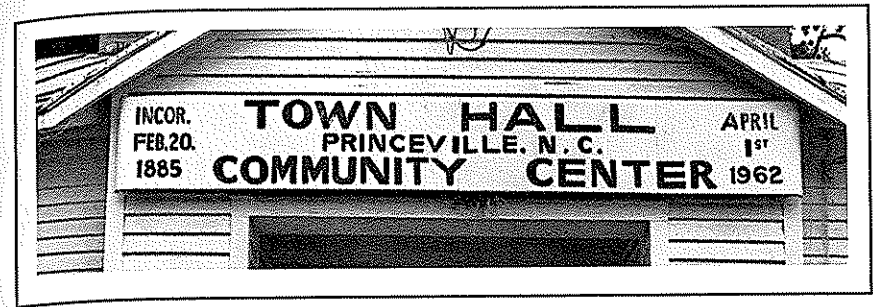


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"The People What Makes the Town": The Semiotics of Home and Town Spaces in Princeville, North Carolina

By Tyler Kendall

PRINCEVILLE, THE OLDEST BLACK TOWN IN AMERICA

In September of 1999, Princeville, North Carolina, was destroyed by the flooding Tar River as a result of Hurricane Floyd. It wasn't the first time that the oldest town incorporated by African Americans in the United States was destroyed by floods, but it was perhaps the most significant of those many times. As a result of the 1999 flood, national attention turned to this small, rural community. From media coverage such as National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* in 2004, to recognition by President Clinton, to being featured in a documentary (Rowe and Grimes) and a book (Halpern), Princeville was acknowledged as a place of great cultural and historical significance. In the months following the flood, despite encouragement that Princeville accept a government buy-out from FEMA, the residents of Princeville chose to remain in Princeville and to accept the hardships of rebuilding their increasingly recognized, historical homeplace (Rowe). In the words of one resident, they "wanted Princeville to continue to be Princeville" ("Braving Home").

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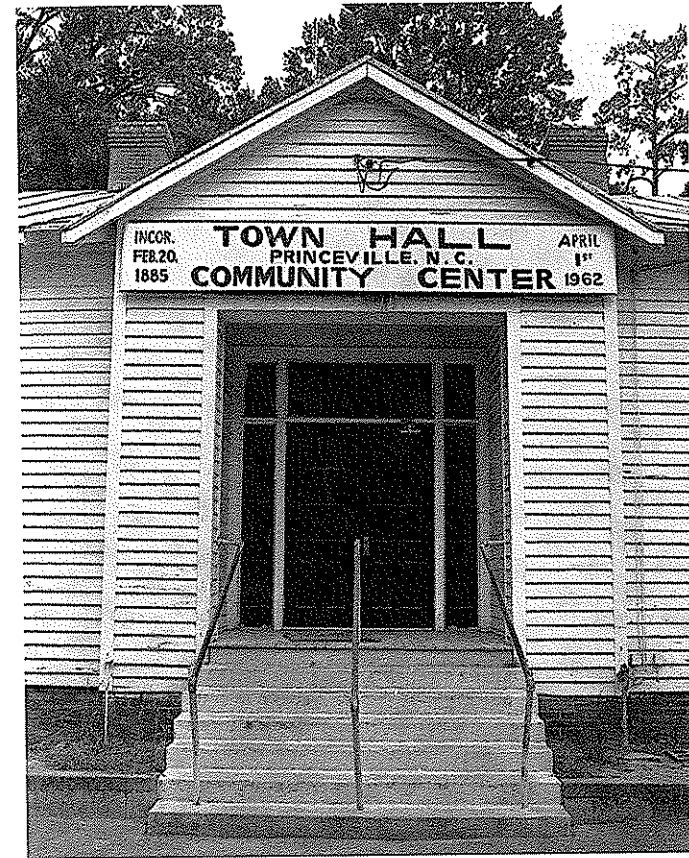
Frame Photo: The sign to Princeville's old town hall proudly lists the date of the town's incorporation.



Princeville's old town hall mostly submerged in the floodwaters of Hurricane Floyd, 1999. Photo Credit: The Town of Princeville, NC.

Princeville was founded in 1865 by freed slaves who settled on an unwanted flood plain along the Tar River, opposite the city of Tarboro, the county seat of Edgecombe County and a major city in post-Civil War North Carolina. Twenty years later, Princeville became the first municipality incorporated by African Americans in the United States. This incorporation was supported at first by the former slave owners and other white residents of the area, who valued the burgeoning African American community as a source of cheap labor. In the years following the town's incorporation, however, growing racist sentiment increasingly characterized Princeville as a source of white fear and suspicion, and white sentiment turned against the small but growing community (Mobley). Tarboro officials even attempted, unsuccessfully, to dissolve Princeville's charter. Despite all this, Princeville survived. Today, of its approximately 2,000 residents, over 98% are African American (Rowe).

Princeville's unique and troubled history positions the town as a site of rich cultural significance. The town and its population also present opportunities for a wide variety of social scientific inquiries. One line of questioning that is particularly inviting, but generally under-examined, lies in a rubric best described as "the semiotics of space." What do spaces and places mean to people? How do the residents of a place conceive of (and perceive) the spaces around them?



Princeville's old town hall before the flood. Photo Credit: Charlie Killebrew, Braswell Memorial Library, Killebrew Collection, Rocky Mount, NC.

Princeville in its post-Hurricane Floyd era is a fascinating place to ask these sorts of questions.

As Marcel Danesi notes, "the gist of the semiotic story is that cities, shelters, buildings, [and] communal sites invariably constitute codes" (142). The mud at the base of a tree, the fresh paint of a new home, the old town hall fenced off and awaiting renovation, these features of the town have meaning for its inhabitants. They are, in the parlance of semiotics, "codes." This paper attempts to unravel some of these meanings of place and space by examining discussions of Princeville by town residents and then considering these discussions in terms of some theoretical writings on the semiotics of space and place.

THE "EXPERIENTIAL PERSPECTIVE" AND "NARRATIVE-DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH" TO SPATIAL INQUIRY

If, following Danesi, "communal sites invariably constitute codes" (142), how does one study and interpret those codes? Research on space and place, both theoretical and empirical, cuts across a number of disciplines.¹ A primary thread that runs through the major theoretical work on spatial semiotics, however, is a lack of interest in the individual, both in regard to the role of the individual in the production of space and in the role of the individual in the perception of spatial signification. Yet, for the work here, and for spatial semiotics in general, understanding the relationships between the individual and spatial meaning is essential.

Yi-Fu Tuan, a prominent human geographer, has made some important inroads into the intersection of space and semiotics, especially as they impact the individual. In particular, Tuan's (1977) work on the "experiential perspective" in human geography is immensely helpful. He explores how humans gain their sense(s) of place and space starting in infancy and how these senses, or, rather, experientially derived conceptions of reality, in turn, affect the perception and conception of space. His examination starts with an anecdote, which is worth repeating as it exemplifies this experiential perspective. It explains how one's reception of the Kronberg Castle in Denmark is deeply tied to the castle's attribution as the home of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Without this world knowledge, a visitor to the castle may be struck by an appreciation for its architecture: namely, its sheer size and the fact that human hands built it. But knowing the castle's history (that is, accepting that a Hamlet actually did exist and did live there) changes the castle from simply an old, visually impressive building to an important and often emotionally charged stage for history (Tuan 4-5).

In another relevant paper, Tuan (1991) argues for a focus on the role of language in the creation of place, both in terms of the importance of language in human behavior (e.g., for organizing workers on a building project) and also the importance of language in the symbolic creation of place (that is, the imbuing of place with subjective "meaning"). In this work, an approach he calls "narrative-descriptive,"² Tuan argues that people "build place by verbal means [and that] changes in perception and attitude can seem to alter an environment more markedly than if it had been physically altered" (689). In short, the way we talk about a particular place influences the way we experience it, which in turn impacts the way we know that place.

Tuan's work provides us with a useful way to examine the conceptions, perceptions, and receptions of space among the residents of Princeville.³

THE NORTH CAROLINA LANGUAGE AND LIFE PROJECT INTERVIEWS

Since 2003, Princeville has been a research site of the North Carolina Language and Life Project (NCLLP)⁴ and the data for this study come primarily from recorded sociolinguistic interviews and meetings with inhabitants of the town. In addition to the recorded data from the NCLLP, I have also made some use of interviews with Princeville residents conducted by Jake Halpern for his book (2003) and radio series on National Public Radio (2004).⁵

For this examination, I focus on six individuals: a Town Administrator, a 39 year-old female who grew up just outside of the town limits and spent most of her life in Princeville⁶; a Police Officer, an early-middle-aged male, who lives elsewhere in the rural county, but has been a police officer in Princeville for a number of years (at least preceding the flood of 1999)⁷; AH, a middle-aged female, who was a town commissioner during the flood in 1999⁸; a County Administrator, a 45 year-old female who has lived in Princeville for over twenty years and spent most of her earlier life nearby in the county⁹; TK, a 74 year-old male, who has lived his entire life in or near Princeville and was "famously" among the first to return to Princeville after the flood¹⁰; and, BP, a 50 year-old woman, who works at the local convenience store (one of the only stores in Princeville).¹¹ All of the informants are African American.¹²

In the transcript excerpts below, I normalize most pronunciation to Standard English spellings (other than common spellings like "gonna" for "going to"), though I maintain morphosyntactic features of the speech (such as was-leveling, i.e., "was" for all positive past tense uses of the verb "to be", e.g., "they was over for dinner" for "they were over for dinner," and copula deletion, e.g., "she gonna tell you" for "she's gonna tell you"). Transcription conventions are provided in the Appendix.

THE HOME IN PRINCEVILLE: A CONFIGURATION OF BELONGINGS

Theano Terkenli's article "Home as a Region" explains that, "the strongest sense of home commonly coincides geographically with a dwelling" (324). Along with this, we would generally expect that people's associations with their homes were of a deeply personal nature. In fact, Neil Smith, in a major foray into spatial theory, supports



The home of Turner Prince, a founding father of Princeville, built in the 1870s. Photo Credit: NC Office of Archives and History

the scale of the body defines the site of personal identity, the scale of the home provides the most immediate context with which this takes place” (Smith 69). However, the discussions in these Princeville data are interesting in that all of the informants other than the County Administrator (who I will return to in a moment) often present a view of the home based more heavily on the things in the home than on a personal connection to the home itself. Passage (1) is representative of the way these informants discuss finding their homes after the flood.

- (1) AH: Things that belonged in the kitchen was in the living room. Things that was in the bedrooms had floated down the hall and was in the office where I worked.

The Police Officer corroborates this view of the home, in (2), when he describes where he was living at the time of the flood. (Before this passage, he talked about being married only days before the flood; the “we” refers to him and his wife.)

- (2)¹³ Interviewer: I forgot, were you living in Princeville at the time of the flood? And that’s why you left or?
Police Officer: No, no. I was still staying down at /Sta?/. We never did

get to put our stuff together. We was going to move in to another house.

Interviewer: Oh I see.

Police Officer: But we never did get a chance to put our stuff together.

The Town Administrator also talks about the home as a collection of things, as in excerpt (3), where she is discussing an individual who claims that her home escaped the flood and this is expressed in terms of losing “things.”

- (3) Town Administrator: She gonna tell you too. “Outta all the people in Princeville got flooded my house-” ... Now, she said her house did not get flooded out and she didn’t lose nothing. Everybody lost everything.

BP does so as well. At one point in her interview, when talking about the flood in general, she abruptly shifts the topic to the loss of her antiques:

- (4) BP: I had a lot of antiques still. And I hate I lost it. You know what I’m- ((Ooo ooo)). Lord have mercy. ((Phew)) I mean I had some ((Ooo)) stuff that you ain’t see no more. You know what I’m saying? But, I lost all that stuff in the flood.

The objects in the home clearly take on symbolic importance for these informants. They are not simply things without meaning (cf. Brown), as we might at first glance expect. AH indicates this strong emotional connection:

- (5) AH: I could deal with it. I could deal with everything that I had seen in that flood, until they came to clean out my apartment. And they finally got to the piano to bring it out. It just- it just folded. It just collapsed. It just folded. And that’s when I really realized that I was not as strong in the situation as I had taken myself to be. And I broke down and I cried. I had really sacrificed to purchase that piano and I know I’ll never own another one.

While this passage is consistent with a “traditional” (e.g., Smith, Terkenli) view of the house as a context for personal identity, it also reinforces a view of the home as an archive of one’s belongings. The piano is a personal, historical artifact for AH. Its loss, therefore, reflects a loss of personal history. Tuan provides us with one possible explanation:

One house may look much like another, as in a housing estate, and yet such houses may be very different places to the people who live in

them because, in the one, a [...] kind of dialogue has occurred and, in the other, it has not; in the one [...] a wall with prints on them [sic], has been illumined by the remarks of a friend, and in another, not. (690)

AH's piano is much like Tuan's prints on the wall: It has been imbued with meaning and this meaning, in turn, has further invested the house with significance.

This is not to say that we don't hear more conventional or expected discussions of the home. In fact, the County Administrator generally provides a very spatially differentiated view of the home versus the community:

(6) Interviewer: But what is life like just living here as being your home in Princeville /what is Princeville like/?

County Administrator: Well. I'm very blessed. Before I even get out of my home I thank God for my family. Um, with that, before I even take on any titles. I am a wife and with [being a] wife there comes responsibility. And I'm also a mother and a grandmother. I'm a daughter. I'm a friend. I'm an aunt. I'm all these things, all these different hats, even before I get out of my house. So with that I have to always be remindful of who I am and why I'm here, my purpose. And so I thank God for each day of my life being blessed enough that He has chosen me, along with the people, to once I come out of my house to be a servant for this county.

This calls to mind an image of the house closely aligned with "traditional" views of the home (again cf. Smith, Terkenli). We see in excerpt (6) a very gendered view of the house. The walls of the County Administrator's house divide her life as wife-mother from her life as an important political member of the county. The Town Administrator, in (7), an excerpt of a passage about her mother, also provides a view of the home very much in line with Smith's discussion of the home as the site of "routine acts of social reproduction—eating, sleeping, sex, cleansing, childrearing" (Smith 68).

(7) Town Administrator: And like I said, she just did family things around the house. Cook. Wash clothes. Took care of her garden. She raised us off garden food. And she- she had a garden back of her yard. And she just took care of her garden and her yard. She just was a family person.

However, for the most part the cited passages show that, for at least the residents of Princeville examined thus far, there is some-

thing more complex going on than the home being simply the primary context for their personal identities. Even for the County Administrator, we see her depicting herself as having two personal identities—one as her family-oriented role in the house, the other as her role as a public servant with an orientation outside the home.

Finally, TK's discourse and spatial practices at home reflect a porosity of the public-private aspects of the home that we do not see in the other informants' accounts. TK spends his time on the porch of this house. After the flood, he was among the first to return to the ruined town. Even while living in a FEMA trailer park in the weeks immediately following the flood, he would come every morning to sit under his carport and watch the desolate town. TK does not talk much about the inside of his house or the notion of house as "home". Interestingly, instead he expresses a strong connection to his "lot":

(8) Interviewer: So what made you decide to come back?

TK: Well, you know, it's a long story, but my father worked hard on the farm and bought this place here. /You see his/ house sitting right over there where that vacant lot is. And it was thirteen of us and I was the /onlyest/ one out of that thirteen- the baby died at birth- I was the only one out of that twelve that didn't go to the city. I stayed here the whole while. And one day I was talking about building. And he said "Boo, I was hoping one of my children would build up there aside of me." So he- I'm able to say, he gave me this lot and that's the reason I cherish this lot. And that's the reason I didn't want to leave this lot.

It seems that for TK at least, the "home" is more of a physical piece of the town than a place of privacy or personal space. It is his personal interface with the community and also a link to his past.

THE TOWN IN PRINCEVILLE: A CONFIGURATION OF PEOPLE

The residents of Princeville are keenly aware and proud of the town's unique history. All of the informants talk with pride about Princeville's survival through a long history of hardships, both social and environmental. These views fall in line with Tuan's argument that "the meaning of an actual physical place is the result of historical and social process, built up over time by large and small happenings" (692). Passage (9) demonstrates a conception of Princeville that emphasizes the town's historical importance to the informants.

(9) BP: I love this old town, /the/ reason why I come back home. Uh huh. This is home. You know. Like you say, after the flood, they talk-

ing about moving- what are we gonna move? Not moving Princeville- you can't move Princeville. You know. You can't move Princeville. Where're we going? Too old to start all over again. You know. Talk about moving. Where're we gonna go? We knew what- Back in the day, I /reckon/ the slaves knew and my great-grandmother knew. They knew what they were moving here for. You know what I'm saying? They know- they knew. But this was the town. This was home.

In addition to the expected discussions of town, such as in (9), there is also a strong thread through the informants' accounts that the town is importantly the historical people of the town. This is most directly shown during the tour of Princeville that the Town Administrator gave the interviewers:

- (10) Town Administrator: We had to get our people back in Princeville. We didn't want to lose our town. So we ha- The people what makes the town. So, we wanted the people to get from Rocky Mount back over here.

TK also supports this view that an important aspect of the town is its people when answering a question about what he remembers the town to have been like earlier in his life.

- (11) TK: Well, it was just a small town. Had one police. And I said, had two stores. And had a school- one good thing about it- had a school over here. And Princeville was always a nice- nice little town. A nice little place.
Interviewer: Okay. Kind of a laid back kind of place?
TK: Yes, yes. Nice place. Has some nice peoples in Princeville.

While the County Administrator also reinforces the idea that the people are a crucial component of the community, she stands out from the other informants in that she seems to identify "community" with the greater county more than with Princeville:

- (12) County Administrator: Basically, born in Edgecombe County, reared in Edgecombe County. Parents were sharecroppers. We have just lived from one city to the other city. And, I just love Edgecombe County, calling it my home. Grew up in Edgecombe and surrounding counties- ... My husband and I were looking for land somewhere where we both had- and agreed to- to stay. And so we saw this land and it became our home in 1982. ...
Interviewer: And was there anything else that attracted you to moving in to the area?

County Administrator: Basically, the people. Relationship. Y'know, I've always had some sort of relationship with people- people are my heart. I mean, I have a passion for serving others. That's how I came about with the election as the clerk. It just happen' to be where I live, where I call home. Y'know, you have to have a place to call home. Y'know. You have to have a place to call home and Princeville happen' to be the place that I call home, but my heart is abroad, in this area.

Of course, the County Administrator's past differs from that of the other informants in important ways. She has been a public officer for the county for most of her life and, even though she has lived in Princeville for over twenty years, she makes it clear in her interview—as we see above in (12)—that she considers Princeville to be one town in the county. This is perhaps the best evidence in these data for a social (and socialized) conception of the community. For each of the informants we tease out a different conception of "community" and these conceptions are likely a result of each person's individual life history.

In addition to defining the "town" by connecting it to its people, all six of the informants also hold very personal views of town. Even though, as we saw with the County Administrator in excerpt (12), the scope of the community may differ for each of the individuals, the notion of the "community" appears to carry a great deal of the residents' affection, whereas we saw this tendency less than we might expect when we examined the informants' discussions of their own homes. For example, the Town Administrator and an interviewer had the following exchange while driving past new houses built in the reconstruction effort:

- (13) Town Administrator: Like I said, most houses are new now, you know? ((laugh))
Interviewer: Yeah, they're nice looking houses.
Town Administrator: Well, thank you.

In this excerpt, the Town Administrator expresses a personal relationship to all the houses as opposed to her house. In an excerpt from Nick Halpern's radio broadcast (NPR 2004), AH also expresses a very personal connection to the town overall:

- (14) AH: I can't remove, y'know, the thought of the rain because I know this is hurricane season. The mud on the trees. The slime on the trees. The slime on the yards. The look and appearance of the homes. It always be there and therefore when it rain it just refreshing all of these memories.



Ray Matthewson, former mayor of Princeville, stands with the Princeville signpost. Photo taken in 1960. Photo Credit: Charlie Killebrew, Braswell Memorial Library, Killebrew Collection, Rocky Mount, NC.

Both of these excerpts, (13) and (14), show pride and tenderness toward the community that we might expect to hear instead about the informants' own homes.

The other residents also echo the notion that the town is better after the reconstruction, because everyone's homes are nicer.

(15) BP: Well, to tell you the truth, to me, it changed, then again it ain't changed. 'Cause it still got the same trees. You know what I'm saying? The same- You know. I reckon the houses are better now than back in the day.

This is not to say that people in Princeville do not show a deep connection to their own homes (recall AH's account in excerpt (5) above). Nonetheless, this strong, personal tie to the entire town seems to emerge from the residents' discussions.

Danesi observes that because such communities are "signifying spaces,"

people perceive their social community as a communal body. This is why we refer to societies as being healthy, sick, vibrant, beautiful, or ugly. Indeed, visitors habitually judge a society instinctively as they would a human person, namely, on how the public spaces appear to the eye – neat, dirty, organized, chaotic, and so on. This is also why a community feels violated "as a single body" if someone defaces its public or sacred places (141).

It makes sense, then, that "the mud on the trees [...] the slime on the yards" (14) is a sort of personal offense to AH. In fact, we might speculate that the importance of the communal body increases inversely with the size of the community, such that in small communities like Princeville we would expect to find such strong attachments to the community overall. Another aspect of the Princeville data that probably influences this finding is that most of the individuals whose comments appear in this essay are political figures in the town and county. Remarks like that in excerpt (13), showing the Town Administrator's pride in the houses in general, may be explainable somewhat as a result of the political lives of these informants.

TOWN, COMMUNITY, AND PRINCEVILLE

As we have noticed, it is often difficult or impossible to differentiate "community" and "town" in the accounts of the Princeville residents. In excerpt (16), we see the Town Administrator attributing a specifically political meaning to the term "town" as that of a politically recognized community.

(16) Town Administrator: This town was a community before it was incorporated.

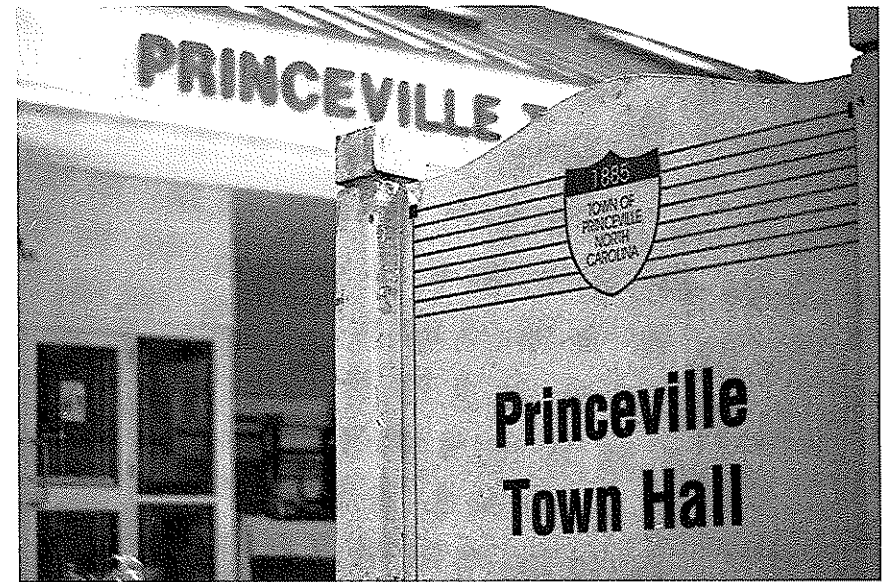
However, we also see her using "town" in a less concrete way. Recall (10), for example, where she declares "the people [are] what makes

the town.” Meanwhile, the notion of “community” is even more complex. In a later discussion, shown in (17), about Southern Terrace, the neighborhood she lives in, the Town Administrator gives us a sense of fluidity or even confusion as to what comprises the boundaries of the community.

- (17) Town Administrator: I was raised up- It was called Tarboro. Okay. Southern Terrace which I’m gonna show you where that is when we go on a tour. It was called- Southern Terrace was called- was called Tarboro at that time. In 1995, Southern Terrace got annexed to Princeville. And it got annexed in Princeville and it made the population in Princeville become twenty-t- twenty-one hundred people, almost twenty-two hundred people as the population of Princeville. ...
 Interviewer: Now is it all divide- I’m trying to get a picture ‘cause I’m still getting familiar with the border between Tarboro and Princeville. Is it all the- the Tar River that divides it?
 Town Administrator: Yes, it is.
 Interviewer: Okay. So that part that- Southern Terrace. What side of the river is that on?
 Town Administrator: It’s on this side. Princeville.
 Interviewer: But it was Tarboro. So there- at one point [that was Tarboro
 Town Administrator: [We use Tarboro- Princeville- We use- We use Princeville- We use Tarboro address. But actually we was like in the county.
 Interviewer: Okay. Like out a little farther down?
 Town Administrator: Yeah because- We weren’t considered Princeville. We weren’t in Tarboro city limit, but we used Tarboro addresses. ‘Cause you can’t say “Edgecombe, North Carolina.” So we had to have a city address. And actually the whole Princeville- now Princeville trying to get its own zip code. We have the same zip code Tarboro has.

The town is, without doubt, subdivided in the conceptions of these individuals. The notion of community at the “neighborhood”-level though—what I would define as the level of community in which the individuals most consider themselves to “live”—is the hardest to extract from the speech of the informants. For example, we can contrast the County Administrator’s account in (12), focusing on community at the county-level, with the Town Administrator’s discussions, like the following, highlighting Southern Terrace as her most salient community-level through her use of pronouns:¹⁴

- (18) Town Administrator: Southern Terrace is right by Princeville. They annexed us in 1995.



Princeville’s new town hall, constructed in 2003. Photo Credit: Drew Grimes.

Another moment that helps to show the challenge in determining a coherent conception of the community appears in discussions of the buy-out the federal government proposed following the destruction of the town by the flood. This buy-out would have meant the political, and probably physical, end of Princeville. AH, who was a commissioner of the town at the time, helps demonstrate the difficulty in figuring out just what Princeville “is” when she declares both that “Princeville is my life” and that “we wanted Princeville to continue to be Princeville”:

- (19) AH: I mean, this is my life. Princeville is my life. And I had no place else to go. And I had no- no inkling of an idea how, but we knew that we wanted Princeville to continue to be Princeville and we had to find a way. So, I was not going to vote for a buy-out.

CONCLUSIONS

These data and discussions all lead to the question: Why do the correlations between home and things and town and people seem to arise from the informants’ discourse? Tuan’s work, I think, helps us move closer to an answer.

Place can acquire deep meaning for the adult through the steady accretion of sentiment over the years. Every piece of heirloom furniture, or even a stain on the wall, tells a story (1977: 33).

That is, perhaps the answer to this question is bound up with Princeville's unique history of flooding and hardship.¹⁵ Terkenli tells us,

More often than not, the home does not become an issue until it is no longer there or is being lost, because the concept of home is constructed on the division of personally known worlds into home and nonhome contexts. (328)

In short, the residents of Princeville have dealt (repeatedly¹⁶) with the loss of their dwellings. It stands to reason that they would have shifted their affection to the community and away from their specific houses. This also relates to their general emphasis on "things." Not only has loss influenced their psychological viewpoint of home, but it has also reinforced the physicality, the objectness, of the home. This proposition also helps to explain the focus on the community in terms of its people and not in terms of the material aspects of the town or community. In spite of the flood(s) and historical hardships, the people in Princeville have remained. A final point may also help to support this hypothesis. Two of the excerpts presented above—(14) and (15)—talk about the trees in the town. On the one hand, we may attribute this to the rural context of the town—perhaps the trees are just more architecturally salient than in more urban environments—but, alternatively, it may also be because the trees are the same trees, as BP herself notes in (15). They represent a constant in the town in a way that not even the houses have been.

Meanwhile, the notion of the "community," even more so than home and town, seems to ebb and flow in complex ways in the discourse of these residents. This may be another result of the political lives of most of the informants,¹⁷ but it may also be result of the inherent ambiguity within the notion of "community." Town and home are more concrete concepts—a home can be destroyed, a town can be "bought out" or abandoned—but a community is a constellation of people, with a shared history, shared hardships, and—as we may be discovering—a shared sense of space.

In closing, following Tuan (1994: 151), the speech samples used here must be acknowledged as no more than the "tip of the iceberg" for understanding Princeville's residents' conceptions, perceptions, and receptions of Princeville's spaces. Nonetheless, this paper has highlighted one important way that we can undertake an actionable "semiotics of space" and better make sense of the spaces and places

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The NCLLP interviews examined in this study were collected with support from the National Science Foundation (Grant# BCS0236838) and the William C. Friday Endowment of North Carolina State University.

I thank Ryan Rowe and Drew Grimes for their help on this paper and for sharing their interviews and insight with me. This paper would not have been possible without their hard work and openness. I would also like to thank Rebecca Stein and Ron Butters for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. Finally, I am most grateful to the residents of Princeville for sharing their stories with us.

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

I use the following conventions for the excerpts contained in this paper:

// enclose transcriptions that are not certain.

(()) enclose non-verbal forms of expression, like laughter.

[indicates overlap. In other words, it indicates two speakers speaking at the same time.

. indicates sentence-final intonation.

, indicates clause-final intonation.

? indicates questioning intonation.

- indicates break in utterance without clause- or sentence- final intonation.

... indicates that segments of transcript have been removed. Additionally, I only provide a transcript of the interviewers' utterances when it is relevant. Most of the contributions by the interviewers are merely affirmations that they are paying attention (e.g., "uh-huh" or "yeah") and these have been suppressed without indication for sake of clarity and brevity.

NOTES

1. In truth, there appear to be about as many approaches to the semiotics of space as there are scholars of it. As Gottdiener and Lagopoulos' collection of essays on "urban semiotics" demonstrates, the major figures in the study of the semiotics of space (Greimas, Eco, Barthes, etc.) all have differing approaches to a theory of "urban semiotics," ranging from a search for ideology (cf. Greimas) to a search for a generative grammar of space (cf. Boudon). Meanwhile, a handful of other scholars (not included in the Gottdiener and Lagopoulos volume) have also written on spatial semiotics from other perspectives, such as Milton Singer's "semiotic anthropology." Of course, other scholars have also made major contributions to our understanding of space and place from other less explicitly semiotic viewpoints (e.g., Lefebvre, de Certeau).

Importantly, Gottdiener and Lagopoulos point out that, although they use the term “urban semiotics,” they use the term to include all “forms of settlement space, such as villages, tribal camps, and the like” (1). Other scholars tend to neglect the non-urban in their forays into spatial questions.

2. Tuan presents a persuasive argument for an explicitly theory-light approach to spatial inquiry. He writes, “in a narrative-descriptive approach [...] the explicit formulation of theory is not attempted, if only because such a theory, by its clarity and weight, tends to drive rival and complementary interpretations and explanatory sketches out of mind, with the result the object of study—a human experience, which is almost always ambiguous and complex—turns into something schematic and etiolated” (1991: 686).

3. This paper follows Tuan’s work and focuses on discourse-level spatial interrogations. One alternative approach would be to examine linguistic features—such as deictics for example—in their role in the production and conception of space. For a brief example of this, we can look at pronouns in the speech of the Princeville residents. As we might expect, the Town Administrator often identifies herself with Princeville proper, as when she explains “we didn’t want to lose our town” (presented in excerpt (10)) and expresses solidarity with (and for) the town through her use of pronouns. While this may be in line with our expectations, we do find examples where the Town Administrator distances herself from the town of Princeville—such as in excerpt (18)—where she tells us “they annexed us” (that is, Princeville annexed Southern Terrace) and aligns herself, using “us,” with the residents of Southern Terrace, in opposition to the “them” of Princeville proper. As I said, a more complete analysis of linguistic features—even just of pronoun usage—would be interesting and illustrative of the subtle ways that the inhabitants both make the town through their speech and at the same time have their ideologies shaped by the town. However, further examination along these lines will have to remain as work for the future.

4. For more information about the NCLLP, see <<http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/ncllp/>>.

5. While the sociolinguistic and media interview data may not seem at first to be the best format for gaining empirical discourse on place and the semiotic reception of place, it does provide a good starting point. In fact, Tuan might agree that this dataset is better than many others researchers have access to. Tuan comments, “the felt quality of a place can never be fully revealed by describing the physical structures and noting the ways people move in them. Nor is it merely a stable attribute that can be elicited through the use of restrictive questionnaires. Such approaches have evident value, but they must be supplemented by studying a people’s speech as it appears naturally in the course of day-to-day living and on more dramatic occasions” (1978: 372).

6. The data on the Town Administrator are comprised of two NCLLP interviews, one an interview in her office and the other a short tour of Princeville where she drove the interviewers around town while talking to them about Princeville.

7. Data on the Police Officer are taken from a short tour he gave an interviewer of the town.

8. AH’s excerpts are entirely from Nick Halpern’s series on NPR.

9. Data on the County Administrator are taken from one, approximately one hour long, NCLLP interview.

10. TK is a central figure in Nick Halpern’s (2003) account of Princeville in *Braving Home*. He has also been interviewed extensively by the NCLLP and the excerpts presented in this paper are from the NCLLP interviews. I describe TK as “famously” being the first to return to Princeville, because he is talked about by others in town and it was his solitary vigil in the ruined Princeville that brought Halpern to focus on him.

11. BP’s data are taken from a 45-minute NCLLP interview.

12. Also, it is worth noting, even though I do not focus on this aspect of the informants’ social lives, that religion plays a huge role in the lives of all six informants. In fact, religion plays a large role in almost everyone’s life in Princeville. All six informants discuss religion at length in their interviews (for example, see excerpt (6)).

13. Again, transcription conventions are provided in the Appendix.

14. See note 3.

15. Of course, some parts of Princeville’s history are not completely unique. It’s impossible to discuss flooded communities and spatial inquiries in the post-Hurricane Katrina United States without acknowledging the deep relevance of these sorts of questions and findings for the thousands of displaced residents of New Orleans and the Gulf region following Hurricane Katrina. While this paper hasn’t discussed this parallel, the destruction of Princeville in 1999 and its subsequent reconstruction has a great deal to teach us about the massive impact that Hurricane Katrina has had and will continue to have on its Gulf Coast victims.

16. Princeville experienced catastrophic flooding not only in 1999, but also in a flood in the 1950s, an event that most of the informants here are old enough to remember, or at least to have heard a great deal about.

17. As mentioned earlier, four of the six individuals examined here have political roles in the town and county. It is likely that, in their interviews, these informants are enacting their roles as representatives of the town (and, for the County Administrator, the county) and that this influences their discourse in the data. It is possible that the complexity we see in the discussions of community and spatial boundaries is a result of the political lives of these informants. In analyzing these passages it is difficult to keep track of the roles that the individuals enact and the changes in these roles over the course of their interviews. The questions of how much this

impacts their discourse—that is, whether it is misleading in relation to their “real” conceptions of place (whatever that might mean)—and, oppositely, to what level their political roles have affected their overall personal ideologies, will have to remain for future research.

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