We live in a moment of profound political division in the United States, exacerbated by the monolithic categorization of supposedly antithetical communities. Labels like blue and red, liberal and conservative, urban and rural obscure the nuance of place and its communities in order to frame anyone outside the immediate homophilic sphere as ‘Other’ – something to be feared and rejected. These polarizing narratives go far beyond party affiliation, pitting, for example, the highly educated against those with less schooling, long-standing community groups against community colonizers, the beneficiaries of technological change against those disenfranchised by it, advocates for diversity against openness and those who privilege stability and security (Galston, 2017). These tensions circle around issues of policy but are fueled by an emotional resonance that drives us to cluster into affective communities, siloed by geography and media, where our biases are reinforced, political leanings intensified (Kintz, 1997; Bishop and Cushing, 2008). Here our view of the opposition shifts from incomprehensible to intolerable.

Drawing on an examination of the iterative and experimental artwork, Department of Transformation, conceived by Minnesota-based theatre artist Ashley Hanson, this chapter explores how creative placemaking, as a performative practice of encounter, addresses political polarization in the United States within the context of the rural–urban divide. Challenging a singular narrative of the ‘American rural,’ which limits the agency and visibility of rural artists and residents, this chapter traces the trajectory of Hanson’s project to present a picture of ‘rural America’ that is hybrid, mobile, and affectively linked. It concludes by looking at the multidisciplinary exhibition that was held as part of Hanson’s project and asks how the story of the place can be reperformed and recirculated within an artworld frame without erasing its multiplicity.

Creative placemaking and conversation

I wanted more, more conversations, just more.

(Ashley Hanson)

National conversations about creative placemaking have taken up the topic of community polarization with limited success. As an increasingly interdisciplinary field, the discourse around placemaking is often stymied by divergent disciplinary priorities and the contradictory implications of ‘fuzzy concepts’ (Markusen, 2003), or terms that not only hold different meanings
within different fields but signal very different institutional or social power dynamics. For example, scholarly journals, academic conferences, and museum symposia often bring together stakeholders ranging from artists, city planners, development leaders, cultural organizers, and social interest non-profits to debate the role of creative placemaking in addressing issues like gentrification, the climate crisis, race and class division, and exploitative or exclusionary legislation. These conversations, however, can fall apart when the focus shifts to desired outcomes, including metrics and deliverables, or the parameters for success or failure. Further still, debates about policy struggle to transcend geographically situated knowledges. When focusing on primarily urban issues, creative placemaking discourse fails to consider *why* or *how* proposed interventions might not work in rural contexts, or why what might work in one ‘American rural’ might not work in them all.

Minnesota-based theatre artist Ashley Hanson is regularly involved in national conversations about creative placemaking and is often one of the only people in the room with her eyes toward the rural. After attending the ‘Next Generation Rural Creative Placemaking Summit’ in October 2016, an event which brought together rural artists and organizers from around the country, Hanson began to note that creative placemaking discussions – be they situated in a rural or urban context – rely on affective narratives and histories as much or more than quantitative data when trying to connect local issues to broader discourses about inequality and reform.

These affective narratives or ‘narratives as felt’ can be understood through what sociologist Arlie Russel Hoschield (2016) calls the ‘deep story’:

> A deep story is a feels-as-if story—it’s the stories feelings tell, in the language of symbols. It removes judgment. It removes fact. It tells us how things feel. Such a story permits those on both sides of the political spectrum to stand back and explore the subjective prism through which the party on the other side sees the world.

*(Chapter 9, para. 1)*

Hanson saw untapped potential in sharing stories and connecting disparate artists from around the country but resisted the formal structure of the conference, where often the most fruitful dialogue takes place on the fringes of formalized conversation – in hallways, hotel rooms, and late-night drinking sessions. She knew more rural artists had to be out there, ones without the means or access to congregate in a central forum, and so she began to think about what it might look like to bring the conversation to them instead.

The concept of creative placemaking has evolved into an umbrella term bringing together projects concerned with the material or socioeconomic conditions of space and place alongside practices elsewhere labeled ‘social practice,’ ‘socially engaged,’ or ‘dialogic’ art. Though geographically situated, these projects also examine the experience of encounter fostered through or as artistic practice. Creative placemaking then, if thought of as intentional collaboration with and in communities, is particularly equipped to engage with and unpack the affective narratives that drive partisan divide, especially when situated in communities that are ambivalent or even antagonistic to the field or idea of art practice. Such works not only challenge the assumed progressive politics of place-based work or the conservative agendas of local community agents but are forced to reconcile the goals of outcome-focused institutions with process-oriented or iterative art practice.

Most importantly, however, these works take up the ‘thorny issue’ of ‘how, when, and with whom’ one should enter into dialogue. By engaging with the ‘opposition,’ we acknowledge what and whom we do not know. We confront our assumptions about the beliefs and priorities of those we consider to be de facto members of our community, and we acknowledge who
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or what we want to admit into an art world context. In this way, writer and curator Monika Szewczyk (2009) argues, conversation is always political and aesthetic:

[I]f as an art, conversation is the creation of worlds, we could say that to choose to have the conversation with someone is to admit them into the field where worlds are constructed. And this ultimately runs the risk of redefining not only ‘the other’ but us as well. Art and conversation share this space of invention, yet only conversation comes with a precondition of plurality that might totally undo the creative agent.

(p. 2)

By engaging with oppositional communities through conversation as aesthetic form (rather than simply framing ‘the opposition’ as a subject to resist), this work allows both practitioners and practice to be transformed.

For Hanson, devising artistic works through conversation is nothing new. With over a decade working in applied theatre and arts programing, Hanson has developed a practice that draws on a wide range of ethnographic methodologies, rooted in oral history traditions and feminist activism. As Co-Founder of the theatre company PlaceBased Productions, Hanson partners with rural agencies to develop community-led, site-specific musicals. Rather than simply creating a ‘a vague aesthetic of progressive uplift’ (Davis, 2013) in conservative communities, Hanson uses multidisciplinary art practices and open-ended dialogue to address issues of policy and the long-standing roots of community conflict.

Though PlaceBased Productions works exclusively with rural communities, as of 2016, Hanson was a self-described ‘nomadic artist,’ splitting time between her home-bases in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Boulder, Colorado. With investments in both rural and urban contexts, she had a unique vantage point from which to observe the changing discourse around American politics leading up to and following United States presidential election. Mobilized by what she saw as a profound disconnect between rural and urban communities, Hanson launched the Department of Public Transformation in the winter of 2017 to not only better understand the role of art in the construction of a national narrative of the rural within the United States, but to also confront essentialist depictions of place that exacerbate political polarization and the rural–urban divide.

Complicating the rural–urban binary

Recognizing that in the United States a national understanding of the rural is largely shaped by images and narratives created by and for urban audiences (Robinson, 2016), the rural comes to be known in terms of what it is not – as ‘the other’ of the urban, or ‘what is left’ when the specificities of the urban have been taken into account (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). The US Census Bureau, for example, has defined the rural as everything that is not urban (Ratcliffe et al., 2016). As urban centers have spread into sprawling metros and suburbs, the census has adjusted its definition of the urban to take into account ‘urban clusters’ of at least 2,500 residents linked together by spatial ‘hops’ and ‘jumps,’ without adjusting the criteria of the rural. The result is a convoluted metric for making the geographic distinction in which a single county or tract can be classified as both urban and rural. This ambiguity reinforces a rural–urban binary that queer theorist Scott Herring (2010) contends ‘is as much context-specific, phantasmatic, performative, subjective’ – and, he emphasizes – ‘standardizing, as it is geographically verifiable’ (p. 8). While it is not generally thought to be harmful, in the way that binaries of race or gender are often discussed (Dymitrow and Brauer, 2017), the rural–urban binary does establish a
power hierarchy. It is maintained through 'structures of intense feeling' or affective narratives that demand rural individuals or groups experience themselves in relation to the 'dominant spatial performatives of the 'urban'' (Herring, 2010, p. 13), narratives that preclude any commonality of culture or experience, and disavow any aesthetic expression outside the mandates of hegemonic culture.

The rural–urban binary not only marks the two geographies as antithetical but as mutually constitutive. Thus, the prevailing narrative of the rural as a white, patriarchal, heteronormative, conservative, working-class monoculture functions, in part, as the antithesis of the progressive, multicultural urban. The urban is the site of individuality, culture, and progress, while the rural is ‘a bastion of the “mass,” undifferentiated, unhip people and perspectives’ (Johnson, 2008, p. 5). The urban is constantly evolving. The rural is static. The urban is future. The rural is past.

These narratives construct a ‘moral geography’ (Massey, 2007) in which the rural is determined to be either a success or failure based on its use-value in the urban marketplace. The ‘rural idyll’ (Little and Austin, 1996) or the notion of rural as a ‘culturally laden’ place (Darby, 2000, p. 54) functions as a ‘theatre of consumption’ (Leiss et al., 1986) for urban tourists or migrants to reconnect with nature and in turn, find their true, authentic selves. Alternatively, the rural is described as a site of ‘deprivation’ (Woodward, 1996), as a ‘dead zone’ (Kenway, Kraack, and Hickey-Moody, 2006), devoid of culture, resources, or value. The rural becomes a place to escape from (to the progressive embrace of the city) or a place to escape to (from the incessant speed, inauthenticity, and performative demands of claustrophobic urban centers). Neither narrative recognizes the way in which both often operate simultaneously and in conflict within the same place, and both fail to consider the implications of place as fundamentally in flux. Place as verb rather than noun.

The Department of Public Transformation tour

Part documentary art project, part mobile artist residency, the Department of Public Transformation began with a six-week tour of rural America, visiting towns with populations under 10,000 where Hanson spoke with artists and community residents about the realities of rural placemaking. With minimal seed funding from a Kickstarter campaign, as well as support from Art of the Rural, the McKnight Foundation, and Minnesota non-profit, Springboard for the Arts, Hanson purchased a converted school bus, lovingly named ‘Gus the Bus,’ and set off from central California, heading south through the pueblos of the southwest, cattle ranches and oilfields of Texas, the bayous of Louisiana, along abandoned Appalachian coal mines, across the rust belt and over the great plains, ending in the town of Byers, Colorado, population 1,160. What Hanson discovered along the way was a picture of the American rural that is, to quote Michael Woods (2010), ‘hybrid, co-constituted, multi-faceted, relational, [and] elusive’ (p. 265).

As an iterative, multidisciplinary experiment in creative placemaking, Public Transformation was both a survey of the field and a discrete artwork in and of itself. During the six-week journey, Hanson was joined by artists-in-residence, Hannah Holeman, Ellie Moore, and Randi Carlson, each for different legs of the tour. Along the way, they had conversations with 127 artists in 24 towns. Some of the stops were to connect with artists Hanson knew or met at the Summit, while others were through mutual connections or from organizations she found online. Her ability to ‘authentically’ perform her claim to the rural by rooting her identity in ‘five generations of bad ass rural women,’ as well as her capacity to ‘code-switch’ between the urban and rural as a dually placed, dually invested artist, lent her what cultural geographer Tim Edensor calls rural ‘performative competency’ (2006, p. 485). Geographer Mirek Dymitrow and social scientist Rene Brauer (2017) contend that taking into account the position and performance of the researcher/artist adds a significant dimension to our understanding of ‘rural performativity.’
It importantly ‘acknowledges that concepts and categories take shape through processes influenced by history, discourses, ecologies, and power relations (Dahlberg, 2015, p. 207).

The rural is a powerful conceptual framework that has historically struggled to address its multiplicity. Rural studies as a discipline has struggled to reconcile a definition of ‘the rural’ that simultaneously takes into account the varied dimensions of place. Drawing on Lefebvre’s spatial triad, geographer Keith Halkacree (2006) offers a three-fold model of rural space that accounts for: the spatial practices of rural locality (in relation to their production/consumption activities); the formal representations of the rural as expressed by capitalist, governmental – and I would argue – artistic interests or forms; and the lived experiences of the rural, which include both individual and sociocultural experiences, as well as their ‘interpretation and negotiation.’ Performance, in turn, offers a bridge by which to connect the materiality of the rural to its discursive and representational forms in a way that recognizes its embodied and affective dimensions (Edensor 2006; Woods, 2010), including the performance of the scholar or artist who documents, and therefore intercedes into rural space (Dymitrow and Brauer, 2017).

The challenge for Public Transformation and other placemaking projects hoping to capture and stage the stories of place thus becomes how to highlight rural heterogeneity without dismissing the political potential of ‘the rural’ as a unifying theoretical concept (Cloke, 2006). Hanson’s project, therefore, attempts to disrupt the binary narratives of place by performatively enacting the flows of mobility that mark the rural as ‘hybrid and networked’ (Woods, 2009, p. 851), shaping the project as a kind of experimental listening session, or what curator Mary Welcome calls the art of ‘the deep hang.’ Hanson’s aim was to bring inquiry into the place of the familiar, to embrace the wide and varied cultural traditions of rural communities, to strip instrumentality from both the research and artistic process, to meet local artists on their own terms, and see community through their eyes – ‘to come to your kitchen table, and hear the sounds of your place, to smell the smells of your place, and watch you work.’

Recognizing that, as Edensor (2006, p. 488) argues, rural space is ‘highly stage-managed’ in a way that contributes to the sense of ‘authenticity’ characterizing many depictions of the rural (as well as the ‘inauthentic’ packaging and commodification of rural culture), Hanson took part in practice ranging from the improvisational and unconscious performances of everyday life (Goffman, 1959) to scripted practices of art-making and cultural tradition. Hanson went to people’s homes and places of business; traveled with them as they took her on multiple-hour tours of their historic landmarks and local haunts; held story circles and participated in local media broadcasts; attended barbecues, hootenannies, bluegrass jams, and potluck suppers, traditional performances of native ritual, and exhibitions of contemporary native American art. Embedded in deep cultural tradition, the conversations were acts of creative exchange, pushing against cultural assumptions and comfort zones.

The performative aspect of these encounters offered a deep and resonant engagement otherwise reserved for longer ethnographic projects. As such, the experimental practice was concerned more with the dynamics of the interview than the questions being asked (Riley and Harvey, 2007), proposing the question of whether deep and lasting connection can be created through ephemeral encounter. While it is easy to dismiss the kind of breath-over-depth approach taken by Hanson, it is worth recognizing the affective resonance that can result from the ethno-poetic practice of ‘visiting.’ ‘To visit,’ is a cultural performance specific to rurality (Stewart, 1996), a reimagining the situated interview as a kind of ‘walking and talking’ that takes place not just in the field but literally in the fields. This performative and mobile engagement can evoke memories that might not otherwise be conjured or reveal the ‘neglected rural others’ – stories and people who exist outside our generalized narrative of the American rural (Riley and Harvey, 2007, p. 392).
Staging the stories of place

Following the tour, Hanson and the Public Transformation artists-in-residence, Holeman, Moore, and Carlson, spent two weeks at M12’s Feedstore in Byers, Colorado developing original works based on the stories and ephemera collected on their journey. During the tour, they compiled nearly 100 hours of video and audio footage. The interviews shifted with the presence of each artist, recognizing the encounters were as much about what was being brought into place as what was collected. To that end, Hanson collected an artifact at each stop and asked a representative from each town to write a letter to an artist at the next stop, which she delivered on her way. These letters, though for the most part short and sweet, were a way to connect the communities directly – a tangible and analogue response to the loose bonds typically created by digital or formal networking.

Later they would reconvene in Winona, Minnesota, with filmmaker Nik Nerburn, who developed two short films about the project, and citizen artist Mary (Welcome) Rothlesberger, to plan the exhibition to take place at Art of the Rural’s Outpost Gallery. The result was Department of Public Transformation: Art in Rural America, an exhibition of art and ephemera, which ran from October 19, 2017, to December 16, 2017. It was kicked off by a weekend of dialogues, screenings, performance, and deep hangs, in which the artists, residents from the community of Winona, as well as rural and urban communities near and far, came together to discuss the role of the artist in rural communities and to debate the meaning of community all together.

If the tour was an open-ended experimental listening project, the exhibition was a highly curated reflection, not just of what was heard, but of how the artists’ positionally as multiply-placed female traveler-artists shaped their reception within the communities they visited and how the stories they captured might be recirculated and mobilized within the space of the gallery and beyond. The journey of the Public Transformation tour also offered a useful metaphor for reading the structural and thematic organization of the exhibition. The spatial and temporal trajectory of the journey was translated in the space of the exhibition by a series of interconnected gestures. The flow of the display physically launched the visitor along a temporally organized circuit, moving from the site of the artist visits, to the resident artists’ works created during their post-tour residency in Byers, to the present space of the gallery, where visitors lingered, socializing and taking Polaroids in front of Gus the Bus before meandering to a local brewery for a bluegrass jam. Morning strolls by the river and even a restaurant crawl moved participants back and forth between the temporally and spatially situated narrative of the tour and the present reflection about the future of rural communities.

There is a risk in curating the story of place of peddling ‘intensity’ or contrived meaning. It is a challenge that is amplified by the curation of decontextualized objects alongside interview snippets or soundbites. In many cases the challenges and opportunities of place, the deeply engrained trauma of racial, class, and gendered oppression were alluded to but left vague. An original artwork from Whitesburg, Kentucky, for example, that bore the phrase ‘I can build my dreams here,’ hinted at the idea of building a life amid rural challenges but did not directly address the context of its production, the Appalachian opioid epidemic. These stories did make their way out, however, in the conversations that took place in the space as part of the weekend’s dialogues and during the ‘deep hangs.’ In this context, objects in the gallery ceased to be self-contained. They served to prompt conversation and activate the gallery within the context of sited exchange.

Performing place

For the closing event of the opening weekend Hanson gave an interactive performance lecture, narrating the story of the Public Transformation tour. Moving performance into the space of the
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gallery is not a new practice. Even the curator's talk has become institutionalized in the context of the monographic or thematic show. In fact, as curator Clementine Deliss explains, the power of an ethnographic collection is in its mobility, the possibility of multiple reconfiguration and the new and varied meanings they produce. For Hanson, however, the practice went a step further. In a gesture that sought to shrink the spatial, political, and ideological distance between the audience and communities on view, Hanson individually removed the artifacts from the visual frame that rendered them immobile, and circulated them through the audience, into an imagined future where they might be shared once again as a way to reactivate the idea of community and the collective power of the ‘rural.’

While it could be argued that the artifacts functioned like props for the performance, and therefore in service of the performer rather than their site of origin, their circulation carried a specific affective resonance. As the items were passed from person to person, Hanson echoed Tom Kennedy of the Zuni Art and Visitor Center when he asked ‘mainstream’ visitors to ‘look deeply’ into works of native art. The audience for Hanson’s performance was asked not just to look into the objects but to feel their significance. There was a kind of deference paid to the movement, delicate but curious, like the most precious object at a child’s class of show and tell.

This was not the first time Hanson gave the performance. Hanson had previewed it following the trip and at the Rural Arts and Culture Summit but, unlike previous performances, Hanson shifted from a chronologically organized narrative to one that affectively linked the disparate rural communities to 12 archetypal roles she found ‘bubbling to the surface’ in the interviews. As Louis Stewart (1987), scholar of Jungian psychoanalysis explains, the archetype is a way of knowing the world and while not all affects are archetypes, all archetypes convey affect. This is not to say that all archetypes will be read in the same way but rather they are intended to draw on personal narratives or understandings of the self that connect individuals to collective human experience. The translator, storyteller, listener, mentor, rabble rouser, curator, host, connector, architect, dreamer, archivist, and energizer spatially situated the artist and their story in relation to their community and what Holly Barcus and Stanley Brunn (2010) call, the ‘elasticity of place’ (p. 284) or the bonds to place, permanence, and portability, allowing connections to place to remain even as they are altered by the relations of mobility.

In a move that brought her narrative full circle, Hanson began the story with the role of the translator, referencing the many ‘unofficial’ stops made on the tour to speak with other ‘translators’ Gabriela Munoz from the Arizona Commission for the Arts and Savannah Barrett of Art of the Rural who are working in urban spaces while trying to bridge the rural–urban divide. Hanson progressed through her tale linking the labor performed by ‘mentor’ Warren Montoya of Resilience and Resonate Art in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico (pop. 479) through that of artist Calvin Phelps, ‘architect’ of community dialogue with the Pike School of Art in Summit, Mississippi (pop. 1682).

At the most (sadly) serendipitous moments, the artifacts being circulated among the crowd reflected not just their community of origin but the narratives—as felt, the deep stories of place. A small sculpture of two antlers locking horns from Show Low, Arizona symbolized the impasse faced by writer and theatre artist Lisa Jayne, who had recently given up her art practice all together after her attempts to slowly introduce progressive content into her rural community, 90 per cent of which were comprised of members of the Latter Day Saints, by staging the musical Grease was met with scandal and an empty house. ‘I think as an artist, the struggle is just being able to talk about new ideas in our community and the traditional doesn’t always appreciate that,’ she explained. ‘The traditional wants to invest in the status quo, so if it is not traditional, it is considered a threat. It is a new idea, it is anti—“what the community is about” and it is therefore suspect.’
In some cases, the connection between object and affective narrative was even more literal. As Hanson recounted the story of Rachael Ensor of Murphysboro, Illinois (pop. 7,970) audience members felt the weight of a brick from the small home where Ensor runs the Murphysboro School of Art. In her community, Ensor explained that there is very little access to the arts, and even less access to social services. During the interview, she joked that art gave her relief from the stress of rural life, ‘It means I don’t have to take my Xanex.’ Though said in jest, the weight of the brick collided with the subtext of Ensor’s reflection, and lingered as Hanson went on to describe the complicated feelings different artists on the tour had about their work serving as stop gaps for desperately needed services in rural areas.

The combination of these performative strategies was most effective when used in combination. During a particularly poignant moment, Hanson began to tell the story of visiting Whitesburg, Kentucky, home of the long-standing arts organization, Appalshop, and meeting with Institutional Development Director, Ada Smith. Hanson began telling the story of driving around Whitesburg in the rain for hours, because as Ada had explained, ‘to understand Appalshop you first have to understand this place,’ when Ada’s image and distinct Kentucky accent appeared on the screen. Walking up a gravel path, Hanson’s camera bouncing in time, Ada led Hanson, and in turn the viewer, through a hole in a barbwire fence onto the site of an abandoned coal mine. As Ada explained the history of the site and the way the shutting of the mine transformed the town, she picked up a piece of coal and presented it to the camera in her outstretched hand. At the same time, the smooth, black rock was passed through the audience, collapsing the distance of space and time. Here Hanson picked the narrative back up. She didn’t reflect on the number of lost jobs or the community exodus but Ada’s journey of leaving and coming home, of the mobility and affective narratives that bind us to place.

**Conclusion**

To evaluate Hanson’s project requires us to consider if and how ephemeral encounter can produce an affective resonance capable of connecting people through the ‘deep story’ of place. It can be argued that to situate this project within any predetermined disciplinary framework would inevitably deem it a ‘failure.’ It does not easily slide into parameters we understand. It is not extensive enough to produce the substantiated narratives of place we associate with traditional ethnography. It is not aesthetically specific or developed enough to be clearly read within a singular artistic discipline. The end product does not translate into valued metrics – network nodes created, project visibility gained, and impressions calculated, opinions changed.

Following the tour and exhibition at the Outpost Gallery in Winona, Minnesota, Hanson initially planned to do a second iteration of the project that would include fewer but more sustained visits to rural communities. Upon reflection, however, Hanson noted that time and time again, what community members on the Public Transformation tour said they really needed was more lasting investment by artists in rural communities. At the same time, the opportunity to create a long-term community partnership arose in the form of a previously vacant Main Street storefront in Granite Falls, Minnesota (pop. 2,734). Here, the Department of Public Transformation now exists in a permanent site, developing the Granite Falls City Artist in Residence, embedding arts and cultural workers in the City of Granite Falls to design and implement arts and cultural strategies to increase civic participation and community engagement in policy-making, planning and public processes, placing temporary artists-in-residence within city agencies to develop creative solutions to local problems.

*City Artist-in-Residence, n.d.*
It could be argued that this ‘tangible outcome’ of the Public Transformation project – a program leveraging artistic labor for ‘creative solutions’ to community problems – clearly demonstrates that placemaking is inevitably the handmaiden of neoliberalization, asking art practice to stand in for badly needed community services, cut by state and federal austerity measures. This argument is not necessarily wrong. Still, as we become more globally and digitally linked, while simultaneously further ideologically and affectively divided, it feels misguided to call for more boundaries – socially, culturally, disciplinarily, or otherwise. It also feels overly simplistic to accuse the artists, community agencies, or any of the myriad other creative placemaking stakeholders of being either unwitting dupes or complicit collaborators of the project of neoliberal capitalism (Jackson, 2020).

Much like the monolithic narratives that undergird political polarization, the reality is far from a simple binary of moral positions. For many, a relationship to art, or lack thereof, is the result of what land artist and farmer Nikiko Masumoto, of Masumoto Family Farm in Del Rey, CA (pop. 1,639), calls a ‘creative wound.’ Whether the result of an artistic ‘failure’ at a young age, alienation from art discourse as an adult, or even as the cumulative toll created by ceaseless neoliberal demands for creativity and innovation in all aspects of our personal and professional lives, these ‘creative wounds’ personalize and internalize narratives about the sociopolitical, spatial, and structural conditions of art.

In the same way projects such as Hanson’s question both the assumed politic of rural artists, their artworks, and communities in which the art is situated, they also force us to ask what it really means to frame such creative placemaking efforts as ‘art for the common good’ (Deutsche 1996; Massey 1994). This subsequently requires us to recognize critiques from both progressive and conservative critics who ask, ‘what public?’ and ‘whose good?’ Creative placemaking, therefore, in all its interdisciplinary forms, cannot simply be concerned with the ways in which art may open the hearts and minds of those resistant to a progressive truth. Rather it must consider how the contexts and circumstances of those thought to be ‘the opposition,’ open space to question the essentialist narratives that exacerbate political divides.

References


Further reading in this volume

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Chapter 14: Experts in their own tomorrows: placemaking for participatory climate futures
   Paul Graham Raven

Chapter 17: ‘I am not a satnav’: Affective placemaking and conflict in ‘the ginnel that roared’
   Morag Rose

Chapter 19: Placemaking in the ecology of the human habitat
   Graham Marshall

Preface: The radical potential of placemaking
   Cara Courage

Chapter 20: Displacemaking 2015 and 2020
   Catherine Fennell and Daniel Tucker

Chapter 26: Sculpturing sound in space: on The Circle and the Square (2016) by Suzanne Lacy
   Trude Schjelderup Iversen

Chapter 29: The solution is in the problem; the art of turning a threat into an opportunity by developing resilience using a creative placemaking critical praxis
   Anita McKeown

Chapter 30: Ecological selves as citizens and governance as ethical placemaking
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Chapter 31: Seven generations: a role for artists in Zuni PlaceKnowing
Theodore S. Jojola and Michaela P Shirley
Chapter 32: The Hollywood Forest Story: Placemaking for the Symbiocene
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Maria Rosario Jackson