

Re-Placing Rural Education: AERA Special Interest Group on Rural Education Career Achievement Award Lecture

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All reification is a forgetting.
– Horkheimer & Adorno (1947/1994)

Introduction: An Ambivalent Preoccupation with Place

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the place from which I speak is Mi'kma'ki, the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. This people will enter this story in due course. The colonial name for this place today is Nova Scotia, Canada, which evolved out of the original colonial place names this territory shares with the United States such as Acadie, British North America, and New France (Corbett, 2013, 2021a). These names represent the changing colonial hegemonies of which the Canadian state with its ten provinces and three territories is the latest incarnation. But there is an older name for the section of Turtle Island where I live and work, which is Mi'kma'ki.

Keith Halfacree (2006) wrote that rural is a fundamentally spatial concept. I think this observation resonates with/in the field of rural education, which has been principally about place and how a modernist institution can operate beyond the metropolis. There has been an encouraging influx of new work, both in the United States and in other anglophone settler societies, as well as in Europe. Some of you here today are part of what I

see as the emerging field of rural education, influenced by developments in sociology, geography, political science, and area studies. Following the excellent critical lead of Craig and Aimee Howley (2018), in preparing this piece, I have been thinking about the development of the field in terms of its assumed core pragmatist and idealist sociogeographic theorizations, which I think remain mired in 19th- and early 20th-century ideascapes that are no longer up for the task of helping us appropriately understand the current moment. An important component of this lingering modernist discourse is a vision of spatial transformation that juxtaposed ascendent urbanism and a parallel rural decline, which has in turn generated a defensive and exceptionalist place-based rural literature that misunderstands and even distorts the complexity of contemporary spatial relations. This point is not new, and Chet Bowers (2008), David Greenwood (2009), Alecia Youngblood Jackson (2010), and Jan Nesor (2008) have made similar arguments in relation to rural education and its undertheorized approach to place.

In a series of recent pieces, I have been thinking about rural education's preoccupation with place (Corbett, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c), which, albeit undertheorized, has been an enormously productive movement in our field. A strong, defensive focus on place is entirely understandable in rural education. Place-conscious education is a response to more than a century of what Wendell Berry (1997) called "unsettlement," or the progressive emptying of the countryside, which has detached the majority of people in advanced capitalist societies from the sources of the energy, food, and materials necessary for shelter and comfort, while at the same time vilifying rural people and places as backward. A focus on place in education also confronts "metrocentric" education and social policy that fail to account for differences between places and how rural areas

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have been largely absent from key educational discussions. One example of this phenomenon is the relentless centralization and bureaucratization of public services whose mandate is principally driven by the establishment of performance norms and the application of standardized indicators to quantify relative performance across space. These comparative metrics, in turn, support managerialism and the marketization of education. In addition, a focus on place in education, and in the field of rural education, has offered a compelling challenge to this marketized framework and its choice politics, while ironically offering marketized options (such as vouchers and charter schools) to rural communities stressed by neoliberal pressures (Eppley, 2021).

Nevertheless, the emergence of place discourse in our field often plays into notions of authenticity, autonomy, exceptionalism, and problematic spatial conceptualizations. For me, rural education's preoccupation with place is shot through with a deep ambivalence. Many, if not most, of us in this field have been drawn to our work through rich experience of rural places. Yet recent events illustrate how any focus on place requires broader relational perspectives. Viruses tolerate no boundaries, and place-based, decentralized, and uncoordinated approaches to address the pandemic have proven disastrous. Indeed, we do well to remember the slipperiness of the very idea of place. As modern set theory holds (cf. Badiou, 1988/2013), any place we can imagine contains an infinite subset of other places (Perec, 1974/2008). At the same time, any place we can imagine is also a subset of multiple other places.

The idea of rural itself is also a slippery spatial notion, and it is defined in dozens of ways in academic, policy, and government circles as well as by innumerable individuals and collectives whose imaginaries, perceptions, and lived experience (Green & Reid, 2021; Lefebvre, 1974/1992; Hunter & Reid, 2020; Reid et al., 2010) generate a multitude of understandings. A place is more than an object; it is a space of relations (remembered and celebrated as well as forgotten). The field of rural education has long been interested in rural-urban spatial inequalities which can be gauged—the definitional challenges notwithstanding. This work is useful, but it is insufficient. We have also begun to look at inequalities within rural communities, for instance along the lines of sociological categories such as class, race, gender, sex, disability, language, and ethnicity. We have not however, looked closely enough at the diversity of communities defined as rural, which range from urban-adjacent suburbs to small, isolated islands and Indigenous communities. For instance, recent work by Looker and Bollman (2020) in the Canadian context demonstrates how graduation rates and rates of teacher turnover are similar in rural and urban communities except for very isolated and Indigenous communities illustrating key differences

between different rural communities. This work illustrates the importance of understanding the differences among rural communities and developing the more nuanced analysis of demographers and geographers who are not satisfied with the simplicity of the rural-urban binary. Such analysis will require more complex theorization and disaggregation of our field's master category (rural) to engage methodological complexities, challenges, and fallacies which in turn generate problematic policy analysis (Sherry & Shortall, 2019).

The general argument here is that we need to theorize place very carefully going forward, considering both the productive value and challenging problems relating to this central spatial idea. I am also concerned that all-too-familiar naturalized conceptions of rural place, and who belongs in them, are problematic and even dangerous. We need, I think, a careful re-examination of our theoretical and methodological habits and how we construct (or fail to adequately construct) our assumptions and central categories such as space and place, community, achievement, curriculum, culture, heritage, society, practice, etc. With respect to the idea of place, I endeavor to suggest some cautions for our field by drawing on sources outside education, notably a relatively obscure book by Theodor Adorno (1973), *The Jargon of Authenticity*.

Recommendations for Practice

When I was finishing my dissertation (Corbett, 2001), which later became the book *Learning to Leave*, my advisor Don Fisher pointed out that because I had situated myself as a community educator, I should have some recommendations for the field. I argued that as a poststructuralist, I was unpacking problematic discourses, not seeking to replace them with new ones. I lost the argument, and one of the things I recommended was a consideration of place-based education. I was a place-based educator through a 20-year school teaching career in small Indigenous, fishing, and logging villages, all of which were going through difficult changes brought on by transformations in global markets. The central thread I distilled out of my experience in these communities was that rural education articulates with depopulation. At the time, I saw stewardship-oriented, place-based education as a form of resistance to what I called, the "mobility imperative" (Corbett, 2001). But by the end of my doctoral studies, I was already experiencing doubts.

I tried to avoid recommendations because I take quite seriously Frankfurt School cautions about "reification." Reification concerns how ideas are taken up by power brokers, "made real," and employed for control. It is easy to see how German social theorists would be cautious about what can be done with words following World War II. This

general caution has been developed by the poststructuralists who argued, particularly after 1968, that there are no innocent ideas, although, departing from the Frankfurt School tradition, they tend to reject the idea that there could possibly be an alternative de-reified alternative (Honneth, 2011).

Thus, ideas are weapons, not unlike like sticks and stones. Or perhaps it is better to say, as Karen Barad (2007) has, that they are tools like scalpels and chainsaws, whose purpose it is to slice up reality into component bits to reassemble and refract. These bits then enter discourse as new language, and when they are reified, they become ordinary and common sense to the point of seeming incontrovertibly true. It can be very easy to imagine that these commonplace ideas innocently appeared as transparent descriptors that reveal what was previously hidden or unknown. Reification also signals that there are no alternatives to the reality they frame. As Axel Honneth (2011) pointed out, reification takes on new meaning today as biotechnology, neurology, human capital theory, and other forms of objectification complement the rise of artificial intelligence, ubiquitous digital networking, and fast capitalism to create what Giddens (2002) called the technologically sophisticated “runaway world” that feels out of control.¹ In a sense, contemporary technoscience places “reality” even further beyond the grasp of ordinary people with its material-discursive magic that nobody understands entirely.

In Barad’s (2007) terms, language does not reflect reality but bends or “diffracts” understanding in different directions. Using the example of the concept *rural*, it becomes possible to see the work this idea does in the hands of various actors, and how material “things” (i.e., land, soil, rock, water, etc.) do not simply receive human agency, but actually respond, or as Barad puts it, “intra-act.”² Beyond the poststructural point that language is power, developed below, Barad posited that much poststructural analysis repeats an idealist/realist binary. Her idea of ontoepistemology insists that knowing is not separate from the material, but rather a more-than-human process of organizing, deconstructing,

and reconstructing the world. To know something is not to separate from it, but to engage the subject of that knowledge directly and work with it.

Barad’s (2007) is a difficult lesson that challenges established social science methodological patterns. The Canadian anthropologist Wade Davis (2007) said that our first response to ignorance is classification, which typically leads to hierarchy. Classification requires study, concepts, divisions, distinctions, and the imputation of norms of structure and function like the growth of the human sciences (Foucault, 1969/1972, 1966/1994). Then emergent professions and entrepreneurial specialties further reify human science classifications and operationalize them to develop programs and methods to manage, treat, and even eradicate difference, which was often cast as dysfunction. From the middle of the 19th century this activity has been the work of the “humane” institutions—the asylums, schools, prisons, hospitals, and clinics. In short, this is the unfolding story of the rise of the state and its apparatus (Althusser, 2008) that parallels, buttresses and occasionally challenges the rise of industrial-technical capital.

I could cite much of Foucault’s later work here, but I think the foundational text is *Discipline and Punish* (1975/1979), a book whose title is ambiguously translated from the French *Surveiller et Punir*. The book demonstrates how surveillance, training, and normalization replace overt violence. The operative principle is the creation of normative knowledge and subsequent transmission of that knowledge back to self-regulating individuals who are instructed to accept and even embrace their subjectivization. Success of social and human science ideas makes them ordinary, and thus, deeply, infused with power. As part of the state, our political situation as educational researchers demands that we offer “practical” solutions demanded of us as experts. Critique, and even theory itself, tends to be suspect. Our work is most often perceived as solidifying the current regime and promoting its efficiency.

Words Do Things

Poststructuralists like Foucault challenged the narrative of a steady movement from a dark past, through an enlightened present, to a bright future. This more complex analysis of the evolution of modern institutions was never anything new to historians and philosophers, but social science was slow to catch up. In many ways the Anglo-American field of education has only very recently reached the starting line because of the pragmatic system demands made upon us to be useful to policy, administration, and practice. Foucault (1975/1979, 2004/2010) called this process *biopower*, the systematic creation of normatively framed human categories and populations to fill them, followed by systems and professionals to manage and

¹ In this context, resistance to reification and a desire for control take many forms, including ubiquitous conspiracy theories, mistrust of state, and rejection of expert authority, which have become all too common in the wake of the Trump administration, as well in the quasi-invisible threats of the global pandemic and the climate emergency, which demonstrates the pressures created by reification and alienation that the early Frankfurt School could never have anticipated. Ironically, the populist right has adapted the epistemological practices of the poststructural left challenging realist knowledge claims, something that Jamieson (1984) saw coming decades ago.

² For instance, when critical race, spatial, or poststructural concepts are used in relation to rurality, by differently positioned writers, new ruralities emerge challenging established singularities.

normalize. In the early 20th century, eugenics was normal science, and there was nothing sinister about categorizing a child as an idiot, moron, or imbecile, or as feeble-minded. These terms were the cutting-edge scientific classifications of a time and place, and they were considered progressive and humane because they identified differences that were formerly “undiscovered.” Those people to whom these labels were applied were brought into the light of knowledge. The point the poststructuralists make is that when we name the body, we do not just describe it or discover its essence; we actually bring it to life, give it shape, and set it up in relation to other bodies and to abstract norms.³

Ideas reflect productive power, but they also enter the world in ways in which their creators cannot predict, and their originators lose control of successful ideas once they enter the world. They ride what Anthony Giddens (1976) called the double hermeneutic. All influential interpretations of society end up filtering back to be reinterpreted again by pretty much anyone. We see this in the case of COVID-19 vaccines or climate change. When complexity and a measure of uncertainty are indicated (i.e., scientific inquiry), some conclude that scientists do not really know what is going on. For others, the next step is to conclude that there is a conspiracy afoot because “they” (experts, scientists, big business, governments, elites, etc.) really do know and are manipulating populations for someone’s benefit.

At the same time, expert systems are often perceived to supplant and marginalize local common-sense knowledge forms. Place-based, localized, direct experience can and does serve to frame idiosyncratic reinterpretations. Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott claimed that he could see no differences in climactic fluctuations over his lifetime, so what is the problem? Since nobody one knows personally has died of COVID-19, the alarm and reported numbers must be fraudulent. Trump, Bolsonaro, and others have their own variants of this form of quirky, and often bizarre, personalized claims-making. In times of social transformation such outlandish responses are common. For instance, the history of American populism from the late 19th and early 20th century can be read as a rural, place-based resistance to the pressures of urban capital concentration (Slez, 2020).

The close relationship between educational research, institutions of education, and the teaching profession is something that is seldom queried in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, or Canada. Gert Biesta (2015) argued that the anglophone education field has developed in a technocratic fashion, operating in the service of schools and education systems, drawing theory from a variety of

disciplines. Critical and qualitative educational research has been systematically sidelined in favor of instrumental forms of scientific, quantitative research alleged to provide solid realist evidence to inform practice (e.g., Denzin, 2017; Lather, 2004a, 2004b)—or, put simply, “what works” (Biesta, 2007). In the Germanic northwestern European tradition, education developed as an independent field which analyzes education as a social, historical, and cultural phenomenon. Educational researchers in the anglophone traditions are drawn inside as embedded intellectuals whose “pragmatic” work should directly “impact” and serve the system.

Place, Urban Teleology, and Modernist Sociology

The idea of place is one that has been central to the way many rural educators, activists, and academics (I include myself here) have thought about our work. The story tends to be that rural places are close-knit “small societies” in which face-to-face neighborly and kinship relations remain resilient in the face of the urban “lonely crowd.”⁴ They are often thought to need protection and to represent the authentic and noble heartland of the nation, misunderstood, challenged, and threatened by urban interests. At one level, I cannot disagree, and take some pride in pushing educational policy and practice discussions to account for rural place. But at another level, this idea can have unintended but predictable consequences. For the tradition in which I work, language functions based on differences rather than essences. In this view, the idea of the rural only becomes meaningful with urbanization. From the mid-19th century and the very foundation of systematic sociology and free public education, the rural-urban binary became a defining metanarrative of progress regarding the shape and character of emerging modernity.

The first generation of sociological thinkers were preoccupied with the upheaval of societies in transition. From the latter decades of the 19th century, anglophone male social thinkers like Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, George Mead, Charles Cooley, Robert Park, John Dewey, Georg Simmel, and even Karl Marx produced analyses of the tensions and strains created by the increasing concentration of populations; the marshalling of productive forces in urban space; the cultural and creative energy sparked by these concentrations and technologies; the disruption of traditional networks and loyalties; and the ascendance of what Ferdinand Tönnies (1887/1988) called “association,” which came to replace the solidarities of face-to-face community. Some, like Durkheim, wanted to promote new social norms and institutional mechanisms to promote

³ Or as J. L. Austin (1962/1975) cryptically put it, we “do things with words,” and language is more about pragmatic accomplishments and commitments than descriptions.

⁴ David Reisman’s book by that name published in the 1950s was (and probably still is), according to Herbert Gans (1997), sociology’s best seller at over a million copies.

solidarity in these difficult times and guard against what they saw as a dangerous drift into normlessness. Others, following the lead of Marx, theorized how to disrupt what they saw as the false solidarities built by the ruling classes to cement their privilege. Despite their differences, they were all responding, in one way or another, to the spatial transformation wrought by industrial capitalism, which assumes an urban teleology.

The second generation of American sociology across its (structural) functionalist, interpretivist, and critical forms essentially found agreement in the urban teleology as well. Drawing on both Weber and Durkheim, Talcott Parsons's theory of social action (1937) and social system analysis (1950) theorized the shift to more complex, concentrated divisions of labor in an increasingly credentialed, bureaucratic-technological urban society. In the 1960s, the descendants of the sociological Chicago School developed an urban anthropological focus that developed into interaction studies (Goffman, 1959, 1982), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), which almost exclusively analyzed metropolitan transformations at a micro level. The emergence of critical sociology in the United States came from diverse work inspired by home-grown critical sociologists such as C. Wright Mills and Irving Horowitz; transplanted members of the Frankfurt School; and other facets of the new left, feminist theorists, postcolonial theorists, and critical race theorists. This diverse critical configuration, despite their differing political commitments and differing views of the underlying motor driving social change, shared a common story of ascendent urbanism. Louis Wirth's (1938) classic essay, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," is perhaps the clearest sociological example of the link between the urban and the modern. By the middle decades of the 20th century in the European and settler society social sciences (including education) there was little appetite to even consider rurality.

The third-generation masculine macro sociologies⁵ retains a foundational metrocentricism, analyzing what Lefebvre (1992) neatly calls the production of (urban) space. The modern was/is capitalist, technological, and urban, featuring the steady movement of populations away from the countryside and particularly from agriculture, which becomes increasingly mechanized and automated.

For at least a century, the fields of rural studies, rural sociology, and rural education have been split between two

⁵ Thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Henri Lefebvre, and Pierre Bourdieu are perhaps the most notable of this generation, and indeed, relevant citations are too numerous to list. Somewhat ironically, each engages spatial theory but in ways that essentially reinforce Giddens's (1990) idea that in modernity, rurality becomes marginal, and the very idea of place has become, as he puts it, "phantasmagoric" (p. 19) in the face of modern forms of techno-urban compression of time and space.

poles. On one hand, an ongoing quantitative demographic project established the relentless force of the depopulation of the countryside and the growth of the city. On the other, a parallel qualitative field has told multiple place-based stories of threatened rural settler populations clinging to land, identity, and tradition. Yet until quite recently, this latter qualitative project has been principally concerned with protecting White, settler spaces, rarely concerning itself with Indigenous or racialized populations. Layered on the urban teleology is a related racist, colonial teleology in which erases Indigenous people from land and relegates them into a distorted history (John & Ford, 2017; Red Corn et al., in press).

It is no secret that rural spaces have often become flashpoints in Indigenous struggles for recognition and sovereignty. To cite Canadian examples, the case of the death of Colton Boushie, a young Cree man fatally shot by Saskatchewan farmer Gerald Stanley, is an example of the tense relationship between non-Indigenous settler populations and Indigenous people (Roach, 2019), as are the events of September 2020 and the ongoing tensions in rural Nova Scotia that I describe below.⁶ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada issued its final report in 2016 after several years of hearings into the treatment of Indigenous people in a residential school system that operated from the establishment of the Canadian state in 1867 until the last facility closed in 1996. Through this period more than 150,000 children and youth were removed from their families and "educated" mostly by Christian religious groups. The TRC uncovered widespread abuse and intergenerational trauma through hundreds of gripping first-person testimonies.⁷

Following the publication of the report (TRC, 2016), the Canadian government accepted all 94 of its calls to action, which were aimed not just at recognition of the depth of cultural violence enacted in a racist social and school system, but also at the need to make restitution to Indigenous groups and educate all Canadians about the truth of national history. Subsequently, educational institutions at all levels have been working, more or less seriously and successfully, to recognize established treaties that were foundational to the formation of the nation and to teach the nation to live by them. As many ceremonial acknowledgments of

⁶ Like the United States, Canada has its bizarre xenophobic twists, such as the rural municipality of Herouxville, Québec, which published a code of conduct for immigrants (even though the community had no recent immigrants) that included a prohibition of the burning and stoning of women.

⁷ At this writing, the most recent event in this unresolved history of trauma is the discovery of a mass children's grave on the site of a residential school in British Columbia in late May 2021 (Dickson & Watson, 2021). It is now widely understood how the residential schools functioned more as detention facilities than as educational institutions.

stewardship and territory state, the land was never ceded either to the British crown or to the Canadian state. Despite the increasing ubiquity of this institutional messaging, particularly in universities, honoring the treaties is increasingly understood as an ongoing responsibility of all Canadians that requires more than metaphorical gestures to achieve authentic decolonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

When I began my academic career in the 1970s, feminists, critical race scholars, neo-Marxists, phenomenologists, and emergent poststructuralists challenged sociological orthodoxies in what felt like a truly revolutionary period. But the imagined political revolution, like the industrial revolution that produced it, was largely an urban phenomenon. Rural and remote areas and those living in them became increasingly marginal. And yet the mythologies and attractions of the countryside never vanished, and there has been ongoing resistance to the techno-urban teleology.⁸

Dasein and the Rural

A relevant and influential academic example of this resistance to techno-urbanism is Martin Heidegger, the nostalgic and reclusive German philosopher who spent a great deal of time in a mountain chalet, writing, drawing his own water, and dressing and speaking like a rural villager. While he is seldom referenced in the rural education literature (or indeed in education scholarship more generally [Peters, 2012]), his ideas, particularly relating to place, should not be unfamiliar to rural education scholars. Heidegger created something of a revolution in philosophy nearly a century ago with the publication *Being and Time* (1927/2008). His feature move was to return to the basic question of ontology: What is being?

Heidegger took very seriously the problem of the perceiving subject set loose upon the world with Descartes's binary separation of mind and matter: I think, therefore I am. For Heidegger, the perceiving subject is separated from that which is perceived, setting in motion an intellectual train that ultimately leads to contemporary sciences and technologies that change the material condition of the earth to the point of climactic catastrophe and radical species and habitat depletion. Heidegger's idiosyncratic and creative conceptual apparatus situates the subject in relation to the material or "things" as well as in relation to temporality. To be is to be *somewhere*, entangled with things, imagining forward in time, indeed unto death. As Malpas (2016) put it, understanding itself is necessarily emplaced. It is this simultaneous recognition of the centrality of place and of

death (i.e., the time-scale of a life) that mark Heidegger's existentialism.

What is the "am" in "I think, therefore I am"? Heidegger argued that because we have avoided the ontological question, we have not been able to seriously critique technological "advances" that may improve some aspects of life for some people, but which also support the more efficient prosecution of warfare, genocide, species depletion, and the range of horrors that became all too clear following World War I. From Descartes, we learned to abstract the human out of nature to produce ungrounded thought which has led us into dark places rather than into the promised Enlightenment.

What is the nature of being for Heidegger? The answer he produces is that humans are "thrown" into the world, and our very existence is a progressive attunement to the place into which we are thrown. For Heidegger, we are more automatic in our routine activity and deeply integrated into our surroundings. It is not our disembodied Cartesian thinking that characterizes agency, but rather how we think *with* things in a material object world. Indeed, the more skilled we become in a given activity, the more automatic that activity is for us. His central concept, *dasein*, is typically translated as being-there, in other words, being-in-place. In Heidegger's ontology, we are today thrown into a world of advanced technologies that effectively deskill and stupefy us, disrupting what he saw as our potential for a more authentic existence.

It is more than a little ironic that Heidegger, a central foundational thinker in modern philosophy, and someone who took the idea of place so seriously, was also a Nazi and an anti-Semite. Particularly in his later work, he was hostile to modernity, technology, and the networked complexity of urban space, promoting a vision of place-based, localized "authentic" living. Heidegger retreated to his rural mountain chalet and quite deliberately rebuffed the social, digging into the uniqueness, specificity, and exceptionality of place, seeking an essence of authenticity in the experience of dwelling itself.

Authenticity?

While there is an ongoing debate about the relationship between Heidegger's politics and his thought, I am more interested here in his analysis of place and how it relates to our field and its preoccupation with the local. While Theodor Adorno agreed with some aspects of Heidegger's critique of the irony of a dark Enlightenment, in Adorno's view, Heidegger's position engenders an emotionally laden, localized, and fragmented conformity rather than authentic individuality.

⁸ Indeed, it is not uncommon to encounter the sentiment, sometimes supported by a reading of election data, that rural America elected Trump, re-enacting turn-of-the-20th-century rural resistance in the populist movement (Slez, 2020).

The jargon of authenticity ... is a trademark of socialized closeness, noble and homey at once—sub-language as superior language ... while the jargon overflows with the pretense of a deep emotion it is just as standardized as the world it officially negates. (Adorno, 1973, pp. 5–6)

Heidegger's object of official negation is the inauthentic *das man*, the hypersocialized figure who does what is considered to be correct, normal, or simply what "one does."⁹ What Adorno finds missing here is any analysis of the specific social, political, cultural, linguistic, and economic conditions into which different people are thrown.

Heidegger's authenticity rejects critical social analysis, and for Adorno, this rejection promotes the very herd mentality Heidegger claims to critique. Why, indeed, is the emplaced agent who dismisses the broad sociological hypothesis that contextual understanding is a valuable tool for shaping perception and action, less vulnerable to manipulation? For Adorno, a rejection of the social is precisely what opens Heidegger's subject up to the kinds of partial and exclusionary understanding that fueled the horrific violence of the Nazi movement. Here we find in Adorno's (1973) analysis a crucial connection between Heidegger's fascism, his rejection of the social, and his philosophy:

Philosophy ... pushes off from society and its objective spirit. It claws itself firmly into its blindly social fate, which—in Heidegger's terminology—has thrown one into this and no other place. That was according to the taste of fascism.... That is how people could jaw about blood and soil, without a smile, during the excessively accumulating industrial capitalism of the Third Reich. The jargon of authenticity continues all that. (p. 100)

Adorno continues, "between the official optimism of the deadly war machine and the philosophical frowning of far too autocratic enthusiasts, who were deeply attracted to Being unto death" (p. 100). This description is chillingly familiar today in relation to the global pandemic; incendiary anti-institutional optimism relating to the rhetoric that fueled the Capitol riots; the Trump administration's often bizarre mishandling and mischaracterization of epidemiology and immunology in the face of the pandemic; the autocratic machismo of Putin, Bolsonaro, Orban, Ortega, Duterte (to name only a few such contemporaries); or the equally

disastrous, willful ignorance dressed up in the populist and divisive religiosity of India's Narendra Modi (Roy, 2021).

Can there be any doubt these days that the emotional jargon of authenticity that promises to make America great, replete with walls and place-based visions of who does and does not belong, is perhaps the most powerful tool employed by contemporary populist authoritarians? Multiple millions of citizens, many of them in rural places experiencing hard times uncomfortably transformed by global capitalism, and the pandemic support this small-scale vision that imagines a return to simpler, allegedly authentic, independent, hunkered-down local living, safe from viruses and immigrants alike. This localized, defensive dream promises escape, and while it is understandable, it is retrogressive, misguided, and toxic.

In a critical essay entitled the *Global in the Local*, Arif Dirlik (1997) wrote: "The emergence of the concern for the local over the past two decades has accompanied a significant transformation with capitalism with far-reaching economic, political social and cultural consequences" (p. 91). Dirlik's argument is that out of the ashes of the local/global binary—a remnant of the modernist/colonial separation of the country and the city—has arisen a new focus on the local that grows out of the increased flexibility of contemporary capitalism. It is now well understood how global capitalism is decentered and able to shift production rapidly. The re-spatialization of capital at a global level through financialization, flexible production, just-in-time consumption, surveillance, and ubiquitous digital networking employs local knowledge, provided freely by billions of users, to manipulate opinion and steer consumption. In other words, digital capitalism thrives by specifically targeting locales through the production of increasingly fine-grained data made possible by the social networks through which we share our lives (Zuboff, 2019). The deep irony here is that global capitalism has no interest in local autonomy, indeed quite the opposite. The most powerful tool of centralized, digitally enhanced capitalism is its ability to localize and to deliver to vast networks of consumers individually targeted manipulations along with a bespoke menu of curated ideas and goods available at the click of a computer mouse.

While, like most contemporary consumers and social network junkies, we click and swipe, many of us living outside cities are also intensely interested in autonomy in the metrocentric runaway world. My foundational work took place in what might be called a deep rural community. I worked there as a teacher for more than a decade and came to know, respect, and love the place and its people. I saw them as rough, but authentic. There was little liberal handwringing or ambiguity. Physiocratic productivist ideas about how primary industry workers are the backbone of society, doing real and essential work to feed, house, and

⁹ Hannah Arendt resurrected this figure in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on Banality of Evil* (1963/2006), in which she described and analyzed the bureaucratic, rule-following complicity of Adolph Eichmann in the Holocaust.

clothe parasitic urbanites, were commonplace. Living in this community, this view was easy to see and accept. I also shared fishing families' frustration with corporatization and state mismanagement; this frustration is documented in *Learning to Leave* both in research participants' quotes and in my analysis (Corbett, 2001). In this community, people were "tuned" to the nuances of life in place, to use Heideggerian language. They knew and loved their place and tried their best to understand threats looming on the ever-precarious horizon.

The Marshall Decision and the Politics of Rural Place

I was teaching in southwest Nova Scotia in 1999 when the Supreme Court of Canada handed down what is now known as the Marshall Decision (R. v. Marshall, 1999). Donald Marshall was a Mi'kmaw man who was wrongly accused and convicted in 1971 of a murder he did not commit. He subsequently spent 11 years in prison. Marshall was released in 1983, and subsequently a Royal Commission into his wrongful conviction found the case to represent a miscarriage of justice. In the late 1990s, Marshall deliberately fished out of season to challenge fisheries legislation and regulations that he argued infringed Indigenous treaty rights. The case eventually reached the Supreme Court, and Marshall was acquitted.¹⁰ The foundation of this decision is that Indigenous people in Canada were guaranteed the right to harvest resources to earn a "modest livelihood." This decision set off a firestorm in the community where I was working. There was (and continues to be) grave concern among the non-Indigenous population that by granting Indigenous people access to resources, settler livelihoods and places built through hard work would be destroyed.

The Marshall Decision of 1999 established treaty rights but limited them with riders on environmental protection which remained under the regulatory purview of the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In addition, the decision protected the right to fish and hunt for food for ceremonial purposes. While Indigenous fishers have been guaranteed a moderate livelihood commercial fishery, the scope and scale of what constitutes a moderate livelihood was never defined by the Canadian federal government.

For more than 20 years things drifted along in a kind of limbo. In September 2020, an Indigenous First Nation got tired of waiting and set up a moderate livelihood fishery outside the commercial fishing season in southwest Nova Scotia. Then all hell broke loose. There were numerous aggressive and violent confrontations, assaults, threats, cut-off gear, property damage, and the fiery destruction of a fish

¹⁰ Several accounts of this case have been published, but a recent book by McMillan (2019) is quite comprehensive.

plant one dark evening. At this writing, multiple criminal charges are pending, and the only response from the Canadian federal government has been to restrict the still undefined moderate livelihood fishery to the commercial season. The Mi'kmaq Sipekne'katik First Nation involved has petitioned the United Nations for support, arguing that that the Canadian state has not protected their people against racialized violence (Grant, 2021).

This 20-year failure of the Canadian state to clarify a regulatory framework for the Indigenous fishery created the ambiguous conditions out of which the current problems emerged. Indigenous groups have been waiting for clear direction with respect their commercial fishery, and in frustration, several First Nations have set up their treaty rights-based fishery. This move has caused non-Indigenous fishers to cry foul, claiming that Indigenous fishers are operating an unregulated fishery, which may both damage the stocks and jeopardize the livelihoods of families who have fished Nova Scotia's waters for generations under state regulation.

Recently the federal Minister of Fisheries capitulated to the non-Indigenous harvesters and their place-based ownership claims and questionable conservation arguments. The racist juxtaposition of hard-working, authentic rural folk and socially dependent Indigenous people waiting for a handout is a prominent social media trope in conservative discourse, and it shapes and fuels this conflict. This racialized interface of authentic and deserving rural producers and Indigenous interlopers damaged by socialized supports precisely reflects Adorno's (1973) analysis of the jargon of authenticity. He writes:

Allegedly hale life is opposed to damaged life, on whose societalized consciousness, on whose "malaise," the jargon speculates. Through the ingrained language form of the jargon, that hale life is equated with agrarian conditions, or at least with simple commodity economy, far from all social considerations. (p. 82)

This rural vision retreats from the complex, problematic, and fundamentally ambivalent nature of place and how it came to be the way it is today. Rather than a focus on an allegedly authentic, hale, and hearty *dasein*, I think we need to keep developing critical theoretical tools to examine the complexity of place relations, and the problem of being with others, to challenge settler communitarian fantasies. We need, it seems to me, to break out of our pragmatic and insular system-service box, while at the same time thinking carefully and critically about the complexity of the communities in which we do our research.

Dreaming in and Beyond Place

Beyond rural communitarian myths, I think we need new imaginaries. I am drawn increasingly to speculative fiction and posthumanist analysis. Donna Haraway conducted an intriguing thought experiment in her 2016 book *Staying with the Trouble*, in which an animal-human hybrid (symbiont) hero and her progeny live in a part of rural Appalachia destroyed by mountaintop removal. Haraway's (2016) characters live and work in spaces of rural trouble but also traverse the migration path of their symbiont species, the monarch butterfly. Haraway's point relates to caring for the damaged earth and making human and more-than-human kin across multiple boundaries.

Despite the trouble of COVID-19 and closed borders, we are not a sedentary species thrown into some part of the world as though at random. The pandemic and online work opportunities have shifted population movement away from large Canadian cities like Toronto and toward the largely rural province of Nova Scotia, where for 30 years the policy conversation has been focused on aging and declining populations (Agecoutay & Anderson, 2021; Bingley, 2020; Weeden, 2020). Something similar is happening across North America, and a burgeoning global literature is emerging on the topic (Sietchiping et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020). Many rural property markets have changed, although for how long remains an open question. Real estate prices in my home province of Nova Scotia, in both urban and rural areas, have escalated rapidly as many of those who were able to flee what was perceived as dangerous urban environments make for the mythic imagined safety, conservatism, and ecologically pure space of the emerging high-amenity, touristic, rural, therapeutic space (Kelly, 2013).¹¹

Is the natural condition of animals to be in motion or in place? Quite likely the former is closer to the anthropological truth for humans, particularly today in the face of rapid environmental change (Ackerly & Hellman, 2015). The ideological implication of established naturalized, static, and implicitly racialized conceptions of place in the field of rural education and elsewhere demand critique. This is precisely what Indigenous and other rural BIPOC scholars are doing, and they are encouraging the field to get on board.

It is no mistake that we send humans for punishment in bounded places from which it is impossible to budge. Most of us crave the freedom to move which gives us the freedom to learn and to trade. While the desire to create a home is as understandable as the parallel desire to move, what

are the conditions that create what Linda Malkki calls the "sedentarist metaphysic" (cited in Nespor's 2008 critique of place-based education)? And what role has our field played in the promotion of the idea that there is something inherently noble and good when people remain in one place? When these claims are made by settler populations, how do they play into distortions of the violent and unjust historical truth of who authentically belongs to/in colonized places? Finally, how might these narratives be unlearned to complexify naturalized settler place myths?

The questions listed above have complicated my early unease about the way in which place is framed in my work. They have caused me to consider my own more-or-less conscious promotion of the idea that there is something inherently virtuous about rural settler populations that stay in one place. Returning to Adorno (1973) has helped, and so has Haraway (1988, 2016). Drawing on the experience of Israel/Palestine, Edward Said (2000) illustrated how strong, emotional conceptions of place are both ubiquitous and, at the same time, what is wrong with the world. This tension feeds the inescapable ambivalence of capitalist modernity and how there is no innocent way to think about place without simultaneously considering power.

I think it is important to emphasize here that I recognize the importance of an education that begins with experience. As Bill Green reminded me in a personal communication, the thing about place is that the concept has been generative in the rural education field, and I do not want to dismiss or disregard its value which is shared with Indigenous social and educational analysis. Bill has also reminded me that with Heidegger there is always ambivalence. I experience a kind of queasiness when simply invoking his name in relation to our well-intentioned place work. Place *is* curriculum *and* teacher, and its lessons can be liberating and constraining at the same time. Place *is* home, but it is also a capitalist colonial construct, from the settler nation states, to the names of regions, waterways, settled communities, to the produced spaces of neighborhoods, streets, and private holdings. Place is many things.

Forgotten Places and Unforgetting Colonial History

"Forgotten" rural places (Reynolds, 2017) provide direct, concrete, and rich material encounters. Neither Heidegger, nor Dewey, nor contemporary place-based educators were wrong about the centrality of ordinary experience to learning. Nor are Indigenous scholars whose concept of land-based education (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015; Wildcat et al., 2014) situates learning in places in a way that might enhance and deepen place-sensitive rural education (Faircloth, 2009; Greenwood, 2009, 2019) and help us come to terms with the reality, to put it bluntly, that we live and work on stolen land. By taking this fact seriously,

¹¹ New questions are emerging as select rural locales either become exclusive, more or less isolated domains, high-amenity tourist and residential locales, or what Jennifer Sherman (2021) calls "divided paradise" to illustrate how rural gentrification creates multiple forms socioeconomic and cultural diversity in rural places.

we confront our national mythologies and the forgotten and erased histories of racialization and oppression. Thus, we may begin to actively *unforget* a buried history and its deeply forgotten places (Shotwell, 2016; Tuck & Habtom, 2019), and we perhaps find a place to start the challenging work of decolonization.

Assuming a metaphorical anthropological clock, extending back at least 20,000 years, European-descended settlers have only arrived in North America at perhaps 20 minutes to midnight. The term rural was meaningless; there was just land upon which established peoples lived (John & Ford, 2017). While the historical record analyzes complex and often difficult relationships, treaties of friendship and cooperation were signed and there appears to have been a large measure of reciprocity in many contexts for some time. Despite their fine conciliatory words, the most of newcomers were never much interested in sharing or applying their own Christian or emerging Enlightenment principles to the people they “discovered.” Over the last 10 minutes the newcomers have taken over the house; ignored the treaties; called the owners horrible names; incarcerated a large swath of the established population, including children; and declared themselves owners. All over the place, they rapidly set up carbon-belching machinery that consumes living or formerly living fossilized organic material and which has imperilled every single species of creature on land and in the waters. As the machinery expanded across reterritorialized geography, the term rural appears and begins to signify as the space outside places of heavy population concentration, and human labor is drawn toward similarly concentrated carbon-fueled machines in expanding cities and towns. Let us call the machinery by the name of capital, the term Marx coined for the incessant “creative destruction” (Schumpeter, 1942/2008), relentless pursuit of growth, and the desire for more. Let us call the justification for all of this by the name of civilization, which became code for capitalism. As Frederic Jamieson (2003) wrote, it is now easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, and yet, imagine it we must. Today, many of us imagine that we will not survive much longer unless “fossil” capitalism (Malm, 2016) is replaced by a new productive regime.

Capital tolerates no boundaries, and it relentlessly forms and reforms space, throwing human and more-than-human stuff together and then pulling it all apart. In the process, bodies of human and non-human animals are relentlessly consumed, and the land and water itself are used up and rendered dead (Sassen, 2014) in rural sacrifice zones (Edelman, 2019). We are not thrown, we are arranged. This process is not random, and we have social science tools to understand at least some of the socio-logic of the arrangement. We also possess the analytic and economic

tools to arrange it better if we muster the collective political will to use them rather than leaving individuals to fend for themselves in their lonely places, Hollywood hero fantasies notwithstanding.

Our places may provide some comfort, but they offer thin protection. If climactic upheaval is not convincing enough, the pandemic has illustrated how a microscopic nonhuman agent stalks a networked globe, and how uncoordinated place-based responses are disastrous. While denial and resistance to science and public health policy are rife, it is now obvious that large-scale, multi-trillion-dollar national income support programs, global immunological research initiatives, and quasi-military vaccine mobilization efforts are not only possible; such coordinated efforts are the only way to effectively manage the pandemic and its effects. Eliminating food insecurity, poverty, climate precarity, and other similarly wicked problems requires similar efforts and illustrate how what affects one place affects all places in a networked world.

In this networked world, we might be drawn together ethically by the values of religion, spirituality, fairness, and democracy we claim to cherish even if we understand them quite differently. When we rural settlers defend places as though they are exclusively ours, we fail to understand what rural theorist Roger Epp (2008) and many other scholars and activists mean when they say, “we are all treaty people.” We exist in what Martin Nakata (2007) called the cultural interface, together under the same contractual, moral, and ethical umbrella. But what do democracy and fairness mean in the context of a relatively short and destructive history of Euro-settler place making and spatial production founded on racialized Indigenous dispossession and the enslavement of African descended people? Surely this is one of the most pressing questions of our time, and one that calls us to recognize and remember buried histories and reconsider established geographies.

Honneth’s (2011) revitalized conception holds that reification signifies forgotten recognition, which is to say the attachment to people and objects together that provide the ontological basis for human development. He draws on Heidegger, Dewey, and a range of others to make the point that recognition is prior to cognition. In other words, we learn in relation to things/others in real and imagined places. But our spatial assumptions and habits in the field of rural education have too often avoided the hard work of unforgetting the complex relations, systematic misrecognition, and selective reifications (for instance, statues and monuments) that have produced and named our treasured places. In the process, what follows is “a kind of mental habit or habitually ossified perspective, which when taken up by human subjects causes them to lose their

ability for empathetic engagement in other persons and occurrences” (Honneth, 2011, p. 53). This tendency aptly describes the fisheries dispute I describe above.

In my view, we require a new and radicalized vision that includes a thorough rethinking of space, place, and capital. This vision transcends the narrow pragmatism of ideologies that tend to exclude, forget, reproduce, and reinforce established hierarchies and privilege, often under the cover of a righteous discourse that invokes freedom, greatness, common sense, truth, righteousness, virtue, and/or God. We require new tools for this work along with new ways to use them to re-place or to deterritorialize—and reterritorialize, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980/1987) put it. When we speak and write differently, we create territory. The question is: How does our work envision rural spaces and places? Some emerging scholars do indeed speak and write differently about the rural, which has always been a space of diversity within the mainstream of capitalist development rather than a homogenous space apart. Durlik’s vision of the space of the local, particularly when it is pitched in its most insular, emplaced mode, is profoundly ideological.

A preoccupation with the local that leaves the global outside the line of vision is vulnerable to manipulation at the hands of global capital which of necessity commands a more comprehensive vision of global totality.... The local in the process become the site upon which the multifaceted contradictions of contemporary society play out, where critique turns to ideology and ideology into critique, depending upon its location at any one fleeting moment. (Durlik, 1997, p. 96)

We hear much today about thinking outside the box and building back better beyond the pandemic. For us in the field of rural education, this mindset might mean accepting the ambivalent realization that the comfort, hominess, attractions, and seductions of our treasured places can inhibit our ability to look outside them to see how they relate to other places and to look within them with unforgetting eyes to investigate carefully how they came to be what they are. An inward-looking rural education field will ossify and become irrelevant. Connecting the multiple layers of place, from home to globe, is essential to building the kinds of understanding required for an inclusive and sustainable future. For this work, I think we need to look outside our disciplinary homeplace and our pragmatic sensibilities to search for the new ideas that will connect us to the movements that might help us critically engage the concerns of our time and create bold new territory in our writing.

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¹² The Province of Nova Scotia Office of L'nú Affairs (n.d.) makes the distinction between Mi'kmaq and Mi'kmaw in the following way: “The word Mi'kmaq (ending in q) is a noun that means the people. Mi'kmaq is the plural form of the singular word ‘Mi'kmaw. Because it is plural, the word Mi'kmaq always refers to more than one Mi'kmaw person or to the entire nation.”

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