The Country and the Grassroots: 
Rural action for local control 
of energy policy and development

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Working Draft

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Abstract

This is a working paper which examines the sociological issue of collective identity in rural social movements and presents an ethnographic study of a coalition of grassroots groups in central New York State that organized in the spring of 2006 to protest the construction of a 110 foot, 400,000 volt, 192-mile long direct current high voltage electrical transmission line from Utica, NY to New Windsor, NY. The study involves how a newly conceived energy corporation, New York Regional Interconnect (NYRI), is capitalizing upon the U.S. 2005 Energy Act which claims that national energy emergencies exist in regions of the United States that are deemed congested by the Department of Energy. A coalition of citizen’s organizations are jointly protesting the proposed power line on the basis that the federal government’s assertions that their region is currently in an energy “emergency” is fallacious and contends that deregulation of the electrical industry is largely responsible for perceived market “congestion.” They also see NYRI as a threat to the local environment along the proposed line, which includes a region of the Upper Delaware River designated and protected as a U.S. Wild and Scenic River in 1968. Additionally, it is suggested that the proposed power line would have a largely deleterious effect on the upstate New York economy, an economy that was likened to Appalachia by candidate-turned-governor Elliot Spitzer. The grassroots movement speaks to the socio-political questions of rural activism and democratic practice, citizen’s roles in scientific discourse and governmental policy-making, Internet connectedness and collective identity, and widely differing claims to expertise and knowledge of energy issues.
I Introduction

This is the story of a social movement emerging within a large rural area of New York State in response to the proposal of a 200-mile electrical power transmission line from Utica, New York, to New Windsor, New York. Much of the sociological research done on social movements has been focused in rural areas of developing nations or in urban areas of industrialized nations experiencing rapid demographic changes. Contrary to the themes of urban change, population density, and the sustained volatility of intense uneven development recognized in urban sociology, rural sociology has been largely influenced by the volatility of third-world conflict revolving around agricultural economics. For example, a search through the EBSCO database using the term “rural social movements” reveals many entries from the Journal of Agrarian Change, Journal of Third World Studies, or Latin American Politics & Society.

In the United States, however, new social movements in rural areas have largely been ignored by researchers. Due to changes in the structure of contemporary society that have resulted in our post-industrial information age, I contend that rural social movements in the United States will become a fertile field of investigation because they are increasingly involved in the “space of flows” of a networked information society as discussed in Castells’ The Rise of the Network Society (1996). The “country” of my title, a large rural swath of upstate New York, has in recent times been characterized by this “space of flows.”

“The space of flows,” says Castells, “is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows.” This abstraction of a “space of flows” as descriptive of our information society can be better understood by recognizing three
layers of phenomena that together make up this space and its flows. The first consists of the circuit of electrical impulses (Castells includes microelectronics, telecommunications, computer processing, broadcasting systems, and high-speed transportation in this category). The second is constituted by “nodes and hubs” of the network societies we now live in. This includes informational as well as geographic nodes and hubs. Third, the space of flows refers to the spatial organization of a “dominant, managerial elite.” The social construction of power is a key factor in how the networked, informational society functions. It prescribes how the dominant interests of a society use space in a structural way to advance their own interests.

The fundamental form of domination in our society is based on the organizational capacity to disorganize those groups in society which, while constituting a numerical majority, see their interests partially (if ever) represented only within the framework of the fulfillment of the dominant interests. Articulation of the elites, segmentation and disorganization of the masses seem to be the twin mechanisms of social domination in our societies. Space plays a fundamental role in this mechanism. In short: elites are cosmopolitan, people are local. The space of power and wealth is projected throughout the world, while people's life and experience is rooted in places, in their culture, in their history (Castells, 415-416: 1996).

In a similar formulation within the field of urban sociology, Mark Gottdiener (1985) likewise focuses on a “sociospatial perspective” which recognizes a similar phenomenon of “regionalization” and notes the hierarchical condition of “uneven development.” Importantly, these new developments of our post-industrial, networked societies have as much of an effect on rural areas as they do urban scenes.

I am involved in a case which interweaves all of these layers of the “space of flows.” In this case, uneven development defines the struggle between a multi-billion dollar electric transmission company headquartered in the urban centers surrounding central New York State and local people of that region who are perceived not to have the economic, political, or demographic strength to oppose the development project. Yet,
through vocal action and organization they have become a force of resistance against the objective of powerful, well-connected business interests who would have their right of way through two-hundred miles of rural towns, villages, agricultural land and watersheds, as well as one city and its many suburbs. My role in the story is that of a website administrator for an activist group located in central New York along the proposed route of electric transmission development (see Figures 1 and 2).

This is the case of NYRI, or New York Regional Interconnect, Inc., a company made up of a consortium of investors who, in March 2006, publicly proposed the construction of a 110 foot, 400,000 volt, 190-mile long direct current electrical
transmission line from Utica, NY to New Windsor, NY, most of which would follow the existing New York Susquehanna and Western (NYS&W) light freight rail line. Many citizens along the route have taken up positions in opposition of the transmission project for various reasons and have created a strong resistance that has gained state and national attention. Prior to examining this case further, however, it will be beneficial to understand the context of this transmission line proposal in light of the history of the electricity industry in America.

II The National Energy Situation, 1972-present

From the very inception of the energy industry it has been unique among other business enterprises. First, it supplies a product that is the equivalent of bottled electricity which can be both life-threatening and life-saving. Second, the product cannot be stored like most other products: it must be used immediately upon creation. Third, it is a product that must be delivered to its source by a very restrictive medium and, currently, the “packaging” must come in the form of wires. Thus, the dynamics of the electricity market are quite different than a traditional market where these dangers, limitations, and restrictions are not variables that can easily confuse transactions.

Nonetheless, our dependence on electricity has grown throughout American history and has never been more acute than today. This necessity was first tested on October 17, 1973, when the Arab oil-producing and exporting countries (OPEC) halted the delivery of oil to the United States in opposition of U.S. support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War. The price of oil, which was the fuel chiefly used for electricity production at the time, increased dramatically creating an energy crisis (Weil, 2006). Anyone over the
age of forty will likely remember long lines at the gas station and a national shift of
attention toward energy conservation and efficiency in the following years. The efforts
made toward conservation in the 1970s was all but forgotten in the heady years of the
1980s, as Reagan’s America saw the Berlin Wall fall, conquered the Soviet Union, and
encouraged privatization in many markets theretofore heavily regulated by the federal
government. Accompanying these triumphs, of course, was the massive stock-crash of
1987, the Iran-Contra affair, and an ever-increasing federal deficit. By 1992, however,
the Republican agenda in Congress was clearly aimed at gutting government services in
lieu of private contracting. The electricity industry was no exception to this agenda.
Congress enacted the Energy Policy Act of 1992, creating the biggest change in
electricity regulation and policy since regulation was put into place in 1935,
fundamentally reorganizing the structure of what had once been considered a “natural
monopoly” to attempt to deliver a more competitive, more efficient, and more fairly
priced electrical market. EPAct 1992 was, however, “an insider’s law, a product of the
utilities and independent generators,” says Gordon Weil, licensed power broker and
energy consultant, and author of Blackout: How the Electric Industry Exploits America
(2006). “They gained political support for EPAct among those who were convinced that
it would guarantee lower prices for consumers. Without any careful analysis of where the
new law might lead, President G.H.W. Bush and Congress seemed to think it could do no
harm and might provide real benefit to customers.” In reality, in many deregulated
regions of the U.S., customers are paying higher adjusted prices today than they did in
1992. Since the deregulation of electricity markets in 1996, New York has been one of 16
states in the nation to create laws allowing electric utilities to be managed, owned and
controlled by private industry in the free market system, virtually unregulated by state governance once running. The reason for deregulation was that it would reduce costs and increase efficiency. However, privatization has not reduced prices significantly in most areas, and has increased consumer prices in many regions (Keith 2007) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Deregulation of Electricity Markets, 1990-2006
Source: Associated Press (Keith, 2007).

The seeds of privatization of public services were sown in the Reagan period and by 2001 they were sprouting. In 2001, Vice-President Dick Cheney held a controversial energy task force meeting, the attendees of which were not revealed until 2007 by the Washington Post, causing a stir amongst the liberal media particularly due to Cheney’s involvement with the energy industry in his private career after serving as Secretary of Defense in 1988-1992 at the first Bush White House. The Post revealed the participants
of that meeting, which included oil giants such as ConocoPhillips, Exxon, BP, Royal Dutch-Shell, and Chevron. While the meeting does not implicitly incriminate anyone, it is clear that the energy industry generally has tight connections to the highest levels of government, where conservationist and environmental leaders have yet to attain access of that kind.

Criminal activity was at foot, however, in the California energy crisis of 2001. Ken Lay’s Enron, in the most famous example of corporate fraud in recent times, bilked California customers without remorse, manipulating the energy market in the state by shutting down electrical service. The schemes they used, going by names like “Fat Boy” and “Death Star,” were preconceived, premeditated and carried out ruthlessly, despite reports of rolling blackouts and even deaths as a result of electricity deficit during one of the hottest summers in southern California in years. The west coast energy crisis was a precursor to the east coast blackout of 2003, which in fact had nothing to do with premeditated meddling, but was the result of an Ohio electricity company failing to keep lines clear of debris. When their section of the grid went down on August 14, a cascading effect rippled through the electrical grid causing a mass failure from Buffalo to Rochester, Syracuse to Albany, effecting New York City, and other parts of the Northeast – Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Ontario, Canada. About 50 million people were out of power for several days (Schewe 2007). The cost of the power failure, while difficult to calculate, was estimated at $4 billion to $10 billion in the United States, and more losses in Canada, where Ontario “actually suffered a one-month recession because of the loss of power.” Importantly, this was not due to grid “congestion” (meaning bottlenecks, not market price congestion) or an inability to produce enough
power, but rather by mismanagement of the myriad private electrical transmission and generation utilities that must work together to make the grid solvent (Schewe 2007). It began with a few power lines downed by falling branches in Ohio, and the outage cascaded outward from there. Nonetheless, the confidence in the ability of the electrical industry to provide a stable, reliable system of electrical provision to customers was shaken and those unaware of the real problem assumed that the electrical grid needed reinforcement and attention. Former Energy Secretary Bill Richardson, then governor of New Mexico, commented “We are a major superpower with a third world electric grid. Our grid is antiquated. It needs serious modernization” (Firestone and Perez-Pena, 2003).

In fact, annual reports to regulators show “that as a whole, transmission lines were less than halfway through their thirty-year depreciable lives. Pole and wires were regularly maintained and had achieved a high degree of reliability” (Weil 2006:110). Despite the facts, however, it became a political priority to revitalize and modernize the grid, as Richardson suggested.

Congress went a step further: they revamped the 1992 Energy Policy Act with an entirely new Energy Policy Act of 2005. Written largely by Joe Barton (R-Texas), the bill was signed into law on August 8, 2005. Within the many provisions of the 2005 Energy Policy act can be found a ruling important to this case study, section 1221(a) which designates areas that had experienced recent grid troubles, namely the mid-Atlantic/northeast region and southern California, to become National Interest Electrical Transmission Corridors (NIETC). Interestingly, the initial staff draft for the acronym to describe these corridors was “NIETZSCHE,” which stood for National Interest Electric Transmission Zonal Secured Corridors of High Energy, in response to a Congressional
finding that “Where there’s a will for power, there’s a right-of-way” (Cunningham, 2006). According to the new EPAct NIETC rule, the Eastern and Western Interconnections of the electrical grid (but not ERCOT, the Texas Interconnection) were to be examined for reliability and energy “congestion.” Section 1221(a) of the 2005 Energy Act would append section 216(h) of the Federal Powers Act to achieve that goal. The Federal Power Act was established in 1935 which was largely a response to the corporate excesses of electricity mogul Samuel Insull and marked the introduction of government regulation of the electric industry (Weil 2006: 30). The United States Department of Energy explains Section 1221(a) of the 2005 Energy Act this way:

Section 1221(a) of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 added section 216(h) to the Federal Power Act. Section 216(h) provides for the Department of Energy to act as the lead agency for purposes of coordinating all applicable Federal authorizations and related environmental reviews required to site an electric transmission facility. This section also requires the DOE and the heads of all Federal agencies with authority to issue Federal authorizations to enter into a memorandum of understanding to ensure the timely and coordinated review and permitting of electricity transmission facilities (section 216(h)(7)(B)(i)). On August 8, 2006, the Department of Energy and eight other Federal agencies entered into a Memorandum of Understanding on Early Coordination of Federal Authorization and Related Environmental Reviews Required in Order to Site Electric Transmission Facilities (MOU), which provides a framework for implementing each agency’s obligations under section 216(h).

DOE is now considering the need for regulations to further implement its responsibilities under section 216(h). To the extent the Department finds regulations on how it will conduct its coordination responsibilities are necessary, DOE will publish them as proposed regulations for public comment. A decision on whether to propose regulations is expected to be made in the near future (U.S. Department of Energy, 2005).

In order to institute these “regulations,” the DOE would give “backstop” permitting authority over electrical transmission siting to the Federal Electric Regulatory Commission, or FERC. Upon embarking on an effort to substantiate this section of the Energy Policy (EP) Act, the DOE in 2006 proposed that corridors be designated within which these oversight rules would apply. These corridors were designated based upon electricity congestion studies which were mandated by the 2005 EPAct:
Section 1221(a) of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 updates Section 216 of the Federal Power Act and requires the Department of Energy to issue a national transmission congestion study for comment by August 2006 and every three years thereafter. Based on the study and public comments, DOE may designate selected geographic areas as National Corridors. Applicants for projects proposed within designated corridors that are not acted upon by state siting authorities within one year may request FERC to exercise federal "backstop" siting authority (U.S. Department of Energy, 2005).

The congestion study results were released by the DOE in August 2006 and identified two key areas of the United States, the northeast and the southwest, as having “critical” levels of congestion (Figures 4 and 5).

These results of the DOE congestion study were not largely contested by people falling within the area of the NIETC for two reasons. First, the results and the following actions were not publicized outside of fairly esoteric means, such as the DOE website.
and the Federal Register (Federal Register, 2006). There was little media attention given
to the designation and what attention it did get in the media was largely ignored due to a
perception that no direct threat existed, except to those within the areas of power lines
already proposed inside those corridors. In addition, the assumption was that the
designation could do nothing but improve electric infrastructure. Many no doubt felt that
the designation of NIETC was connected to the instances of blackouts which occurred
several years earlier in the same regions. Importantly, however, the power failures of
California (in 2000 and 2001) and the Northeast (2003) were not related to electricity
congestion. Rather they were caused by the manipulative business practices of Enron in
the West and poorly maintained infrastructure in the East.

According to EnergyVortex.com, electricity transmission congestion is defined as
the condition existing when demand outstrips supply. But,

The term is somewhat misleading, because no actual congestion occurs in the
transmission system. These systems don't slow down, and electricity doesn't become
blocked or delayed because the transmission system can't be stretched beyond its limits.
Attempting to operate a transmission system beyond its rated capacity is likely to result in
line faults and electrical fires, so this can never occur. The congestion is actually a
shortage of transmission capacity to supply a waiting market, and the condition is marked
by systems running at full capacity and proper efficiency which cannot serve all waiting

It is a worthwhile hypothesis to suggest that the term “congestion” was chosen by the
DOE as a label to imply lack of reliability in the “grid,” when in fact it is a term that
measures the market integrity and ability of competitive partners to trade fairly, and in
the interests of the public. The deregulation of the 1992 EPAct is followed up by the
privatization of the 2005 EPAct, a system by which electrical generation is split from
transmission and distribution, and each player in the marker must negotiate prices and
trading rules. This leads to what is known as “gaming the system”, which can be defined
as “taking advantage of legal loopholes and operational quirks to create or exploit
bottlenecks and chokepoints” (Overbye and Weber, 2002). In other words, privatization is the cause of congestion. Sometimes, as in the case of Enron, the system is rigged to the point where the trading company is controlling the production of the grid. Their traders were ruthless. This statement from California Senator Dianne Feinstein’s testimony shows just how ruthless:

[One] trader said: “Just cut 'em off. They're so [expletive]. They should just bring back...horses and carriages, ...lamps, ...kerosene lamps.” (Expletives Deleted)

To have traders say these things shows a complete disregard for the health and safety of Californians. And this was not an isolated trader – this was a mentality apparently endemic to Enron employees.

...Let me read you another excerpt, this one illustrating the lengths these traders would go to manipulate the market:

Tom: The headline before that is “California Grid Operators Call Stage 2 Power Emergency as Reserves Drop.”
Matt: Yeah. They're on the ropes today. I exported like a [expletive] 400 megs.
Tom: Wow.
Matt: I bought it all. I'll see you guys—I'm takin' mine to the desert.
Tom: [Expletive] 'em, right?
Matt: I think those gamblers in Las Vegas need the power more than you.
Matt goes on to say that he and Enron were getting rich off of exporting power out of California when Californians needed it most.

The transcripts prove that Enron intentionally congested transmission lines and used its influence to delay wholesale price caps in order to maximize its profits.

Other transcripts also prove that Enron traders made secret deals with power producers, deliberately driving up prices by ordering power plants shut down (Congressional Record, 2004).

David Freeman, former New York Power Authority leader and the first person to coordinate the national energy policy under President Lyndon Johnson, suggests that in “the free market, it's okay for the price of fur coats to go up and down. It's okay for carrots to go up and down, or almost anything else that you can do without or that you can store. It's not okay for the oxygen of life in this high-energy civilization. That's the lesson we need to learn. The economists, they have an interesting word; it's a Freudian slip. They call it "externalities." That's their word for saying that the impact on the
consumer, you just have to live with it. …They are without any human feeling as to the impact on the consumer, or, actually, the impact on small, independent producers when the price gets too low. This volatility, what we're learning, is no good” (Chandler, 2001).

The DOE’s decision to adopt the specific language of “congestion” to use industry terminology in this manner may have been a willful misdirection. It is both technically correct and widely misunderstood. Even if it was not, the confusion regarding the term “congestion” can lead to a breakdown of communication between the scientific-political elite and the local activist. Without a clear understanding of the machinations of the electricity market, the layperson will easily connect power failures with the term congestion.

The most recent activity on the front of the NIET corridors had the DOE conducting public meetings to get input from interested parties on the designations. There were three meetings scheduled in May 2007 in Arlington, Virginia, New York City and San Diego. In none of these areas were there transmission proposals that would be impacted by the rules regulating a congestion corridor designation. The New York City public meeting was scheduled approximately two weeks prior to its occurrence and was scheduled for the middle of the work week. Under considerable political and public pressure, the DOE added four more meetings to the list to take place in June 2007 in Rochester (NY), Pittsburgh, Las Vegas and Phoenix. In the case of Rochester, the public meeting was still 130 miles from the northern terminus of the power line proposal that would incite tremendous public out roar and gain the attention of national political leaders and the media.
III  New York Regional Interconnect, Inc. vs. The Grassroots

In 2006, shortly before the Department of Energy released its news regarding the National Interest Electrical Transmission Corridors, a private, for-profit company announced a plan to build a power line that, not coincidentally, falls within the mid-Atlantic corridor. On March 30, 2006, a company called New York Regional Interconnect, Inc. (NYRI, www.nyri.us) announced that it was proposing to build a 400,000 volt HVDC electrical power transmission line from Marcy, New York (near Utica) to Orange County in the lower Hudson Valley, 190 miles to the south. The towers would range from 80 feet to 110 feet in height and placed every 1/8 mile along the route. A long stretch of the proposed route follows the New York Susquehanna and Western (NYSW) railroad, owned by the Delaware Otsego Corporation headquartered in Cooperstown, New York. The new transmission company and the chief executive officer of NYSW, the late Walter Rich (d. Aug 10, 2007), had clearly made a deal with the heads of NYRI to secure leasing rights and allow the route along the tracks to be occupied by their power line.

According to their website, “NYRI is owned by a consortium of investors with broad experience in managing energy and other infrastructure assets and investments. The consortium includes Borealis Infrastructure Management, a subsidiary of one of Canada's largest pension plans, and American Consumer Industries (ACI), an investment holding company that specializes in environmentally sensitive power generation technologies and applications.” At the organizational head of NYRI is President and Chief Executive Officer Richard Muddiman. Muddiman is also President of 50% owner of NYRI, Inc., American Consumer Industries. Aside from Borealis Infrastructure, the
investors in NYRI, Inc., projected to be a $1.6 billion project, are unknown (see Figure 6).

![Figure 6 – American Consumer Industries (ACI) Organizational Chart](Figure 6 – American Consumer Industries (ACI) Organizational Chart)
Source: ACI website, [www.aciinc.net](http://www.aciinc.net)

The NYRI office headquarters are listed as existing in Albany, New York (100 State Street, Suite 1033, Albany, New York 12207), appears to be a front – when State Assemblyman Clifford Crouch visited the location, he found “basically, nobody there, though. Just an office and telephone and nobody is really in there. So that telephone must transfer to someplace else” (New York State Senate Energy And Telecommunications Committee Hearing, 2006). He reiterated this to the company representatives at a public hearing and received this response:

[LEONARD SINGER [counsel to NYRI]: To be absolutely frank on this issue, the people who work on this project have been threatened and harassed and that has resulted in the reluctance to identify the offices. So, you know, if we seem like we're being evasive then, you know, that's one of the reasons for it. We also believe that NYRI is -- well, I don't believe that, I know -- it's a New York Transportation Corporation, it's organized and existing in an office in Albany. And that's what is relevant to the Article VII Application and to whether this project gets certificated.

SENATOR LIBOUS: [Sir,] you are missing Senator Wright's point. You're missing his point. His point is that what we're asking is not where the shell office is, as Assemblyman Crouch mentioned, where the phone is. But we're asking you to share with us where NYRI [is] -- I don't think that's a difficult question. By the way, I have been threatened
many times in my career. My phone number is still in the book. My address is still in Binghamton and people know where I live, and I am not afraid. And my life has been threatened at least a dozen times. And if you don't believe me, you can talk to the State Police. I don't buy that. That's garbage. We're asking for basic information here and it's not -- we want to know where the company's headquarters is that wants to come through our properties. We want to know who the investors are (New York State Senate Energy And Telecommunications Committee Hearing, 2006a).

Behind the scenes at NYRI are a father/son team of financeers, Willis McLeese and Robert McLeese of Toronto, Ontario. They are at the reins of not only NYRI but an array of energy projects spanning the continent from Southern California to northern Ontario. Reporter Brendan Scott notes that

In recent years, McLeese has begun to emerge from his father's shadow. In 1990, he founded Access Capital, a small consulting firm in Toronto's financial district that claims it has secured financing for more than $1.5 billion in energy projects.

McLeese was also among a small cadre of movers and shakers who turned a loose group of small power generators and banks into a major player in the province's energy industry, the Association of Power Producers of Ontario.

That role has earned McLeese spots on influential committees and given him access to some of Canada's most powerful politicians. It's given him the capital and the pull to make the idea of building a 1,200-megawatt power line across the Empire State seem like a natural next step.

But make no mistake: NYRI is the biggest thing McLeese or his industrialist father has ever tried.

"He's rolling the dice pretty big here," says Tom Adams, who heads a Toronto-based think tank, the Energy Probe Research Foundation, and sits on a government-backed energy policy board with Robert McLeese.

"It's just so huge," Adams says. "I think he's capable of it, but this is a project that would be a challenge for a huge corporate conglomerate." (Scott, 2006a).

Headed by these financiers, a group (presumably) of unknown investors is willing to back at least half of the $1.6 billion cost of the project.

Interestingly, these same players had proposed in 2004 to build a transmission line of nearly identical route. The company was called Pegasus Power Systems, also known as the Niagara Reinforcement Interconnection, and its president was identified as Richard A. Muddiman (ESS Group, 2004). Pegasus came to an end when they
encountered tremendous resistance from an environmental/river group called the Upper Delaware Preservation Coalition, created to preserve the natural identity of the upper Delaware river on the border of New York state and Pennsylvania (see Figure 7). Inexplicably, given the evidence of the connection, NYRI has claimed no affiliation to Pegasus Power Systems.

![Figure 7 – Delaware River Basin](source)

Source: Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

After announcing the proposal of the power line, the news had hit many local papers and residents in many communities along the nearly 200 mile stretch of the proposed route began to stir. NYRI filed their application with New York State’s electrical power transmission permitting authority, the Public Service Commission (PSC) on May 31, 2006. Article VII of the Public Service Law (“PSL”), §§120-130, gives the authority to PSC administrative law judges to rule on filings, settle disputes, take comments from public sources, and judge over the permitting process in general. While there is no statutory deadline for approving permits, there was worry about the speed with which events were taking place.
NYRI, for its part, was following the letter of the guidelines of the Article VII proceedings and had created a slick web page which offered information about the transmission line’s benefits and made available PDF versions of the orthographic maps used to identify specific areas to be affected (although there were many problems and complaints with downloading the files, particularly for many rural residents without broadband computer access).

They also scheduled a number of public meetings within the local communities the proposed route would interrupt. The NYRI representatives got more than they bargained for when they arrived at these communities. Three representatives and a support team were involved in arranging the meetings and providing maps, lectures and a question and answer session. William May, NYRI’s Project Manager, Robert Malecki, Regulatory Consultant to the project, and Jonathon Pierce, the Public Relations director for NYRI, were the chief company representatives at these meetings. Descriptions of the meetings found on one grassroots activist website outline the character of these meetings:

April 27, 2006: New Windsor, NY
The first NYRI meeting with the community, in New Windsor, NY, "began with shouts denouncing the meeting's format and ended with an accusation of 'corporate greed'. At one point, town Supervisor George Green threatened to clear the room and called two police officers to stand in the back" (Scott, 2006b).

May 8, 2006: Binghamton, NY
The Binghamton meeting with NYRI executives was equally as uninformative as any of them. UDPC representatives characterized it as "mistaken, misaligned, misleading, and misinformed."

May 9, 2006: Utica, NY
The meeting in Utica on May 9 was a sign of things to come. Utica Mayor Tim Julian led a walk out of most of the 150 or so people at the meeting.

May 11, 2006: Norwich, NY, High School
"Thursday night, about 150 people [of a total of approximately 800 attending] were turned away from the NYRI meeting in Norwich, including many from the Town of Hamilton. Just before traveling to Norwich, some of those Town of Hamilton residents spoke out against the proposed power line project during a Hamilton Town Board meeting. The board unanimously passed a resolution demanding a one-year moratorium on the project" (David Hollis, Radio Free Hamilton). NYRI, Inc. has promised Norwich
another meeting before they file at the NYS Public Service Commission, due to the fact that about 200 people were left out in the cold. UPDATE: NYRI spokesmen declared that the first Senate Hearing to which they were invited constituted their second visit to Norwich, even though that hearing allowed ONLY invited speakers to participate.

May 18, 2006: Callicoon, NY

The youth center in Callicoon, New York was filled to capacity with over 450 local residents opposed to the New York Regional Interconnect Project. NYRI continued to avoid direct questions. Some of those they did answer included: "Would you rule out the use of eminent domain?" NYRI: "No". "I heard that if the route were approved you would have the authority to move it one way or another by 1/8 of a mile?" NYRI: "Correct". "Will you be conducting economic impact studies to determine the economic impact of this area?" NYRI: "No it is not required by the application process" (personal communication).

Source: www.nyri.info

Shortly after the public meetings, many community members sought one another out through email, by phone, and through the general “grapevine” network of talk that goes on in small towns, to organize a united front against this perceived violation of property. Curiously, however, the response was not only local, but regional as well, with those most concerned with NYRI’s proposal now getting in touch via the Internet with others up and down the 200-mile stretch of the proposed route.

The earliest group to become active, even prior to the public meetings, was the Upper Delaware Preservation Coalition (UDPC), who was made aware of a similar threat several years earlier with the Pegasus project. The UDPC website was influential in spreading the early word to prospective attendees of the first public meetings.

Next to organize was a group from the central area of the proposed route, in Madison and Chenango counties of New York. The first meeting of the group took place in April 2006. This meeting was attended by what were to become the co-chairs of the organization, Eve Ann Schwartz, a farmer and lawyer who is very active in local politics, and Chris Rossi, a curator at the Fenimore Art Museum and Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, New York. Several of the leaders of the “Town Teams” organized to
canvass the rural villages one by one to raise awareness also were present, as was artist Steven Skollar, who has created numerous photographic compilations of local residences, businesses (see Figure 8), and agricultural areas showing what the power line would look like if it were to be standing on, near, or through their property, and the web administrator (myself, who had secured a web domain, www.nyri.info and had already created a webpage a month earlier designed to ironically mock NYRI’s slick and very flashy webpage – www.nyri.us – outlining their proposed project). The organization’s first treasurer, a number of committee leaders assigned to investigate the economic, political, health, ecological, and scientific bases of the NYRI project also attended, and journalist David Hollis, who was very active in establishing the group and reporting on the NYRI situation on his website, www.radiofreehamiton.com, was there.

Figure 7 – Mock View of Sherburne, NY, diner with power line
(Source: Photographic compilation by Steve Skollar)

At one of the early meetings of STOPNYRI, Inc., in Poolville, New York, was a contingent from the northern area of the route, such as Sauquoit, Chadwicks and New Hartford, all near Utica. Inspired, they were determined to organize their own local
resistance and later initiated the Upstate New York Citizens Alliance, organized by Dan Buckingham and chaired by Michael Steiger, whose broadly conceived mission is “to effectively organize and inform the citizens of Upstate New York in a unified manner on issues affecting our communities both individually and collectively.” They too created a website to disperse information relevant to their group and others, at www.upstatenycitizensalliance.com.

Also organizing around this same time was a group of four technologically savvy individuals from Cochecton, NY, in Sullivan County, near the southern terminus of the proposed route. They set up a data-driven website designed to provide updates and information on NYRI and to collect information from registrants to be used to distribute e-mail alerts about upcoming legislative action, opportunities to protest and other activities. The website, www.stopnyri.com, was yet another conduit of information and outrage.

Entering the scene of grassroots activism along the proposed route was yet another citizen’s activist group, this time from Otisville, New York. They named their group SayNo2NYRI and created yet another website (www.sayno2nyri.com) and mail list.

In addition to these local organizations websites, the Internet was rife with talk about NYRI on many different weblogs and forums, as well as through a large email distribution system. Blogs and forums were essential in widening knowledge of the NYRI proposal throughout the greater central New York region. Examples include the www.StopThePowerlines.com forum (run by citizen Lynn Phillips from Hancock, NY, in the southern area of the proposed route who dedicates the blog exclusively to discussion
of NYRI), the Chenango Talks weblog, now defunct (originally created by the Norwich, NY, Chamber of Commerce), the www.ChenangoGreens.org forum (run by the local Green party, of whom, Mike Bernhard has been the most vocal) and the NYCO weblog (www.twentyfour01.com/nyco/, a central New York forum which nowhere explains the meaning of its title acronym and has no clear ownership contact, but has a regular NYRI update section). Additionally, politicians began to use online press releases and email lists to inform constituents that they were being heard.

By June 2006, enough letter writing, protesting, and blogging had occurred to garner the attention of the regional politicians representing constituents along the proposed route. They made statements confirming the outrage of the citizens and promises to protect them from this threat. It was shortly determined that three State Senate hearings were to be convened in the following months. The fact that the elections of November 2006 were rapidly approaching may have influenced the volume of the political rhetoric against the power line proposal. The first Senate hearing took place in Norwich, New York, where representatives for and against the line gave testimony and answered questions from the five person Energy Committee panel. One of the first questions to be asked in the first hearing actually came from a citizen in the audience, Dr. Glenn Stein, an optometrist from Norwich, New York, affiliated with the grassroots group STOPNYRI, Inc., who requested of the committee that the NYRI representatives be placed under oath. The committee chose not to swear them in.

CHAIRMAN SENATOR WRIGHT: For the record, there has been a question asked in the audience and there were discussions among ourselves as to whether or not these individuals would be placed under oath this evening. There was a conscious decision -- there was a conscious decision not to place them under oath. Because of the nature of the material that's contained in the application, much of it is technical, scientific, and legal data that some or all of the individuals cannot testify accurately to in terms of its complete accuracy. Therefore, we were informed that they may have to secure the advice of counsel to decline to answer our questions under that technicality. We chose in
discussions with them to avoid swearing them in and assume that all parties will exercise good faith and judgment and providing full and complete information to the best of their ability (New York State Senate Energy And Telecommunications Committee Hearing, 2006a).

On July 15, 2006, a few weeks before the Department of Energy was to release the results of its congestion study, a “Regional Congress” was formed by members of the citizens groups of the various communities along the proposed route who recognized that their power was greater in solidarity than repeating the efforts of one another in the different regions. Meeting at the Chamber of Commerce building in Norwich, NY (a central location along the proposed route), Troy Bystrom of the UDPC took the informal role of leading the meeting, which was appropriate given his depth of knowledge regarding the issue going back to the Pegasus project. After much talk about the NYRI proposal, an attempt was made to formalize the group, although it was clear that there were different parties interested in different objectives. The UDPC was interested in protecting the river, farmers upstate were interested in protecting their farmland, conservationists were interested in protecting the environment in general, manufacturers were interested in protecting low electricity prices, etc. Nonetheless, a vote by the 30 or so members present at the meeting to formally organize a Regional Congress confirmed that there was a shared enemy common to all of the interested parties and that it was valuable to have one group organizing against NYRI on a concerted front. At the same time, villages, towns and counties along the route were beginning to pledge tangible support for the fight against NYRI, which was looking more and more like it was to be a legal fight needing some major funding. Each of the eight counties the proposed route straddles promised to support the effort with $50,000 and the state government also pledged $500,000 of support to citizen’s action groups working against NYRI, amassing
to nearly $1 million in financial backing. No actual funds were immediately distributed, but the commitment had been made to tangibly support the efforts of these groups.

Citizen’s action groups continued their efforts by raising public awareness of their opposition to NYRI. Thousands of lawn signs clearly opposing the proposed power line have appeared along the 200-mile route, featuring slogans such as “STOP NYRI Power Lines,” “It’s Time to Pull the Plug: No Power Lines,” “Because We Say So: No Power Line,” “We Vote: No Power Line,” “The Battle Line Has Been Drawn: No Power Lines,” “Not Here, Not Now, Not Ever: No Power Line, and several visually symbolic signs were printed, such as that with the words “Power Lines” through which was drawn the ubiquitous “No” circle, and a sign with a drawing of skeletons standing in front of their house, located below power lines. Many, many other variants were produced and as the importance of the NIETC ruling became apparent, signs started to reflect the federal/state dichotomy as well, such as the lawn sign reading “Communities Not Corridors: NO NIETC” and a bumper sticker which reads, “Don’t FERC with Central New York: No NIETC – No NYRI Power Line”. Many of these signs were donated and others purchased by the groups and sold at cost. T-Shirts, bumper stickers, wearable buttons, calendars, and other paraphernalia have come to symbolize the movement and gain attention as well. They participated with floats in holiday parades (with power tower hats and floats displaying signs like “Feds – Don’t Dump On Us!”) and holding bake sale fundraisers (where the baked goods resembled gingerbread houses being rolled over by Tonka bulldozers and cupcakes with the names of towns along the proposed route strung together with little power towers). Amidst the seriousness of the issue, there was a sense of fun and community bonding which pervaded many of the groups.
The Regional Congress met infrequently and eventually transmuted into a group designed to capture the various monies promised to help pay for a competent lawyer who could file briefs and motions to the PSC in an attempt to slow down NYRI’s progress. This group, formed in July 2006, became known as Communities Against Regional Interconnect, or CARI, and was comprised of elected representatives of the eight counties through which the New York Regional Interconnect lines would pass, as well as the Upper Delaware Council (UDC), the Upper Delaware Preservation Coalition (UDPC) and STOP NYRI, Inc. Chris Cunningham, Sullivan County legislative chair, is the group’s chair. After considering counsel from attorney Richard Lippes, who famously tried the Love Canal case in Niagara Falls, New York, the law firm of Gilberti Stinziano Heintz and Smith, P.C. William Gilberti, chairman and founder of the firm’s land use group, is “one of the foremost authorities on environmental law,” according to information from the firm. The formation of CARI was undertaken with a great deal of negotiation, as the varied interests of citizen’s groups and county representatives created a certain tension, but even more importantly, the control of funding was disputed.

At every opportunity, the Gilberti group pressured the political regulatory agencies while the public was bombarding local, state, and national politicians and bureaucrats with a concerted letter writing campaign. In late July 2006, the Public Service Commission had reviewed the permitting application of NYRI and come to the conclusion that it was deficient and had failed to permit waivers of the environmental and economic surveys required by the process. State regulators cannot schedule a public hearing on the project until NYRI's application complies with several requirements, chiefly about the project's visual and environmental impact and the research of alternative
routes. NYRI lawyers said filling the request could take up to six months and asked for a mediator to find a compromise. The mediation process took place in January and February 2007 and led to a settlement on four specific studies that would be necessary to complete NYRI’s application to the PSC. NYRI officials said it would take three to four months to complete the studies and submit them to the state. They have not completed these studies to date (September 2007).

IV The Political Sociology of NYRI and NIETC

Much of the debate going on both online and off regarding the proposed power line was (and continues to be) over damaging health, environmental, economic and aesthetic that the line could do to the area that it runs through. As evidenced in local group meetings, one of the first actions that many people took was to begin to research what effect power lines of this magnitude have had on other communities. Predisposed to find negative effects, this took the form of Internet searches and library study. A quick Google of “power lines” and “health effects” gives one the impression that power lines cause cancer, and most prominently in children. The second paragraph of the first link in such a Google search (conducted on Sept. 16, 2007) opens “Studies conducted in the 1980s showed a link between magnetic field strength and the risk of childhood leukemia.” This is from the National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). The second link in Google is titled “Power Lines and Cancer.” Because the route is proposed to transit through 7 counties, 1 city, 7 villages and 30 towns, many activists see this threat as dire and do not desire to be the guinea pigs proving the
cancerous point that the scientific evidence regarding the harmful health effects of power lines is not yet conclusive.

Talking to transmission industry officials on power lines and cancer, on the other hand, one would come away with the impression that electro-magnetic frequency (EMF) and extremely low frequency (ELF) radiation exposure is harmless. While some communities near power lines have an unusually high occurrence of cancer and other health problems, they argue, other communities near power lines have seen no such trends. It is possible that the high-cancer rate seen in some of the communities near power lines is nothing more than a matter of chance. They focus upon the controversy surrounding the research. For example, in their mandatory analysis of the Sahuarita-Nogales power line, Tuscon Electric Power Company mentions the NIEHS report released in June 1999 entitled *Health Effects from Exposure to Power-line Frequency Electric and Magnetic Fields*. The report studied the effects of the extremely low frequency range (ELF) fields generated by the power lines in the United States. The NIEHS report’s Executive Summary concludes that “The scientific evidence suggesting that ELF/EMF exposures pose any health risk is weak.” The report continues, “The probability that EMF exposure is truly a health hazard is currently small.”

The lack of rock-solid evidence for what the health effects indeed are with EMF/ELF exposure has clearly led to varying definitions of the situation that are not easily parsed. Dr. Les Roberts, an epidemiologist who worked for the past eleven years at Johns Hopkins University and four years prior to that at the U.S. Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, now lives in central New York (Chenango County) and has spoken about the debate surrounding the NYRI proposed power lines and cancer. At the New York State Senate Energy and Telecommunications Committee Public Hearing on
Electric Transmission Line Proposed by New York Regional Interconnect, Inc. which took place in New Hartford, New York (a suburb of Utica through which the proposed route passes), he gave the following testimony which reveals some of the difficulties of parsing knowledge regarding the health effects of power lines.

Those of us who work in public health have two major challenges. One is to figure out what things pose a health hazard, and once we know, figure out how to communicate those in a way that is useful for society. It took 25 years between when the Surgeon General said cigarettes cause cancer and we had a consensus in the scientific community to the point the tobacco companies agreed.

The health effects of electromagnetic fields are far harder to study. All of us who have electricity in their home or workplace are exposed to electromagnetic radiation. Like cigarettes, the health effects come decades later perhaps. People have no ability to tell researchers what their exposure was in the past. But in spite of this, in the past 5 or 6 years there has been an overwhelming consensus that high voltage transmission lines cause childhood leukemia.

It has been 27 years since the first study linking proximity of power lines to cancer. And a review published in 2001 by federal researchers found that at level .4 microteslas the chances that a child would develop leukemia would double. Other reviews have come to the same conclusion. And these conclusions appear to be about the same in Europe with DC transmission lines as in North America with alternating current lines. One of the main troubles is once you know that, how to communicate these notices to the public. All of us accept that there are hazards associated with every public service. Interstate highways bring us auto accidents, at moment [sic] pipe water system transmit disease. Every year about 900 people are electrocuted in the U.S., but none of us wants to do away with highways or high transmission lines.

But we want the information that exists to be incorporated into the decisions to minimize those hazards that we have to endure. The equivalent measure for power lines is to keep them away from people.

The World Health Organization, the State of California, our National Center for Environmental Health, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences have all concluded that electromagnetic transmission fields should not exceed .2 microteslas from transmission lines.

We have calibrated that the levels outside of the right-of-way from this line will be 10 to 40 times those levels. The NYRI application to the Public Service Commission roughly confirms these unacceptable levels, and they conclude that this is not a problem (New York State Senate Energy And Telecommunications Committee Hearing, 2006b).

Upon being questioned about this testimony by now former New York State Senator Ray Meier, NYRI lawyer Leon Singer had the following to say:

SENATOR MEIER: Did the application, to your knowledge, contain any analysis about the exposure to electromagnetic fields, human exposure, according to the commonly accepted measurement in the professional field, which is the microtesla testing?
LEONARD SINGER [counsel to NYRI]: All I can tell you, Senator, is the application contains a report by the expert in this field, and that individual, Dr. Bailey, concludes, and it is in a portion of our application, concludes that there will be no adverse health effects from electromagnetic fields emanating from this facility.

SENATOR MEIER: Well, we've had testimony earlier from a physician, we've had testimony today from a Ph.D., epidemiologist, who tells us that we're dealing with anywhere from 10 to 40 times the level of acceptable exposure with your line. ...There's plenty of relevant testimony and literature that gives the microteslas as a relative unit of measurement. Could we expect at some point you're going to offer something in terms of a measurement that is recognized and accepted in the scientific field?

LEONARD SINGER: I believe the report in our application is accepted and is an accepted scientific method for reviewing electromagnetic field impact from a facility like this. Our expert, Dr. Bailey, will be available for cross-examination during the Article VII process under the Public Service Commission. And you or any other intervening party can ask him these types of questions at that time, as well as present your own evidence of those impacts (New York State Senate Energy And Telecommunications Committee Hearing, 2006b).

The health effects of high voltage power lines are controversial enough that if NYRI can present their case as evidentiary rather than as a moral decision they will have a strong chance of bypassing this issue. And the public service permitting process is far more geared to recognize evidentiary rather than moral arguments.

Equally difficult to correlate are the environmental issues related to the NYRI line, such as wetland protection, historical/archaeological significance and scenic rivers. The route would impact 65 miles of farm land, 70.5 miles of forest lands, 52.4 miles of brush lands, 154 streams and rivers, 64 trout streams, 5 state regulated wet lands, 37 federal wetlands and protected Wild and Scenic River areas which contain endangered species like the American Bald Eagle and Timber Rattlesnake.

For example, the route would travel through an ecologically sensitive area of central New York, Nine Mile Swamp, which is a watershed for the Chenango River, which flows into the Susquehanna, Delaware, and eventually south to the Chesapeake Bay area. Contamination due to development at the source of a major waterway is not a
consideration for many, including the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation which has taken a stand against the NYRI proposed power line.

Nine Mile Swamp is also the site of a historic local legend: it is the home of the infamous Loomis Gang who lived there in the early 1800s. The swamp was home and hiding place for the gang, as described in this 1877 report written for *The New York Sun*:

George Washington Loomis, father of this noted family, came to Oneida county in 1802. He settled in Sangerfield Township, near the Madison County line. He was muscular and about 5 feet 10 inches high. He was 25 years old and weighed 180 pounds. Loomis is said to have been driven from Vermont for horse stealing. His record in Oneida and Madison counties bears out the imputation. He bought 385 acres of land covering the highest knob in the former county. After clearing it he built a substantial farmhouse on the side of a hill overlooking the Chenango Valley.

The Chenango River, at this point a mere brook filled with speckled trout, watered a large cedar swamp that choked the valley below the mansion. This swamp fills much space in the annals of the Loomis family. Stolen horses and other plunder were hidden in it, and it was a never-failing avenue of escape when the gang were hard pressed with constables. It has never been cleared up, and extends from Sangerfield Center, Oneida county, to Hubbardsville, Madison county, a distance of nine miles in width. The cedars are so thick and impenetrable that not more than ten men in the county can traverse it with confidence (Cummings, 1877).

On a more regional basis, the Chenango Valley is the site of the historic Chenango Canal, an offshoot of the Erie Canal connecting Binghamton and creating a north/south to the trade route at Utica in the early 1800s. In 1803 the Chenango River was declared a public highway and in 1824 the canal was proposed to make travel easier by constructing a series of locks. By 1837 the Chenango Canal was in service.

The Canal, like the New York Suffolk and Western Railroad, follows the Chenango River from its watershed near Utica to Binghamton, roughly following State Route 12. Though explicitly designed to link the urban hubs along their route, all three of these major north-south transportation routes also enhanced ease of movement through the Chenango Valley and linked together disparate towns and villages. As epidemiologist Les Roberts has pointed out, “the bizarre notion is that [the proposed NYRI route] will be
on a railroad right-of-way that was identified a hundred years ago to essentially maximize the population's access to the railroad.”

Further south of Binghamton, the Chenango spills its waters into the Delaware River. The Delaware River corridor borders Pennsylvania in the southern tier of New York State. In 1978, the river was given the designation of a National Wild and Scenic River by the U.S. Forest Service: “It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.” The beauty of the river attracts many tourists to the region and the local economy depends on the unspoilt environmental conditions of the region.

In the June 15, 2006, Senate hearing in Norwich, New York, NYRI officials Leon Singer (counsel for the company), William May (project manager), and Robert Malecki (project regulatory consultant) admitted in their testimony that the economic costs and benefits of their proposed transmission line would not be evenly distributed throughout the state and region. In fact, New York Control Area electrical load zones G, H, I, J, and K (roughly equivalent to areas south of the lower Hudson River valley – south of Poughkeepsie, including northern suburbs of New York City, New York City proper, and Long Island - see Figure 9) would see a reduction of electrical rates, producing an $11.7 billion dollar savings over the course of twenty years. The remaining Zones A-F, all north
and west of the Hudson River valley region, would see overall cost increases around five percent per annum on average, with actual differences reflecting local area and provider.

Additionally, the benefits of electrical reliability that might accrue by having a large power source are not made available to the communities through which the proposed power line would run. NYRI representatives made that point as well in their June 15 testimony:

SENATOR RAY MEIER: So what we've got here, so I understand, you've got a line that's about -- how many miles long?
LEON SINGER (attorney for NYRI): Two hundred.
MEIER: And it runs roughly from Marcy, New York, to the Rock Tavern substation, and you've got a converter at each end, right?
SINGER: Yes, sir.
MEIER: So there is no possibility, then, for any juice to come off that line anywhere between those two converters, right?
SINGER: That's correct, it's DC [direct current] technology.
MEIER: And there is no possibility in between those converters to do anything about local reliability lines until you get south of the lower Hudson Valley, am I right?
WILLIAM MAY (project manager for NYRI): This is an entirely bulk power transfer. It does not -- it does not really play a role in local distribution, that is correct.
MEIER: So the answer to my question is, no, it doesn't do anything for reliability up here until you get below the lower Hudson Valley, correct?
MAY: That's correct.
(New York State Senate Energy And Telecommunications Committee Hearing, 2006a).

One of the chief economic and property concerns that citizens along the proposed route have is the threat of property being taken by NYRI through the powers of eminent
domain. The state Public Service Law permitting process for “transportation corporations,” which include electrical transmission utilities, gives utilities the power to purchase private property for fair market value to condemn such property for infrastructure development (i.e. substations, towers, lines, etc.). They may also purchase or lease use rights for property where lines might cross (property owners may still be taxed on such property by the state). It is particularly important to understand that the transmission siting process demands the existence of a 660-foot (1/8 mile) easement on each side of the proposed route within which private property could be condemned. These easements expand the area of effect of the proposed route tremendously. These rights, however, were amended by the state legislature on June 23, 2006, largely driven by a coordinated effort from the various activist groups, as bill S.8349A and companion bill 11977-A passed. Known as the “Bonacic Bill” after the upstate 42nd district assemblyman who brought it to the floor, the bill curbs abuses of eminent domain by companies registered as “transportation corporations,” and though the legislation does not explicitly reference NYRI, it is specific enough to this case that NYRI stated in February 2007 it would challenge the legislation in the State Supreme Court.

Complicating matters is the NIETC order from the DOE, which, in giving the power of “backstop authority” to the FERC to site power lines would also transfer federal eminent domain authority to private transmission corporations, overriding the state power to block a power line within regions designated as national corridors. This is the chief threat of the NIETC designations from the perspective of the grassroots and is being addressed in letter writing and public protest campaigns addressed to the Department of Energy, FERC, and the New York Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton. In
response, Schumer and Clinton have introduced a bill on the floor of the Senate in the near future (still pending as of 25 Sept 2007), designed to curtail the authority of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to unilaterally establish power line routes through New York State, while stripping FERC of its eminent domain powers and blocking it from overriding New York State's siting process” (Clinton, 2007). Such legislation, if passed into law, would almost certainly be challenged by the powerful interests of the electrical industry lobby and may ultimately be decided in the U.S. Supreme Court.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled on eminent domain in 2005 in the case of *Kelo v. City of New London* (545 U.S. 469). The result of this case was the controversial ruling on the side of the state, which was allowed to grant eminent domain powers to a private corporation citing the necessity of the development for the economic welfare of the locality. This precedent does not bode well for any challenge that a much more powerful industry might mount; however, the scope of the powers delivered to private utilities and the scope of the NYRI project in particular is much larger than that in the *Kelo v. City of New London* decision and the lack of analogy leaves any speculation on judicial opinion quite open to interpretation.

Beyond the potential for private transmission corporations to take land via eminent domain powers is a more basic concern about property values themselves. Regardless of the verifiable evidence that exists particularly in regard to health, there is a widespread perception on the part of the public today that health concerns do exist. Also, the view shed of property will be disrupted, particularly due to the extreme height of the roughly 100-foot towers and lines that are proposed. Realtors are quick to note that,
depending on their height, power lines do in fact make it more difficult to sell residential property and reduce the value of those properties that do sell.

Larger commercial projects have already been affected by the NYRI proposal. In Norwich, New York, a small city (population 7,203) in Chenango County along the proposed route, a 2,000 acre, $62 million golf-course resort and conferencing facility had been in the planning stages since 2003. When the NYRI proposal was revealed, developer Stephen E. Stark was made aware that the route passed through the planned facility. “The community will be located on 725+ acres of wooded hills overlooking the picturesque, quaint, beautiful” Chenango Valley. This investment project, the largest ever to hit the Norwich region, was stalled by NYRI’s proposal which “had devastated his fundraising efforts for the $62 million recreational resort and hotel he announced back in 2003. Since learning that NYRI’s power line would run directly through his property on the eastern slope overlooking the county’s seat, Stark said he had been focusing five percent of his time on Alteren and 95 percent on other business ventures” (DeCordova 2006). While not completely sunk, the Alteren development has faltered due to NYRI’s proposal. There is no doubt it gives hesitation to other businesses considering development in the region of the NYRI route.

Brian O'Shaughnessy, President and CEO of Revere Manufacturing, a manufacturer of copper and copper alloy sheet, copper strip, copper plate, copper bar and extruded copper profiles, located in Rome, New York (near the northern terminus of the line in Marcy, NY), has speculated that the construction of the NYRI transmission line would increase costs significantly enough for the company. “‘If our energy costs went up...we couldn't survive in this area,’ O'Shaughnessy said. He suggested building
electrical generation systems in the southern part of the state, instead of simply transporting it there. ‘Let the cities downstate suffer from high prices until they agree to build additional capacity in their own backyards,’ he said, inspiring a loud round of applause from the audience” (Brown, 2006).

It is likely that many industries would face similar difficulty. The economic condition of central New York State is tenuous compared to the rest of the nation. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York notes that “Upstate New York’s weak population and labor force growth in recent years has raised concerns about a loss of educated workers. Indeed, the region has seen a net outflow of college-educated people. ...This net outflow reflects a low rate of in-migration to the region, rather than an unusually high rate of out-migration” (Deitz, 2007). While campaigning in the summer of 2006, Governor Elliot Spitzer compared upstate New York to Appalachia: “If you drive from Schenectady to Niagara Falls, you'll see an economy that is devastated. It looks like Appalachia. This is not the New York we dream of” (Cockfield, 2006). NYRI’s opponents believe that the proposed power line will worsen the economic condition of an already impoverished region.

Finally, one of the clear motivations for those opposing NYRI is their basic philosophical and aesthetic position regarding the region itself. It is both literally and figuratively seen as a sanctuary of unspoiled beauty, with green rolling hills, beautiful rivers and watersheds, scenic vistas, and agriculturally historic, providing for residents and visitors alike an experience of rural New York State that appeals to the nature lover and historic preservationist in a way that is felt quite viscerally. To this end, one activist group, STOPNYRI, Inc., has recently hired a central New York historian, Jessie Ravage
of Cooperstown, to outline the historical value of this landscape, detailing historic buildings and agricultural lands that are similar in quality and character to when they were first established in the early 19th century. Upon completion of the study, Ravage will submit a “statement of significance” to both state and federal historic registrars, appealing for a “determination of eligibility” as regulated in state historical preservation act section 1409, and federal act section 106. It is the activists hope that the recognition of the historical significance of the area will be yet another road block to NYRI’s proposal.

In many other ways the activist groups have raised awareness, money, and interest in the grassroots effort to stop NYRI. According to the STOP NYRI Inc. website, the following activities have been undertaken by the group:

- National media have covered our efforts, including CBS Evening News, Fox News, NPR’s Living on Earth, NPR’s All Things Considered, The New York Times, Business Week, and others;
- There has been incredible public support of our FAX DAY outreach efforts to educate numerous state and federal elected and appointed officials;
- Madison and Chenango counties have allocated money to fight the power line;
- We helped convince the state Senate to spend money to fight the project;
- STOP NYRI is a founding member of the Communities Against Regional Interconnect, a coalition of four citizens’ groups and eight NYS counties formed to use all available legal and political tools to defeat the project. The NYS Senate has allocated $1 million to support the work of this coalition.
- STOP NYRI, Inc. and its members have testified at state Senate and Assembly hearings on the NYRI proposal;
- About 40 people had the opportunity to see inside Nine Mile Swamp because of the event sponsored with Colgate and the Rogers Environmental Center;
- Colgate University professors are teaching students about NYRI in their classes and a student group has organized against NYRI on campus;
- Colgate University’s Upstate Institute has created a lecture series regarding energy and environment, featuring prominent national researchers;
- More than 100 people turned out for our first rally in Sherburne on one of the rainiest days of the summer; our second annual rally was also a success;
- Members have marched in local parades and many of those same people have staffed information booths at the Chenango County Fair, Hamilton Fourth of July, Music Mix, Chenango Colorscape, Hamilton’s Farmers’ Market, the Sherburne Pageant of the Bands, Norwich Halloween Parade, and more;
- [Local restaurant] Nichols & Beal held a benefit golf outing on our behalf;
- We created awareness and support with a movie night at Hamilton Theater;
- A Power Line Bake Sale and Show at the Earlville Opera House gained great attention;
- The Night Without Lights on December 21, celebrating the winter solstice. Source: www.stopnyri.info
Though for the most part small in scale, these accomplishments have been instrumental in their accumulated effect to increase citizen awareness and participation and to skew the debates within the political and regulatory process. For example, the power line bake sale culminated in one of the cakes being offered to Governor Pataki after he signed into law the Bonacic eminent domain bill (see Figure 10).

NYRI is not the only private corporation seeking to take advantage of the federal NIETC ruling. Other power line interconnection initiatives are in process within the Eastern and Western Interconnection areas affected by NIETC. In northern Virginia, a 500KV line similar to the NYRI line has been proposed by Dominion Power. Local groups have been organized and have united with Piedmont Environmental Council of northern Virginia in a fight that mirrors the New York case. In San Diego, “Sunrise Powerlink” is an initiative for a transmission corridor that has been made by San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E). The NIETC designation process, in fact, has largely been
driven by particular private interests seeking “early designation” status, a circumstance offered as a possibility of the 2005 EPAct. Being the line that is furthest along in the planning and permitting process, NYRI is likely to be a precedent setting case to test NIETC should the designations be made, which, due to the lack of real democratic connection to that bureaucratic process, is very likely to happen.

V Social Movements and Anti-NYRI Activism

The political sociology of NYRI revolves around three interlocking phenomena: (1) the social necessity of the uninterrupted operation of the electrical grid; (2) the physical networks that the power infrastructure requires; and (3) the social networks that exist to debate the different interpretations of the facts that are presented about health, environment, economic, and aesthetic effects of the proposal. These phenomena mirror the abstracted layers of the “space of flows” (Castells, 1996) identified in the introduction, those of electrical conduits, hubs and nodes, and the exercise of power. It is the intersection of these technical and political layers that cases such as NYRI and STOP NYRI emerge. The actors that are the central players in this drama are (a) the electrical transmission company representatives that presided over the public meetings and who were called to testify in support of their proposal at the Senate hearings, (b) the political representatives that are coming out for against the proposal, and (c) the grassroots leaders that are stirring up local action and activism against the proposal. The claims to knowledge here clearly tread along a continuum of assertions, both scientific and otherwise, that cannot be agreed upon by any measure. Castells seems somewhat fatalistic that the dominant managerial elite will inevitably win such power struggles, but
also recognizes that changes in social organization that are due precisely to the emergence of this space of flows can redefine social priorities and reinvigorate public participation in the technical arts.

A redefinition of the situation is what the STOP NYRI movement is attempting to create. The assertion of the officials and investors heading up the NYRI project (the dominant managerial elite) is that the grassroots activists are responding solely out of a sense of collective NIMBYism (“Not In My Back Yard”) and are unwilling to acknowledge the benefits of the project. NYRI’s public relations machine has claimed these benefits will be based on the necessity of improving the dependability of the grid, and on economic and environmental improvements. Technically, “congestion” and “reliability” have been key terms in creating a perceived necessity for the project. References to reliability and to the blackout of August 14, 2003, already discussed, are regularly used in public statements about the project, presumably in an effort to define the need for the project as dire. Economically, the company claims benefits to those along the line in terms of construction jobs and has also held out a token gift to communities and counties along the proposed route in the amount of $30 million, presumably to be used for projects that will help ameliorate the negative effects of the construction through these communities, though no specifics have been given by NYRI. Environmentally, NYRI claims that the line will help with the development of alternative energies, particularly wind power, which matches the direct current format of the high voltage line, and will reduce dependence on foreign oil.

STOP NYRI interprets these supposed “benefits” quite differently. First of all, the reaction to the proposition of the power line may have been driven initially by some
NIMBY concerns, as little knowledge had been gained about the specifics of the proposal. The Public Service Commission application from NYRI (required by Article VII of the Public Service Law, thus also known as the Article VII application) is very lengthy and bureaucratic, thus lending little to most lay people’s understanding of the proposal. But, quickly, knowledge was accumulated by concerned community members who shared their insights with others and created a kind of “smart mob” (Rheingold 2003), identifying perceived problems with the proposal and the company that went beyond purely backyard concerns.

The skepticism toward the authenticity of NYRI's knowledge claims on the part of grassroots activists came during the initial public meetings in regional communities. The principals of NYRI appeared to be unconcerned with any aspect of the proposal or the communities it would affect beyond satisfying the purely legal and regulatory process. Former Senator Sherwood Boehlert (who held a seat on Congress’s Science Committee for his entire 24 year congressional career), wrote a scathing letter to the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Samuel Bodman (also a personal friend of the Congressman’s), in which he characterized NYRI as “incompetent,” “arrogant,” “bumbling,” and “potentially devastating.” “I would be hard pressed to entrust a matter of tremendous public importance,” said Boehlert, “to a group who has exhibited, at every phase, the utmost contempt for the public and transparent dialogue. The Northeast is clearly in need of utility upgrades; however, this proposal raises questions, many questions, and the cavalier response from NYRI seem to be “trust us, we know best.” That qualifies as one of the most absurd statements from a source that has yet established any public trust. I don’t mean to get preachy, but as I see it the government is of the people and not, as
NYRI's insulting action would lead one to believe, an institution with the means and will to skirt the very people from whom we derive power” (open letter to the DOE, reprinted from the Congressman’s website at www.stopnyri.info).

Another facet of the NYRI corporation that led to immediate distrust and skepticism was its organizational secrecy. For example, when questioned at that hearing they were not prepared to reveal the names of the investors holding 50% share in NYRI:

SENATOR SEWARD: How many investors are there in this company?
LEONARD SINGER [counsel for NYRI]: The New York Regional Interconnect is 100 percent owned subsidiary of one company that's called COLMAC NYRI, Inc.
SENATOR SEWARD: How many investors are there in that company, the parent company?
SINGER: COLMAC NYRI, Inc. is owned by two companies, 50 percent owned by the -- actually I shouldn't say two companies. COLMAC NYRI, Inc. is owned 50 percent by ACI, American Consumers Industries. And the other 50 percent is owned by private shareholders.
SENATOR SEWARD: My question was, how many investors are there. You are telling me how many companies. How many investors are there?
SINGER: I don't know the answer to that.
SENATOR SEWARD: Is it a public -- are you a publicly traded company?
SINGER: No, they are not.
SENATOR SEWARD: A privately held company?
SINGER: Yes.
SENATOR SEWARD: And you are the legal counsel?
SINGER: I am the legal counsel for the private company, New York Regional Interconnect.
SENATOR SEWARD: You can't tell me how many investors there are?
SINGER: I don't know the number of the investors and the two companies that are -- the individuals that are two companies upstream from the project company.
...

SENATOR LIBOUS: Gentlemen, I would ask that if you could provide this Committee in writing the officers and investors in American Consumer Industries, the officers and investors in NYRI, the officers and investors in -- is it Co-Mac Energy, Inc.?
WILLIAM MAY [project manager for NYRI]: No, sir, it's COLMAC NYRI, Inc.
SENATOR LIBOUS: Thank you for correcting me. But the officers and investors for those companies, also.
(New York State Senate Energy And Telecommunications Committee Hearing, 2006a).

Clearly, in the written testimony provided, NYRI did not satisfy the requests of Senators Seward and Libous to provide the number or identity of the investors paying half of the $1.6 billion cost of the project. This underlines the closed process by which private
corporations function, and raises the question of whether or not this is appropriate for a corporation providing a public utility.

The Governor of New York State at the time of the announcement of NYRI’s proposal (March 30, 2006) was Republican George Pataki. He did not take a stand one way or another on the proposal, deflecting that role to the Public Service Commission. However, in an effort to support the candidacy of Republican State Senator Ray Meier for his congressional run on the seat of the retiring Sherwood Boehlert, he did sign the Bonacic eminent domain bill into law in a very public ceremony (see Figure 9). Meanwhile, State Senator Jim Seward somewhat prematurely exclaimed the death of NYRI upon that signing, proclaiming that “the fat lady has sung.” Activists were skeptical of this remark, given the specificity of the bill and the likelihood that it would not stand up to a court challenge. The current (Democratic) Governor of New York, Elliott Spitzer, on the campaign trail in the summer of 2006 also now infamously exclaimed that “If I am elected governor, NYRI is done.” He has since reiterated his dismay with the NYRI proposal, but has taken no direct action to stop it.

For his part, Ray Meier was not successful in his run for Boehlert’s congressional seat. This was won by Michael Arcuri, the Democratic contender and District Attorney from Utica. Arcuri has been an outspoken critic of NYRI, and has co-sponsored with southern tier Congressmen Maurice Hinchey and John Hall, as well as Virginian Congressman Frank Wolf (sponsor), a bill (H.R. 829) which was written to amend the Federal Power Act to make certain changes in provisions relating to National Interest Transmission Corridors, and for other purposes. Two other bills (H.R. 809, 810) have also been sponsored by Congressman Hinchey to much the same effect.
In addition to strong upstate political support, the forthcoming NIETC designation by the DOE has garnered federal political support from New York’s Senators Schumer and Clinton, previously described.

Finally, the Chenango County Green party has chimed in with a wholesale condemnation of NYRI’s proposal, but, interestingly, also a strong critique of the attempts of the other citizen’s action groups to fight the proposal. Clearly following a power elite model of political society, Green party representative Michael Bernhard writes the following:

My analysis begins with this assertion: the nature of the opposition to the NYRI project, when it was announced a year ago, was based on the assumption that we live in a democracy, where concerted, informed, public opinion, expressed respectfully by a broad majority, motivated by concern for one's neighbors, the larger community, and for the natural world, would win out in the end. Even in the face of the power of corporate wealth. Certainly, by enlisting every public official, every logical argument, by assiduously following the developments in the permitting process, dedicated and caring citizens would eventually win out.  

... I can't decide whether the anti-NYRI campaign is better characterized by the addicted gambler model, or by the obsessive-compulsive model. You know: "the last bet didn't pay off, but the next one might, if only..." If only we had more lawyers, more expert testimony, more statements of support, more contributions, more bake sales, more symbolic acts, more petition signatures, more viewshed photos, more media coverage, more elected officials on our side, a hundred more people at the rally, a thousand more letters in the mail, ten thousand more... Stuck in a feedback loop where failure is interpreted as a sign that we have to keep doing the same thing, only more.  

... If our goal is to assert our sovereignty, what strategies can we use to get from here to there? I believe we have to exploit the tensions of our political system by creating crises of jurisdiction and authority between local, state and federal governments. In a practical, immediate sense, we must force our local elected governments (who don't want to do it) to represent the interests of their cities, towns and counties. We must force our local governments to pass laws that declare null and void the decisions of unelected commissions. They must be forced to pass laws that make the use of eminent domain by private corporations illegal in their jurisdictions (Bernhard, 2007).

As persuasive as this progressive argument is, it perhaps fails to recognize the measures that are taken at the level of the dominant managerial elite to pressure localities to submit to the rule of law and avoid confrontation. This can include withdrawal of political support as well as material support. The dominant-managerial elite is remarkably well-
connected and networked into a tightly woven socio-technical fabric so as to most effectively control those local representatives below them in the political hierarchy.

While the grassroots activists have curried favor with upstate representatives through public participation, the NYRI corporation also has made connections to important political insiders at the state and national level. NYRI hired Albany-insider Patricia Lynch and Couch & White, a firm associated with former PSC chair Maureen Helmer, to make its case to the PSC. NYRI is attempting to play the game that has worked for so many others in the past. We need energy companies that sell affordable power, not buy influence in Albany. But to accomplish this goal, we first need an administration willing to hold both energy companies and the PSC accountable” (Common Cause, 2006). NYRI has also called on the services of no less than sixteen lobbyists to make their case to both state and federal government representatives. According to the Times Herald-Record, “headlining the list is Bracewell & Giuliani [former New York City mayor and 2008 presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani], who's Republican bona fides and roster of former agency heads have led many to consider it one of the energy industry's most influential advocates on Capitol Hill. Bracewell lobbyists registered to represent NYRI include Edward Krenik. He most recently served as the Bush administration's liaison between Congress and the Environmental Protection Agency. …NYRI had paid Bracewell at least $75,000 as of Dec. 31, according to federal lobbying disclosure records. …NYRI's Albany lobbyists include Leonard Singer, who also serves as the company's legal counsel, and Pataki-era Public Service Commission Chairwoman Maureen Helmer. State lobbying records, updated every two months, show
NYRI had paid Singer and his firm $29,790 for his lobbying efforts as of April 30. Helmer and her firm had received $67,500 in the same time frame” (Scott, 2007).

Thus, the situation of NYRI’s proposal is currently being defined and negotiated in specific ways that make this case an excellent example of the uneven development that exists due to regional forces of technical and political expertise that are dominant over local forces of grassroots activism. In order for the social networks of the power elite in this case must be overcome by either political change, tremendous public sentiment (which can produce such change), or a wholesale redirection of technical and political priorities. Otherwise the “space of flows” that has created the NYRI power line proposal will overcome the localized resistance.

VI Conclusion

In The Power of Identity (1997), Manuel Castells adopts his concept of social movements from Alain Touraine and characterizes them as driven by three basic principles: identity, adversary, and societal goal. Identity here refers to the “self-definition of the movement”; the adversary “refers to the movement’s principal enemy”; and the societal goal refers to “the movement’s vision of the kind of social order, or social organization, it would wish to attain in the historical horizon of its collective action.” (1997: 71). Other researchers (Burke and Reitzes, 1991; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Wall 2007) have also focused upon collective identity to better understand the role construction that involves linking stable self-meanings to communal goals.

The grassroots activism that emerged in opposition to the NYRI project was certainly well defined. Within the group I am most familiar with, STOPNYRI, Inc., a
clear identity has been maintained via an organizational structure that emerged in the very first meeting of citizen’s in the library of Hamilton, New York. The structure of the group, typical of a more formal organization, has allowed individuals to move in and out of roles which maintain the cohesion of the organization itself. Additionally, the specific mission that the group has simplifies the task of creating an identity politics. The adversary is clearly identified in the mission statement of STOP NYRI: “STOP NYRI is a diverse and growing coalition of citizens from Madison and Chenango counties. We are committed to fighting the New York Regional Interconnect, Inc. 400,000 volt power line project. Our goal is to educate and inform our citizens, as well as state and local officials, about the numerous negative impacts of this project. Our intent is to take all legal and political action necessary to stop NYRI” (Mission Statement, STOP NYRI, Inc., 2007, www.nyri.info). The philosophical stance taken in opposition the NYRI proposal clarifies the societal goals of the organization as those of energy conservation, environmentalism, and federalism – the protection of state’s rights and the non-interference of federal powers in local and state decisions over the use of public and private property.

The expression of societal goals in this case is a valid expression of the old saying “politics makes strange bedfellows.” A mix of liberal, Green and democratic politics collides with the more traditionally libertarian/conservative position of governmental non-interference. In some cases, this has caused conflict, as on March 3, 2007, when STOP NYRI, Inc., co-sponsored with the Chenango Valley Peace Alliance a showing of Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Truth.” Conservative supporters of STOP NYRI regretted the association with such a liberal group as the peace activists, and the movie’s political
nature added insult to injury. After this incident, STOP NYRI leaders were careful about other co-branded actions and affiliations.

One aspect of the literature on social movements in rural areas of the United States is that there is a deficit of research on the topic. While more and more studies are surfacing today, traditionally social movement analysis was performed in urban settings, perhaps influenced by population demographics, but also no doubt by the trends that are created within schools of academic research. Castells’ 1983 dissertation, *The City and the Grassroots* (from which my title is paraphrased), is a widely cited example of this trend, although Castells himself has performed important research on rural movements in other countries, notably his work on the Zapatistas in the Chiapas district of Mexico, which he describes as “the first informational guerilla movement” (72: 1997). As previously mentioned, much of the literature regarding rural social movements involves agricultural economic movements in foreign lands.

This case study of NYRI and its opponents is important in two respects. It recognizes a trend of rural areas becoming regionalized and caught up in the technology and politics of larger urban areas that were once separate, but now are proximate. This trend is widespread nationally and internationally and could be described in the terms of globalization of capital, power and urban interests. Economically disadvantaged areas within growing regions are becoming the new hinterlands that are to be used for their resource value only (electricity resources in this case) to support what are deemed to be the more civilized, important, and powerful population centers. That NYRI is not the only case in point relating to the NIETCs provides evidence for the widespread nature of the phenomenon. A better understanding of the effect of the “space of flows” on rural areas
could be gained from study of these other cases, particularly to see the response of the public and the role of the Internet as a catalyst to action.

The NYRI case is important because local actors sought resistance to the NYRI proposal and have utilized “urban” technologies, chiefly the Internet, to create a strong wave of continual pressure affecting the political representatives through direct challenges to the logic, science, and reason behind the proposal. Howard Rheingold (2003) has used the term “smart mob” for those new social movements utilizing the latest information technologies to organize resistance against unpopular political or technological projects. The use of the internet to disseminate information, educate the masses, inspire action, and deliver the world of information about NYRI to one’s fingertips cannot be underestimated.

However, the Internet is just another of those networks within the space of flows, electrically conducted through nodes and hubs, controlled by a dominant managerial elite. Or is it? There is a quality of openness still in the Internet that fosters the knowledge-seeking individual to self-educate, participate, and act in a communal way that instigates change (presumably for the better, but not necessarily). Nonetheless, without the electrical grid, there would be no Internet!

In creating the first versions of the webpage for STOPNYRI, Inc., I encountered the ironic feeling that without electricity itself, I could hardly expect the Internet to help gain the kind of attention and coordination of people needed to resist the kind of industrial and political powers we are up against. However, this is tempered by understanding the chief reasons for resistance and acknowledging that stopping NYRI is not the equivalent of neo-Ludditism. Nonetheless, the project has brought to the attention
of those who are informed the importance and ubiquity of the electrical infrastructure itself. This kind of public awareness is, in fact, an important byproduct of social activism and can be said to represent a new relationship between citizen and social technology that is characteristic of other cases studies discussed by science, technology and society researchers (Frickel and Moore, 2006). These new relationships offer “alternative pathways” (Hess 2007) to energy policy, focusing on alternative solutions to electric grid problems. What is of particular interest in this case is that rural areas, so often misconstrued as technologically and politically backwards, are at the forefront of this new movement in national energy technology, policy, and security due to the changing space of flows.

The intersection of the space of flows and the NYRI controversy comes at the point where both the dominant managerial elite and the grassroots public have access to the sets of nodes and hubs important to the maintenance of power (“power” being understood both literally and figuratively in this case). The elite control the nodes and hubs of electrical transmission and the legitimate and authoritative means to manage and develop those networks. The grassroots public has utilized the Internet and more traditional means of organizing regionally as well, creating a relatively united group across two hundred miles of rural landscape and accessing resources from private and governmental sources that sustain the opposition to the dominant paradigm of regulatory process and judgment.

After consideration, I believe further study of this case as it proceeds should focus exclusively on three purposes: (1) outlining the aspects rural empowerment through the use of the Internet and other new media (a project I plan on taking up in forthcoming
research); (2) the connections between scientific literacy, political action and technological change; and (3) the effects of regionalization and uneven development. A better understanding of the dynamics of rural activism in the light of these sociological topics will help us to understand better the scope and character of democratic action when it comes to the social impacts of science and technology.
References


