looking at nature. What he “sees” through a shallow ecological lens is the deer that he may want to hunt, the wetlands and bald eagle that federal law requires he protect, and a few trees along the contours of the land he may develop. This shallow ecological lens screens out or is not aware of the fullness, richness, and connectedness of nature. His is a completely separate human life, or so he thinks.

An example of a shallow ecology might be the view of a commercial developer who buys land based on location, access to utilities and transportation, and other “objective” criteria. A shallow ecologist would not think about, or plan for or around, the creatures inhabiting that land. Their task, as I heard during my research, is to “assemble dirt” for human projects.

A person with a deep ecological view would “see” the creatures, the surrounding landscape, the pathways and connections, and the individual plants and animals and their communities. He or she would know how nature functions and feel connected to those functions. Soil would be a living organism; not dirt, but a rich microbial composter, taking leaf litter and decomposing it into rich soil. Without the workings of the bacteria in soil, we would drown in leaf litter and animal waste.

A person with a deep ecological view could not, would not, make decisions in a distant boardroom based purely on numbers. Decisions would be made by walking the land, imagining the land's future in the context of the larger ecoregion, and by studying its natural history and relative importance in the ecoregion. The subjective experience of the land and its inherent qualities would have weight. Sometimes the land might not be developed but protected due to some inherent value such as the presence of representative or endemic species.

I juxtapose the shallow and the deep in this rather idealized version to illuminate fundamental differences. Deep and shallow ecology are not separate things, but different views, understandings, imaginings, dimensions, and experiences of the same thing. The two people might even come to the same conclusion on whether to go ahead with a particular development proposal. To me the value and essential importance of this distinction is that it helps us discern our underlying intentions as well as more fully comprehend the consequences of our choices and actions. As an environmental professional and policy maker for 20 years, I have rarely seen measures that truly account for the lives of other species. The human environment yes, but not for nature. The shallow ecological lens renders nature invisible and is an example of Galtung's notion of cultural violence.

## More than a Matter of Words

With all that said, there are some important issues that need to be addressed. The words *shallow* and *deep* sound judgmental when translated from Norwegian into English. I do not believe this is Naess's intention. Naess, if nothing else, embraces complexity. As is my own penchant, Naess would prefer exploring and mulling over complexity rather than try to reduce it.

But if the problem with the concept of a deep and shallow ecology were only word choice, then we might try taking out the sense of judgement by talking about a wide versus a focused ecology, or a maximum and a minimum, or an encompassing and restricted. From the language of ethnography, one might think of a thick ecology versus a thin. While this might help to some extent, it probably is not enough.

Another problem with deep ecology is that it is a practically unrecognizable concept in our highly utilitarian culture. At first glance this seems to weaken the practical value of the concept of deep ecology. Utilitarianism places supreme value on the instrumental value and use of something. During my years studying the process of real estate development and experiencing communities struggle to make development decisions, I saw our cultural prevalence of a utilitarian ethic or philosophy toward land and its development in action. Imagine this: a public hearing regarding a proposed development. The developer stands and has a thick report outlining all aspects of the development with pages and tables and charts filled with numbers

showing just how strong the finances are just how much money – and more importantly jobs<sup>35</sup> – will result. A citizen stands up to talk about a bird nesting in a tree in the woods that will be cut down. He or she can promise no jobs, no money, and no human improvement. He or she doesn't own the land or any right to the land. He or she cannot even promise that by not doing the development the community will actually help that bird. I suspect you can sense the near ridiculousness of the situation and how the power of persuasion lines up with the numbers.

Now I have never known anyone to actually follow up to see how many jobs were created. I have never heard of any follow-up evaluations to see if outcomes matched promises. Interesting numbers are bantered around like in Ingham County where the economic development director said that for every new job something like \$5 million per year would be added to the community. When I asked where that figure came from, I was told someone did a study that showed this type of multiplier effect. I found it hard to believe.

Similarly, I never heard of anyone keeping track of the costs of increased traffic, pollution, noise, loss of open space, and other “by products” of development. Current social and political movements to fight sprawl may in

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<sup>35</sup> I learned that jobs are important not only because towns want to grow, but because people want to secure jobs for their children once they graduate from high school or college.

time try to do a better job of balancing the benefits with the costs<sup>36</sup>. Regardless, deep ecology's concern with species and natural communities is rarely part of the equation.

### Environmental Pragmatism

In professional discussions, environmental ethicists have increasingly called for a shift toward adopting philosophical frameworks that can more directly address actual environmental problems (e.g., Light and Katz 1996; Minter and Manning 2000; Retina 1998). Light and Katz (1996) begin their edited volume lamenting that while environmental philosophers have made strong strides in their ethical analyses, "it is difficult to see what practical effect the field of environmental ethics has had on the formation of environmental policy". Light and Katz share my angst about the state of our biosphere:

We are deeply concerned about the precarious state of the natural world, the environmental hazards that threaten humans, and the maintenance of long-term sustainable life on this planet."

They frankly state that it is "imperative that environmental philosophy, as a discipline, address this crisis – its meaning, its causes and its possible resolution". Minter and Manning (2000) agree:

Noting that the emphasis of protracted conceptual battles over axiology may not get us very far in solving environmental problems, many environmental ethicists have begun to advocate a more pragmatic,

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<sup>36</sup> Philosopher Peter Singer (1991; 1993) has successfully used utilitarian arguments for the inclusion of all sentient creatures based in their capacity to feel pain. What I'm addressing here is what I find actually talked about in communities.

pluralistic, and policy-based approach in philosophical discussions about human-nature relationships.

They argue that rather than apply “monistic” ethical theories, one should start with environmental policy dilemmas and then experiment with and use ethical theory. They support a pluralistic notion of searching through a range of “moral programs” to find the one can best help “resolve policy contests”.

The solution, as Light and Katz and many other agree, is for environmental ethics “to develop for itself a methodology of *environmental pragmatism*” which they define as the “open-ended inquiry into the specific real-life problems of humanity’s relationship with the environment.” Light and Katz also call for moral pluralism, which they say are “central aspects of our conception of environmental pragmatism”. They view pragmatism as a “strategy” consisting of “a cluster of related and overlapping concepts, rather than...a single view.”

Pragmatism has its origins in the work of John Dewey, William James, Charles Sanders Pierce, and others and is anti-foundational, experimental, and contextual (Minteer and Manning 2000). Reitan (1998) talks of pragmatism as a “distinctively American philosophical school which, roughly, holds that our ideas, theories, and worldviews should be examined and evaluated in the light of their impact on lived experience.” He traces the assumption of a link between worldview and behavior – such as a consumerist society treating nature as property – to pragmatism, especially William James. James believed that

worldview is not only an important determinant of behavior, but “has more direct impact on how we live our lives than any other single thing.” To help us out, Reitan suggests using two of James’s principles, the *criterion of meaning* – what way of life something produces – and *the criterion of truth* – how well something allows us to live our lives – as guides. He then details the ways in which the modern worldview fails based on these criteria.

### Don’t Throw the Baby Out with the Bath Water

Environmental pragmatism will help address troubling environmental problems and conflicts. However, I do not believe it is sufficient. While the pluralistic approach of Light and Katz and others do not screen out deep ecology, their push for “systematic understanding of these values in all their multiplicity, complexity, and indeterminacy” needs a standpoint. In my own work as an environmental policymaker and mediator, I have always considered myself a pragmatic idealist. As these new environmental pragmatists would agree, opportunities to make decisions about nature never happen in an idealized neutral setting. These decisions are always made within a particular context with a particular set of people in organizations or with personal interests and a particular point in time.

While recognizing the limits of deep ecology, I do believe we can embrace and employ its strengths. I believe that deep ecology is needed to get the framework right. Nothing more, nothing less. While deep ecology may not be

able to tell us what decision to make, it can easily show us when we go astray, when our direction is wrong, and what indicators may be needed to keep us on track. All we have to do as we begin and end environmental decisions is ask a very simple question: But what about nature? This question might never come up using a purely pluralistic environmental pragmatism.

I believe that deep ecology should be the first and last screen for decisions affecting nature. We need this lens to see the larger context without which our work has little meaning or direction. We need to know the full purchase price, as it were, of activities that transform the land from one use to another or increase the intensity of use and thus making less available for the lives of other species. I believe we need the perspective of a deep ecology in order to accommodate this, understand what we are leaving out, and to “see” and correct our strong utilitarian bent.

Furthermore, I think all of this needs to be conscious and on the table. We need to openly discuss the effects and costs. We need to fully realize when we are ignoring or willingly destroy habitat that supports the life of other species. We need to know and admit that is what we are doing. We might still take a destructive action, but without whitewashing the circumstances. These questions grow out of a deep ecological view. Pressing further with this view has us ask, where do the birds and animals now live, and where will they live or die if this plan is implemented?

I do not suggest that the situation be viewed as either nature or humans. As Naess himself encourages, we need to think in terms of both nature *and* humans. I care about the loss of wildlands for people. I deeply care about people and spend each day in close and loving relations with others. At the same time, I also care about the loss of wildland for the wildlands themselves, regardless of their use or value to humans. I ache for the wild, for the wild places and wild creatures whose land area grows smaller every day. If I did not view the world through the lens of a deep ecologist, one who feels connected to and holds dear the living Earth, I might never even notice how infrequently we ask, “But what about nature?”

### Postscript

A few days ago I lost my friend and committee member Jacob Climo to cancer. He had fought the cancer for over a year. Recently his health had declined. I knew he might not be strong enough to make it to my graduation, but I did not think he was going to die. Jacob and I got to be friends by meeting together every Tuesday morning from 9 a.m. until 11 for over a year. He taught me qualitative research methods. He loved that I could incorporate deep ecology – using a normative-empirical approach, as Martin termed it – into my work consciously, thoughtfully, and with reflexivity. Jacob helped me do that. He shared these values. He was a friend of the Earth. I believe that if he had to die, he was pleased that he left us on Earth Day.

Last summer when Jacob was going through chemotherapy, I would sometimes go sit with him in his family room over looking his backyard and talk. When he was real sick we would talk about his cancer, other times about my dissertation, and, when he began to feel better late summer, about his own work. One day he was feeling particularly strong so we took a slow walk down his street in the sunshine. Jacob's yard was huge and filled with trees, shrubs, and an assortment of wildlife. His neighborhood had quite a bit of "undeveloped" communal land and much of it was behind his house. One day his neighbors were excited and talking about clearing out the underbrush to create trails and turn the woods into a park. Jacob questioned this, asking, why not just leave the area alone? The neighbors said it wasn't being used. Jacob said yes it was, the animals are using it. Thank you, Jacob.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Fax Cover Sheet

**Karen E. Vigmostad, Doctoral Candidate**  
2507 Bentley Court, East Lansing, MI 48823-2972  
517/339-2202 FAX 517/339-1165

# Fax

To: [Developer's full name]	From: Karen E. Vigmostad
Fax: [Developer's fax number]	Pages: 3 (including cover)
Phone: [Developer's telephone number]	Date: 4/1/2004
Re: Dissertation interview	CC:

Urgent     For Review     Please Comment     Please Reply     Please Recycle

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● Comments:

Dear [first name of developer],

Attached is the purpose statement and consent form that details the reasons why I would like to interview you and just how everything would work. The form may seem quite formal, but the University requires us to take this approach so we protect your rights to privacy. I would love to include your perspective in my study!

Please feel free to call me at 517/339-2202 to set up an appointment. I will follow-up in a day or two if I don't hear from you, and thanks!

Yours truly,

[Signed with my first name]

APPENDIX B

Purpose Statement and Consent Form

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCE  
DEVELOPMENT

Karen E. Vigmostad, Doctoral Candidate 517/339-2202 vigmo@msu.edu

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CONSENT FORM  
DISSERTATION RESEARCH 2002

**Purpose of study:** Over the next few months I will be interviewing the top 15 to 25 Michigan real estate developers. The purpose of this research is to better understand the process of real estate development. While there have been studies of development in the past, as far as I know this will be the first study from the “eyes” of the developer. In addition to the interviews, I have been reviewing books, reports, guidebooks (e.g., Urban Land Use Institute publications), and autobiographies and biographies of developers in the United States. The results will be published in my dissertation and possibly in other publications such as academic journals, conference proceedings, and books. I will also distribute findings in other ways such as to developers, planners and local officials. If you have any questions about this study, please feel to contact Dr. Frank A. Fear, chair of my guidance committee, at 517/432-0734 or via email at fear@msu.edu.

**Your involvement:** I would like to talk with you for about an hour to an hour-and-a-half. I realize this is a sizable time commitment, but I have found it is the best way to get beyond a surface understanding. I will meet you at a time and location convenient to you, and suggest that we meet at your office or some place where you can feel comfortable and free to talk and relax. I am interested in learning about your *actual personal experiences* as a developer. You do not need to do anything in advance to prepare, and, of course, there are no right or wrong answers. I trust we will have a relaxed and interesting conversation as you *share stories* of your experiences as a real estate developer. The first few developers in a previous pilot study said they really enjoyed the opportunity to sit back and think about and reflect on their work. If you want, you could think ahead about one project that holds particular meaning for you and another that doesn't. We will talk in three areas:

- *How you became a developer and what it is like to be a developer.*
- *How you select projects and what they mean to you.*
- *Any thoughts you might have on issues of “sustainability”.*

YOUR RIGHTS AND MY RESPONSIBILITIES

I adhere to particular ethical standards and practices regarding my conduct before, during, and after our interview as described below. This is done to protect your right to privacy.

**Voluntary:** Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You may end our discussion at anytime for any reason, or decline to answer any question or any part of any question, without penalty.

**Confidentiality:** I will keep your identity confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law. While your *words* might be directly quoted, your *name* will not be associated with the words nor appear in any published materials or reports. I will keep my notes in a file cabinet in my office, and I will be the only one with access. When I write up my findings, I will probably assign a pseudonym for clarity to the reader. For example, you may become a Jack Jones or Susan Gray.

**Tape recording and written transcripts:** With your permission, I would like to tape record our conversation. This will allow me to listen closely to what you say rather than take extensive notes. As a social scientist, *what you say* is my “data” and the cornerstone of my work. You may decline to be tape-recorded, or ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any point, for any question or part of any question, and for any reason. I will be the only person with access to the tapes, which will be kept in a filing cabinet in my private office. A professional transcriptionist will transcribe the tapes, but she will not know your identity. The tapes will have a number or pseudonym on them, not your actual name. I will destroy the tapes after I check the quality of the transcription and finish my dissertation. I will keep the written transcripts for an indefinite period for use in future research and publications, but I will be the only one with access and the transcripts will not include your name.

**Your rights:** If you have questions about your rights in the research process, please contact Dr. Ashir Kumar, Chairperson of Michigan State University’s University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) at 517/355-2180.

**Consent:** If this research process is acceptable to you and you agree to participate, we will review and then both sign this form the day of the interview right before we begin. *Your signature* will indicate your consent to the interview, tape recording our conversation, and publishing of findings. *My signature* will indicate my commitment to keep your identity confidential and to uphold the terms of this agreement. In the meantime, if you have any questions please feel free to call me at 517/339-2202. I very much look forward to our time together.

Signed on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2002

\_\_\_\_\_  
Karen E. Vigmostad, Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

## DEVELOPER STUDY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### PART I: HOW S/HE BECAME A DEVELOPER; WHAT A DEVELOPER DOES

So how did you ever get *to be* a developer?

In your own words, what *is* development?

As a developer, what exactly do you *do*?

*Who* do you typically work with?

What about money, how do you typically *finance* a project?

Are there any particular *theories* or *principles* that guide you?

How do you find and obtain *land*?

What *natural resources* do you use? How do you *get* them?

What do you like best about being a developer? The least?

### PART II: SELECTION AND MEANING OF PROJECTS

Could you tell me how you *select* projects? What are you looking for?

What types of *information* do you use to select projects?

Do tax laws, zoning, and other "rules" *affect* your selection? How so?

How do you *know* when a project is a "go"?

Can you think of a project that was particularly *meaningful* to you?

Have you ever had any *regrets* about any of your projects? What I mean is, did anything turn out very differently than you had hoped in a disappointing sort of way?

### PART III: SUSTAINABILITY AND PROTECTION OF NATURE

I don't know if you have ever heard of the term, but some people talk about having "sustainable development". Their concern is with urban sprawl and loss of greenfields. What would *sustainable* development look like to you?

In my own work, I'm struggling with how we can have development *and* protect nature. Do you have any thoughts on this?

WRAP-UP

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what your life is like as a real estate developer?

APPENDIX D

Human Subjects Review Letter



APPENDIX E

National Association of Home Builders' Code of Ethics

## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HOME BUILDERS' CODE OF ETHICS

Members of the National Association of Home Builders believe and affirm that:

- Homeownership can and should be within reach of every American family.
- American homes should be well designed, well constructed, and well located in attractive communities, with educational, recreational, religious, and shopping facilities accessible to all.
- American homes should be build under the free American enterprise system.

To achieve these goals, we pledge allegiance to the following principles and policies:

- Our paramount responsibility is to our customer, our community, and our country.
- Honesty is our guiding business policy.
- High standards of health, safety, and sanitation shall be built into every home.
- Members shall deal fairly with their respective employees, subcontractors, and suppliers.
- As members of a progressive industry, we encourage research to develop new materials, new building techniques, new building equipment, and improve methods of home financing, to the end that every home purchaser may get the greatest possible value for every dollar.
- All sound legislative proposals affecting our industry and the people we serve shall have our informed and vigorous support.
- We hold inviolate the free enterprise system and the American Way of Life. We pledge our support to our associates, our local, state, and national associations, and all related industries concerned with the preservation of legitimate rights and freedoms.

We assume these responsibilities freely and solemnly, mindful that they are part of our obligation.