THE OPEN SPACES OF DEMOCRACY: PUBLIC LANDS, PRAGMATIST PLACEMAKING, AND PEACEBUILDING

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ABSTRACT: Land-use issues regularly arise in the context of social and political problems, but the debates that dominate tend to revolve around security of geographic borders and boundaries, natural resource scarcity, declining biodiversity, and the like. These are crucial to address. But they are not the only land-use matters that contribute to the instability of our overall social and democratic landscape, in the US and around the world. In this paper, I develop a feminist-pragmatist consideration of public lands, situating them as "open spaces of democracy"—spaces for public deliberation and for reshaping a collective identity in light of the urgent needs for justice and amelioration. I suggest that public lands are uniquely suited for meeting community needs and for addressing social ills. Like the settlement houses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they can serve a public function; they can be created, redesigned, and better used in the service of stabilizing and enriching our fragile social and physical landscapes. In this paper, I draw from the Norwegian philosophical tradition's strong emphases on peace and deep connection to the natural world and highlight important connections between this tradition and the pragmatist tradition as I expand upon the potential for placemaking and peacebuilding through the open spaces of democracy.

Keywords: Feminist-Pragmatism, Peace, John Dewey, Arne Naess, Norway, Public Lands, Place-Based Design

> "We are standing on the edge of a political chasm that is beginning to crumble. We all stand to lose ground. Democracy is an insecure landscape."
> – Terry Tempest Williams[1]

> "The golden produce of the earth has been trampled under iron feet, the land lies in ruins everywhere, and the foundations of its communities are crumbling."
> – Fridtjof Nansen[2]

Introduction

It is hard not to resonate with Williams's claim that "we are standing on the edge of a political chasm that is beginning to crumble" (Williams 2004, 24). Perhaps the only way to disagree with it would be to take issue with the use of *beginning.* The image she evokes is familiar. We are as aware of the fragility of our social landscape as we are the fragility of our eroding physical landscapes in a changing climate, although we may not always recognize how closely the two are connected. The causes of the fragile social, political, and physical landscapes are multiple and complex—some particular to this distinct moment in time, others perennial global problems—and they are, unsurprisingly, sources of intense debate. As throughout history, public intellectuals, politicians, and philosophers—even masses of community activists and college students—contribute to these debates with resources and with nuance, offering a wide range of theoretical and practical suggestions to help grasp the severity of the situations we are encountering and to try to shape public response. This paper aims to contribute to that discourse by developing a feminist-pragmatist vision for placemaking as an opportunity for positive peacebuilding. In what follows, I suggest that public lands, in many different contexts, are uniquely suited for meeting community needs and for addressing social ills. They can be created, redesigned, and better used in the service of stabilizing and enriching our fragile landscapes, social and physical. In developing a pragmatist vision for public lands, I situate public lands as "open spaces of democracy," considering how they might serve a public function like settlement houses served in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I then draw from Norwegian philosophical resources to expand upon the concept of the open spaces of democracy in the contexts of positive peacebuilding and pragmatist placemaking potential.

Feminist-Pragmatism and "Place Capital"

Across multiple national and international measures, the social and political landscape is grim. The year 2023 was the hottest on record. Wars rage on in Ukraine, Gaza, and

[1] Terry Tempest Williams, *The Open Space of Democracy* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 24.
[2] Fridtjof Nansen, "Nansen Lecture," Nobel Prize, 1922, accessed April 15, 2024, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1922/nansen/lecture/

many other parts of the world. Nuclear threats are intensifying; Vladimir Putin, for example, recently declared "suspension" of Russia's participation in the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. As Russia and China compete to expand their nuclear capabilities, the United States prepares to respond in kind. Far-right authoritarianism and nationalistic ideology are increasingly normalized and gaining in the polls in the US and more than a dozen European countries. Across the globe, people continue to endure ramifications of Covid-19 while trying to anticipate and prepare for the pathogen that will trigger the next global pandemic. Isolation and loneliness are at all-time highs in young people, and the implications of AI and other disruptive technologies leave people feeling uncertain about the future and experiencing high levels of social distrust.[3]

In the context of social and political problems, land-use issues also regularly arise. But the issues that dominate land-use debate tend to revolve around security of geographic borders and boundaries, natural resource scarcity, declining biodiversity, and the like. And these are certainly crucial to address. They are not, however, the only land-use matters that contribute to the instability of our overall social and democratic landscape. Among other reasons for social distrust, the late urban sociologist Ray Oldenberg identified the critical lack of opportunities for people to interact with one another across their differences as a result of urbanization. In the late 1990s, reflecting on US culture in particular, he explained that "virtually all means of meeting and getting to know one's neighbors have been eliminated" (Oldenburg 1997, 6). There are countless reasons for this decline, from minor technological developments geared toward efficiency, such as automatic garage door openers that allow cars to pull straight into garages without interacting with neighbors, to more significant matters of public safety and the dramatic increase in use of social media, which dramatically limit face-to-face interactions, not just among young people but across demographics.

Oldenberg's thesis is that declining availability of shared physical locations contributes to our instable social landscape, and, importantly, he points to this decline as opportunity to create spaces where people can interact with their neighbors. He coined the term "third places" to indicate these informal locations where citizens gather outside of work and home. Third places—which still do and have always existed in various forms, such as pubs, cafés, community gardens, town squares—are becoming more and more rare. But designed well, they can serve numerous functions: they unify neighborhoods, they serve as "ports of entry for visitors and newcomers", they bridge intergenerational gaps, they become places for coordinating care for community members and the community as a whole, and they foster political debate, among many other benefits (Oldenburg 1997, 70). Third places provide opportunities for social interaction that are crucial for functioning democracy. Our current culture prioritizes consumerism rather than citizenship, Iaian Bernhoft and Bruno V. Manno explain, and third places can help redress some of the consequences of that shift: "Third places are neutral places we visit voluntarily, where conversation is one of the main activities. Because they lack membership requirements, social differences are often leveled and left outside the establishment" (Bernhoft and Manno 2022).

Pragmatist philosophers like John Dewey recognized this impoverished community experience long before Oldenberg. Dewey stressed that "democracy begins at home" and that democracy's home "is the neighborly community." He saw neighborly communities as imperative to a vision of participatory democracy—one which draws on "the unique contributions of all citizens into tremendous, society-wide collective projects" (Shutz 2001, 287). Dewey had great faith that the "democratic way of life" enacted in our neighborhoods is the source of immense social intelligence and creativity that can be

[3] *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, "Doomsday Clock," accessed April 15, 2024, https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock.

harnessed to find creative solutions to our most daunting social and ecological problems.

What Dewey was describing then is what some social science experts now call "place capital," "the shared wealth (built and natural) of the public realm" (Kent 2011). As architects, urban planners, public health leaders, and others are trying to figure out how to harness and bolster "place capital" to address the social ills we face today, pragmatism can contribute meaningfully to the conversation, offering theoretical support as well as rich historical examples that aid efforts to create spaces for people to come together in ways that are democracy-building and peacebuilding.

One such example is the Settlement House Movement. In response to the social ills and turmoil in her own community—a crowded, industrial neighborhood in Chicago without adequate social services, flooded with immigrant families struggling to build new lives—Jane Addams established Hull House in 1889. It became not just a place for families in need to receive support, education, and opportunities for fellowship, but the locus of a powerful reform movement in the United States, leading to a remarkable amount of legislation that improved the living situations of women, immigrants, the working poor, and more. Hull House stands as an exemplar of participatory design that recognized, made use of, and expanded upon "place capital." In Hull House, Addams envisioned a place designed to meet community needs particular to its context. In an old Victorian house on Halsted Street that had once been a factory, a secondhand furniture store, and a home for the aged, she saw potential far beyond the face value of the building. Hers was a pragmatist vision of place, and one that can continue to inform our efforts today.

Public Lands and the Open Spaces of Democracy

Naturalist and "citizen writer of the West" Terry Tempest Williams describes public lands as "open spaces of democracy"—spaces for public deliberation and for reshaping a collective identity in light of the urgent need for justice and amelioration. Her own context involves experiences collaborating with others in the deeply divided and contentious American West, particularly where she resides in Southeastern Utah, near the hotly contested Bears Ears National Monument. Public lands deserve protection and respect, not just for their conservation or their natural resources or their beauty, but for their democratic and peacebuilding potential. A pragmatist vision of place for public lands is one that works to draw out that potential.

In the United States, there exist somewhere around 840 million acres of public lands—more than 1/3 of the country—that all citizens hold in common and to which all ostensibly have a claim for resources, recreation and more. Williams has called these America's "national inheritance," describing them as "that which makes each of us land-rich" (Williams 2016, 37). For a country that is so highly individualist, where private property ownership is foundational to its history, even the fact that such vast amounts of terrain are held collectively is somewhat paradoxical. Public lands in the US also, of course, are highly controversial, given the unconstitutional and violent nature of the acquisition of many of these lands and their troubled colonial history, a matter which will be addressed later. Nevertheless, these multiple-use lands that are shared in common include forests, wild and scenic rivers, national and state parks, preserves, and monuments, wilderness and conservation areas, and more. These are lands that Wallace Stegner heralded as "America's best idea," boldly asserting that public lands are "Absolutely American, absolutely democratic"— "they reflect us at our best, rather than our worst" (Stegner 1998, 135).

But of course, public lands are not unique to the United States, although the context, language, and understanding of commonly held land vary greatly from country to country. Not all of these lands could be said to be "democratic," of course, but all developed countries have public lands of some sort, and more than one hundred countries

can boast having national parks and other conservation areas. Over a million hectares are commonly owned in Britain, 89% of Canadian land is designated "crown lands," India's public lands are thought to be one of its most valuable tangible assets, nearly half of Bhutan and Luxembourg are protected areas, just to name a few examples. In myriad ways and for varying purposes across nations and cultures, certain lands are shared among the people.

In a 2004 monograph called *The Open Space of Democracy*, Williams articulates an ethics and politics of place that harnesses the democratic potential of public lands. Like Dewey, her understanding of democracy is both aspirational and *actionable.* She calls for citizen engagement through contestation in what she calls "the open space of democracy," sites of deliberation in which there is invitation to dissent. The open space makes room for uncovering multiple angles of vision and discovering overlapping values, holds space for difference and for righteous indignation—they are places of deep listening to and engagement with disparate voices from which creativity can emerge in response to the tension. Bears Ears National Monument is one example of place as a site of deliberation, dissent, and discovery of overlapping values. This sweeping swath of land—more than 1.35 million acres—is a sacred space to many and "a cradle of Native American history," the ancestral home of more than a dozen tribes and a rich repository of petroglyphs, rock art, and ancient dwellings. And this area, importantly, has been the site of endless dispute over ownership, resource rights, and management. The last decade has intensified these disputes. These tensions arise from multiple angles and involve multiple stakeholders, including indigenous people and tribal leadership, industry, state and federal governments, the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and environmentalists. At the forefront of the efforts to preserve Bears Ears National Monument is the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition. This coalition was established in 2015 by leaders of the Hopi, Ute, Ute Mountain Ute, Navajo, and Zuni tribes after a long history of shared but disparate efforts to preserve the land. The Inter-Tribal Coalition now has support of over 30 tribes as well as tremendous support from other stakeholders. It has become, according to some, a "blueprint for how to involve tribes in the stewardship of lands that were originally stolen from them but are also important to the country as a whole" (Douglas and Brewer 2001). The collective effort to protect the land is challenging, requiring skills and commitments of deep democratic deliberation, sympathetic understanding, and cooperative intelligence, among others—skills and commitments closely aligned with feminist-pragmatism.

When we employ these open spaces to connect and work toward shared goals, like in the example of Bears Ears, Williams says "we can come closer to understanding why each of us is committed to our own points of view and perhaps even adjust our perspectives along the way to find creative alternatives that we cannot only both live with, but feel comfortable in proposing together" (Williams 2004, 20). The open space of democracy embodies "a dynamic citizenry, unafraid to exercise our shared knowledge and power" (Williams 2004, 86).

A more transnational example of the peacebuilding potential of open spaces is seen in peace parks—conservation zones that cross borders and involve various political jurisdictions. The term "peace park" was coined in 1932 in the development of the Waterton Lakes Glacier International Peace Park, shared between the United States and Canada. Although the establishment of this peace park was largely symbolic, since the US and Canada weren't in conflict, it nevertheless represents well the goal of using shared space to build and maintain peace through joint conservation efforts (Ali and Maron-LaFevre 2). The number of peace parks has steadily risen since Waterton-Glacier was established; hundreds exist now in more than sixty countries that cross state borders and involve shared governance, and dozens that straddle

transnational borders, including the Balkans Peace Park, Korea's "demilitarized zone," Sweden and Norway's "Morokulian," and the Limpopo Transfrontier Park of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, to name a few.

Peace parks embody the potential in and on and through the land itself for the emergence of creative and collaborative problem-solving. In examples from Bears Ears to peace parks and more, open space is both literal and figurative; the land itself—its own openness, its capaciousness—is meaningful. What Williams envisions and embodies in her work is an idea of public lands as a starting point for dialogue. The *place* itself serves as a locus of embodied, experiential, and experimental knowledge, a *place* of deep, democratic engagement. The place is not merely a setting for people to gather but an on-the-ground opportunity to grow together *into* a public, prepared to face the challenges of democratic life together. Williams understands that such work will be experimental, fallible, and ever in need of adjustment. But the place itself is a critical element of the process, like Hull House "providing the mechanism for people of all classes, races, and sexes to 'speak together,'" and to employ empirical evidence and scientific research to find ways to move forward together (Skorburg 2018, 929.) Williams explicitly draws on Dewey's understanding of democracy, sharing from his 1937 speech to the National Endowment for the Arts: "Unless democratic habits of thought and action are part of the fiber of a people, political democracy is insecure. It cannot stand in isolation. It must be buttressed by the presence of democratic methods in all social relationships" (Dewey qtd in Williams 2004, 87). My concern here is how open spaces, particularly in the form of public lands, can facilitate those democratic methods that are critical to improving and sustaining our social relationships.

Public Lands, Positive Peace, and Placemaking—Feminist Pragmatism and the Nordic Tradition

In an attempt to draw out the potential for placemaking and peacebuilding through public lands, I find fruitful resources in Norway's tradition of peace and conflict transformation strategies that involve the natural world. The rich intersections of Norwegian philosophy and pragmatism are rarely adequately recognized.[4] I suggest that Norwegian philosophical resources can deepen and enhance a feminist-pragmatist vision for public lands.

Positive Peace and Peacebuilding

Norway has long held a reputation for being a peace nation, from its decades committed to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation to the vigorous program to combat radicalism and violent extremism at present. Peace and facilitation of conflict negotiation has been a fundamental feature of Norwegian foreign policy, and as early as the late 1800s, Norway was known for "its emphasis on neutrality, free-trade, arbitration and international cooperation and a general liberal (meliorist) belief in gradual progress, the peacefulness of peoples as opposed to states, and the benefits of closer interaction among the peoples of the world" (Leira 2013, 341). Norway is home to the Nobel Peace Prize and to a large network of peace, dialogue, and human rights organizations. And importantly, Norway boasts being the home of the polar explorer and humanitarian Fridtjof Nansen, whose tremendous legacy includes his work as the High Commissioner for Refugees in The League of Nations, the establishment of the Nansen passport after the first world war, extraordinary efforts for famine relief in Russia and Ukraine, and much more. "No realpolitik in a civilized society is conceivable without a basis in compassion, reciprocity, helpfulness, trust," Nansen wrote in 1922.[5] Nansen's influence can be seen throughout Norway in its peace practices, from international negotiations to its curriculum of dialogue practice throughout the educational system.

[4] Notable exceptions are found in the work of Sami Pihlstrom and others in the Nordic Pragmatist Association.
[5] "Compassion in Action," *Nobel Peace Center,* accessed April 15, 2024, https://www.nobelpeacecenter.org/en/exhibitions/compassion-in-action

In these ways and many others, peace is a central feature of Norwegian culture and identity, although several studies indicate that that identity is shifting, and that younger people feel it as less salient and are more critical of the limits of Norway's inclusivity. Despite its waning influence as a peace nation, Norway has produced a small but significant philosophical tradition in which the concept of peace and peace research is a central component.

The late Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, often called "the father of peace studies," established the Peace Research Institute Oslo in 1959—the first institute of its kind—and, in 1964, founded the *Journal of Peace Research.* Informed by his own childhood experiences of World War II, Galtung made a critical distinction between positive and negative peace. Whereas many think of peace as the absence of war, Galtung insisted upon a more robust direction for peace efforts—one that did not stop at the absence of war or absence of violence but worked to establish the *presence* of social justice and integrated structural support within societies. Galtung explains: "Negative peace studies are about the non-use of violence and its delegitimation, and positive peace studies are about the use of harmony and its legitimation"(Galtung and Fischer 2013, 39). Amanda Feller and Kelly Ryan put it simply: "the minimum aim [of peace] is the later (not to kill each other) and the eternal goal is the former (harmonious integrated communities" (Feller and Ryan 2012, 356). It is the task of building positive peace that many feminist-pragmatists have taken up and that I am primarily concerned with here, but of course, positive peace incorporates negative peace, as well. Patricia Shields and Joseph Soeters elaborate on the complexity of the distinction:

> In a society at war, the first stage of peace begins as the end of personal violence and absence of war (negative peace). In the next stage, a stronger society would emerge with communities that sustain freedom, social equity, social justice, cooperation, and so on (e.g., positive peace). Furthermore, a state of peace cannot be placed in a neat rational continuum beginning with negative peace and ending with positive peace. War and violent conflict are messy; the two types of peace overlap and are seldom clearly separated. *Positive* peace is itself complicated and demarcated as a continuum because a community may not be at war, yet filled with structural violence and militarism (Shields and Soeters 2017, 324).

Shields and Soeters highlight how, at Hull House and elsewhere, Addams embodied the positive peace which Galtung advocated. Addams understood how peacebuilding needed to be understood as an ongoing, integrated, and participatory process. Maintaining peace could not be a task merely delegated to military personnel or governmental officials, but instead, is a task that belongs to all who have a stake in the wellbeing of individuals, of the community, and of the wider world—which is to say, it is our collective task to pursue positive peace and work to foster attitudes and habits that contribute to it. Addams's conception of peace was relational and nondogmatic; it valued lateral progress, given the complexity of conflicting values, needs, perspectives, and life experiences. Her peace efforts were place-based, requiring sympathetic knowledge, and drawing upon the wealth of wisdom in a community of inquiry. In these ways, the concept of *placemaking* closely aligns with positive peacebuilding. Placemaking is part of peacebuilding.

Placemaking

The term *placemaking* is more commonly used in design-focused disciplines like architecture and urban studies than in philosophical literature, but feminist-pragmatists like Addams, Grace Lee Boggs, and others have long been emphasizing *placemaking* in their projects and writing (Heenen, Lake, and Whipps 2024). The term, which began to circulate in the 1970s, is at once a philosophical concept, an approach to creating shared spaces, and an international movement. According to The Project for Public Spaces, "placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to

maximize shared value."[6] Placemaking efforts are those which inspire people to "collectively reimagine and re-invent public spaces as the heart of every community….. [P]lacemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution."[7] Drawing on urban design principles, place-making creates public spaces that center the perspectives of people who stand to benefit from them. Among those principles are that the community is seen as the expert, that form supports function, and that the process is always ongoing—commitments shared with feminist pragmatists (Madden 2021).

Peace, Dialogue, and Open Spaces – Nordic Connections

Like American philosophy, [8] the Norwegian philosophical tradition is largely understood to be inextricable from its history and its physical setting. Norway's rugged, isolated, mountainous landscape and culture of outdoor recreation and activity is as evident in much of the philosophical canon as is the history of Nazi occupation and resistance are. The intersections of the peacebuilding tradition and the natural world are some of the most interesting places for philosophical reflection, and they are a place from which insights can be drawn for capitalizing on place and the open spaces of democracy.

Fridtjof Nansen and "The Land of Beyond"

The aforementioned Nansen is an iconic Norwegian hero—a polar explorer and scientist turned humanitarian who raised Norway's profile on the world stage and later received a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts with refugees and the League of Nations. He is known for his audacity and his ambitious meliorism, undertaking tasks others thought were impossible or crazy, and accomplishing them—from crossing all of Greenland on skis, something no one had previously done, to issuing the Nansen passport to hundreds of thousands of stateless people after the war. He is also known for popularizing the concept of *friluftsliv* in Norway. *Friluftsliv* translates roughly to "open-air life" or "free air life." It is sometimes used colloquially today synonymously with outdoor recreation, but it is much more complex. According to Hans Getler, *friluftsliv* refers to the "philosophical lifestyle based on experiences of the freedom in nature and the spiritual connectedness with the landscape" (Gelter 2000, 78).

Nansen regularly talked about *friluftsliv* as one of Norway's distinctive features, referring to it as a philosophy—one to be encouraged as an alternative to overreliance on commerce and tourism, helping young people be more connected to the natural world, to one another, and to themselves. Importantly, and unlike other kinds of outdoor recreation approaches, *friluftsliv* does not require elaborate equipment or particular athletic prowess. It includes the sorts of activities that are accessible to everyday, ordinary people—a stroll in the hills, a swim, mushroom foraging, etc. It awakens one's curiosities about the natural world and encourages them to look more carefully. Gelter explains:

> Friluftsliv involves the unconditional encounter with nature in the same way as getting to know a person needs an unconditional meeting, and not just a quick look at each other. It requires connectedness and participation. By not participating one becomes a spectator and a consumer. Not participating and connecting with nature makes nature into a museum to observe, to learn from but not to interact with (Gelter 2000, 81).

For Nansen, *friluftsliv* was not entirely separate from peace matters. He believed that the anxiety and suspicion that many people experience with respect to the natural world was something that could be overcome with practice and exposure, reaping myriad benefits. But

[6] "What is Placemaking," *Project for Public Spaces,* accessed April 15, 2024, https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking.
[7] "What is Placemaking," *Project for Public Spaces,* accessed April 15, 2024, https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking.
[8] See, for example, Pratt and McKenna, *American Philosophy: From Wounded Knee to the Present* and Spencer, *American Pragmatism: An Introduction.*

he saw similar sorts of attitudes of distrust toward other people, particularly those others one is socialized to assume they have little in common with—the foreigner, the refugee, the enemy. These attitudes, too, pointed to the need for more practice connecting with others and more exposure to difference. He wrote: "If nations could overcome the mutual fear and distrust whose sombre shadow is now thrown over the world, and could meet with confidence and good will to settle their possible differences, they would easily be able to establish a lasting peace" (Leach 1961, 367).

Connecting with the natural world and connecting with others, for Nansen, was part of the adventure of life. He encouraged people to get outside—both literally and figuratively—to explore "what was unseen." Gunnar Repp explains: "As an educator Nansen urged his audience to develop their abilities 'to see the hidden things,' to be open to 'the call of the unknown,' and indulge themselves in 'the longing for the Land of Beyond'" (Repp 2010, 218).

The *Land of Beyond* includes the natural world and outdoor activities, but for Nansen, it is not merely that. It is also the vision just over the horizon, that toward which we strive, even when others think that our goals are too audacious and too outlandish. *Friluftsliv,* closely tied to peacebuilding, is, in Nansen's words, "that which could revive us and lead us back to a more human existence" (Reed and Rothenberg 1992, 162). He encouraged people to "take up a simple life in nature; in the forest, plains or mountains, on the high plateaus, in the great, lonely emptiness, where new and greater thoughts stream into us and leave a mark that cannot be easily erased" (Reed and Rothenberg 1992, 162). Nansen's trust that the land of beyond can help to foster "new and greater thoughts" that could lead us back to a "more human existence" is an attitude we can adopt as we envision the potential uses of the open spaces of democracy.

Arne Naess and "Life Seen as Open Landscape"

Arne Naess was Norway's most famous philosopher, as well as a notable mountaineer and naturalist. In the US, Naess is known primarily for his being the co-founder, along with George Sessions, of the Deep Ecology Movement, a school of thought that emerged in the 1970s and which has had a considerable influence on the field of environmental philosophy. Although it includes much more, deep ecology is often reduced to representation by an eight point platform that Naess and Sessions published as a "set of principles…tentatively proposed" for establishing a long range ecological movement in response to the ecological crisis (Naess 2021,1). While the platform is philosophically provocative, it has often been dismissed as too idealistic, too complicated, too far-fetched, and too radical (Clark 2010, 22).[9] The basic tenets of deep ecology are demanding and sometimes ambiguous and vague, asking a great deal of its adherents. I would argue that the audacity and ambitiousness of the eight point platform is, in fact, in the spirit of Nansen, and that being a little too far-fetched might actually be appropriate when responding to the suffering of the world and its inhabitants. Naess, in fact, went to great lengths in interviews and subsequently published work to clarify that the platform was a *working* platform—something meant to be revised, expected to be adopted inconsistently—calling it a "set of fairly general rules," and acknowledging that "it is a high ideal to be consistent" (Jickling and Naess 2000, 58). Lamentable as it may be that his reputation is so closely tied to the platform absent its larger context, Naess offers a great deal more which merits our further consideration, particularly his peace activism and Gandhian peace philosophy, as well as other features of his philosophical orientation that align with pragmatist commitments.

[9] Murray Bookchin famously called it a "ideological toxic dump." John P Clark, "A Dialogue with Arne Naess on Social Ecology and Deep Ecology," *Trumpeter* 26, no. 2, (2010): 22.

In Naess's work there is considerable engagement with pragmatism, particularly James, Dewey, and Whitehead. The influences most often recognized are from Spinoza and Gandhi, but Naess wrote about his attraction to the pragmatists, especially in the years in which he was engaged with the Vienna Circle as a young man. Naess's philosophical writings about peace precede his writing about deep ecology, although they overlap significantly, and several features of Naess's thinking are useful in the service of peacebuilding efforts through public spaces from a pragmatist perspective.

Critical to his peace philosophy and deep ecology are the roles of self-reflection and self-discovery. Naess's desire is for people to examine their *selves* deeply enough to recognize their essential unity, to grasp their relationship to the whole: "Self-realization…means expansion of the self, from the ego towards an inclusion and identification with wider circles of being" (Breivik 2021, 420). Self-realization, then, is a primary goal of philosophy, but it isn't *self*-centered in an indulgent, self-concerned way. Rather, according to Naess, by examining and becoming more intimately familiar with oneself, the individual self or the ego ultimately dissolves into the larger *Self.*

The individual, autonomous, atomic self is a myth—a denial of our connections to others. And it is partly responsible for our deep feelings of isolation and inadequacy that are increasingly and dangerously characteristic of our current culture, where one out of two Americans report experiencing measurable levels of loneliness and social isolation—experiences that have seriously adverse health impacts and which increase the risk of premature death by more than 20%. We need more, not less, self-reflection, and more, not less, emphasis on self-realization—but the realization needs to resist the Western tendency toward individualism and self-centeredness and lean more toward identification with the rest of the world, human and nonhuman. The pursuit of self-realization, for Naess, is simply a goal or direction. We may never fully see ourselves as ultimately tied up in the rest of creation, but we can sometimes momentarily grasp it, and we can continue to seek that awareness.[10] Naess wrote and spoke regularly about his close, personal identification with the mountain on which he grew up, a mountain which he called his father, and the mountain on which he lived as an adult in a tiny hut, Tvergastein, after which he named his personal philosophy, "Ecosophy T".

This fallible, iterative, ongoing process of self-realization readily connects both to identification with the wider natural world and to the wider human world. Those who understand their own *self* is tied up with other *selves* are better prepared to respond to the suffering of others. Following Gandhi, Naess advocated nonviolence, convinced that incremental, slow, nonviolent revolutions were long-term revolutions with lasting impact (Naess and Jickling 2000, 59.)[11] Like his ecosophy, his philosophy of peace activism was non-dualistic, pluralistic, fallible, and nonideal. He encouraged open, constructive dialogue, especially among those in ardent disagreement, and insisted that knowledge is provisional, inconclusive, and partial.

An avowed pluralist, Naess also identified himself as a "possibilist." According to Naess, possibilism is "the assumption that the future is in principle completely open, offering unimaginable surprises" (Naess 2002, 4). This possibilist perspective he characterizes elsewhere in the phrase "*life seen as an open landscape*" (Naess 2002, 1).

Possibilism accounts for his hopefulness, as he calls himself a "futurological optimist," and his "hope for the 22nd century"—although he admits little hope for the 21st (Witoszek 1997, 61). The vision Naess offers is one that embodies Erin McKenna's call for feminist-pragmatist utopian thinking; what we need—and what Naess of-

[10] Naess wrote and spoke regularly about his close, personal identification with the mountain on which he grew up, a mountain which he called his father, and the mountain on which he lived as an adult in a tiny hut, Tvergastein, after which he named his personal philosophy, "Ecosophy T".

[11] One of Naess's philosophical projects included carefully working out the philosophical system of Gandhi, arguing that "Gandhi needs help to enter the history of philosophy" (Naess and Jickling 2010, 59).

fers—are visions that "express a desire for a better way of being" and that allows "horizons of experience" to begin to expand (McKenna 2001, 9). He envisions a future where, in harmony with the natural world, people of all kinds coexist. McKenna likewise advocates for a process model of utopia—a model which incorporates change and transformation as central to the vision all along the way, flexible enough to evolve as plans become frustrated and when things go wrong, affording people the opportunity to be the sorts of people that they are, in all their plurality and difference, while still striving for—and educating for—a world in which we actually want to live. What these kinds of visions do is "keep the possibility of change alive," she writes (McKenna 2001, 9). In his peace philosophy and activism and in his deep ecological worldview, this is what Naess offers. The vision is audacious and demanding, but it emerges as *possible* when life is seen as an open landscape.

Steinar Bryn and "Unconditional Spaces"

A final Norwegian figure to mention here is Steinar Bryn, a public intellectual and peace leader with connections to both Naess and Nansen. In 1995, Bryn developed a dialogue program for the Nansenskollen (Nansen Academy) in Lillehammer, Norway. The Nansen Dialogue Seminars is a seminar series, training program, and network of resources "aimed at creating conditions and offering spaces for productive dialogue between conflicting parties" (Varner 2021, 46). The program began when Lillehammer hosted the winter Olympics in 1994. The city that had previously hosted was Sarejevo, which, at the time, was involved in a devastating war and had been under siege for more two years. Bryn wanted to know what Lillehammer could do to support its "Olympic friend" city Sarajevo. What followed was that the Nansen Academy, where Bryn was based, opened sixteen beds in their dormitory for people from all three groups involved in the Bosnian conflict to come to Lillehammer and engage in a three month dialogue process. This was the beginning of the Nansen Dialogues, from which emerged a Nansen Dialogue Network, and which led to the establishment of ten Nansen Dialogue Centers across the Balkans. The Nansen Dialogue process is one which "gathers politicians, journalists, teachers, parents, and pupils for dialogue about their own conflict, exploring potential solutions and opening possibilities for institutional change, where the situation is no longer seen through ethnic or mono-cultural lenses, but with a view to joint understanding that benefits all."[12] The dialogues now take place all over the world, supported by the Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, a center internationally known as a hub "for dialogue work focused on interethnic dialogue, conflict transformation, reconciliation, inclusive communities and democracy."[13] Recently retired from the Nansen Academy, Bryn lectures around Europe and the United States about his dialogue expertise and experiences and continues to facilitate dialogue in communities with deep conflict, such as the Greek and Turkish conflicts on the island of Cyprus. For this work, he and the Nansen Dialogue Network have received multiple Nobel Peace Prize nominations.

In facilitating Nansen dialogues, one of Bryn's goals is to "create the arena where people can meet and talk"[14] (Bryn 2015, 53). Peacebuilding, in this way, is thoroughly relational. For dialogue to take place, people must be able to see and be seen by one another. This requires epistemic humility and an openness to challenge one's own assumptions and perceptions of the truth. But getting to that point where that can happen is difficult. Dialogue is a slow, incremental, and iterative process. Bryn stresses the importance of "unconditional spaces,"— spaces where people "forge shared realities and

[12] "Home," *Nansen Dialogue Network,* accessed April 1, 2024, https://www.nansen-dialogue.net/.
[13] "Dialogue is the Key," *Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue,* accessed April 1, 2024, https://nansen.peace.no/dialogue-is-the-key/.
[14] Steinar Bryn, *Twenty Years in the Eye of the Storm,* (Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, 2015), 53.

create 'meeting points'"—places where people connect and find ways forward (Varner 2021, 46). When dialogues take place in Lillehammer, "unconditional spaces" might be anything from the local outdoor cultural museum, the Maihaugen, to the recycling center, to the Olympic ski jump. These are "ostensibly neutral spaces, places, or experiences that allow the barriers between people to come down and create "meeting points" that people wouldn't otherwise consider" (Varner 2021, 47). In this context, the place itself doesn't have a direct connection to the conflict at hand, and this affords the opportunity for people to connect in low stakes activities. Doing so humanizes the other and makes them visible to one another. In "unconditional spaces," a person may still be someone with whom you are at war, but may be also someone who is seen as a fine athlete, a good musician, a fellow parent, a student. Unconditional spaces create these meeting points, establishing connections that set the stage for dialogue to take place. For some, this long process seems too informal, unrelated to the issues at hand. But if it is so, it is so by design. Bryn's method is "deliberately set up to have an informal appearance," (Feller and Ryan 2012, 367) giving participants the opportunity to become more at ease in the physical location, in their bodies, and among each other. It involves what feminist-pragmatists identify as relational embodiment, and relational embodiment is essential for transforming conflict into creative potential:

> As social and physical creatures, we are situated in and constituted by our relationships, social structures, and the particularities of place. We are made by our interactions with others in and around us and by the physicality of our environment, including workplace and living conditions, health care, and food. The self is not separated from society or its environment; as pragmatists like Mary Parker Follett pointed out: "there is only self-in-and- through-others." (Heenen, Lake, and Whipps 2024, 292)

The approach to peacebuilding Bryn established and practices with the Nansen Dialogues is "understood and implemented as a mental, physical, and multilevel movement" (Feller and Ryan 2012, 368). This holistic approach echoes Naess as well as Nansen. Bryn served as an assistant for Naess for a period after graduate school, working closely with him as he undertook the work that ultimately was published as *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*. Naess himself references Bryn here, insisting upon the rich potential of ordinary people to bring about necessary social change. The *system* needs to change, and many of our challenges will require structural, legal, and political leadership at the top levels. But, as Galtung insisted and Addams showed, positive peace involves everyone, and we are remiss to underestimate that power. We must not "disregard the people themselves as the creative driving force in history," Bryn insists; "Individuals and groups of individuals are capable of leading a struggle to change themselves, their lifestyle, and their living conditions" (Bryn qtd. in Naess 1989, 90). Bryn's dialogue efforts are aimed at creating opportunities for people to figure out how to live together in spite of their differences, and engage together in that struggle to change social conditions. Dialogue, in Bryn's practice, makes use of "unconditional spaces" to bring together even people engaged in deep conflict.

Conclusion

Although their approaches differ considerably, thinkers like Addams, Naess, Nansen, and Bryn align in their efforts to build positive peace in the service of pursuing challenging and audacious democratic aims. These figures recognize that our democratic foundations are crumbling, but also see potential in land to hold them steady. In various ways, each has faith in the richness of their own communities and the physical spaces in and around those communities—they recognize and harness "place capital." Williams's concept of the "open space of democracy" can serve as practical and theoretical framework for promoting a feminist-pragmatist vision of place that encapsulates the democratic and peacebuild-

ing potential of common spaces and public lands. As we endeavor to ameliorate social ills and address pressing community needs in local and global contexts, we should harness the "place capital" of public lands, seeing them as natural resources—not just for timber or oil or recreation, but for navigating conflicts, for creating participatory democratic habits and practicing democratic methods, and for connecting meaningfully with others, co-creating a future rather than remaining 'prisoners of the past'" (Bryn 2015, 214).

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