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Identity, Memory and Place by Kelly Baker

Benedict Anderson's assertion in Imagined Communities that a sense of community or belonging traverses both geographic and material borders has been championed in the bulk of work following his. Thought to rest less in material place and more in imaginary space, the traditional sense of belonging to a land and its people has been supplanted by an increasingly expanded notion of what constitutes viable spaces or places as foundations for self/group identification and belonging. Yet, I would argue, even imagined community is "placed" in some way, as bodies remain, though mobile, situated in one place or another. Beginning with a brief overview of key approaches to space and place, this article will explore how notions of the self and belonging are shaped by place in both imaginative and material ways. Drawing from both work in the social sciences and the humanities (particularly geography, anthropology, and bell hooks' Belonging: a Culture of Place), and focusing particularly on spatial understandings of queerness, I will argue that far from solely imaginative, individual and collective senses of belonging are shaped by and hinged upon both the material and symbolic manifestations of place. Not only do conceptions of queerness-as-placelessness spatialize queer individuals as inherently urban, such understandings also fail to conceptualize the ways that queer identity is rooted in material place.

I: Approaches to space and place

The so-called spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities, coupled with the "cultural turn" in geography, has over the past couple of decades rendered space and place highly instrumental concepts for researchers exploring socio-cultural, economic, and political relations (Hubbard and Kitchin 2). Approaches to the concepts are, however, far from unified. While, for instance, many anthropologists have conceived space and place as productive of and produced by everyday life and sociality, many physical geographers hold onto the notion of "absolute space," where phenomena pre-exist their location in space (Hubbard and Kitchin 2-3). Highlighting some of the key debates that have foregrounded current thinking on space and place, in this section I will argue that while the two concepts are interrelated and coconstitutive, they each carry distinct meanings, both material and symbolic, which are instrumental in highlighting the complex ways identity is both abstractly and physically embedded within material context.

i: space to place from the abstract to the experiential

During the 1950s and 1960s, space was understood by human and physical geographers alike as outside of human existence. A neutral container for human action among the former, and "straight-forwardly empirical, objective, and mappable" (4) among the latter, space was perceived as functioning according to statistically-derived "spatial laws," which supposedly could and would amount to "the construction of predictive spatial models" (5). This so-called Quantitative Revolution, however, was met with a number of objections, prompting, for example, urban sociologists to join geographers in reconceptualizing space as both socially produced and productive, and as cementing racial and class inequalities into city space (5). Henri Lefebvre forwarded this notion of space in *The Production of Space* where he, rejecting the notion of absolute space, argued that space is produced by social activity and is thus inherently historical. Space, for Lefebvre, is not a neutral container but an ongoing social production.

Conceiving space as produced through a threeway dialectic between conceived, perceived, and lived space, Lefebvre's work engenders the notion of place, which, representing a distinctive type of space, is defined by the lived experiences and identifications of people. Originally perceived as a bounded locale or territory, place was reconceived by human geographers during the 1970s as being created through emotional attachment, familiarity, and everyday embodied experience (Hubbard and Kitchin 6). For Yi-Fu Tuan space is abstract and allows movement, while place is a pause; space is transformed into place as it becomes more familiar, intimate, and valuable (6). As such, for many geographers, being-in-place became understood as an embodied practice, which, both mental and physical, is constantly evolving through everyday encounters. The relationship between space, place, and identity, however, remains contested, as debates surrounding scale highlight the transformative and apparently undermining effect globalization has had on place identities (Hubbard and Kitchin 9).

Claiming in some instances the "end of history,"

these extreme and slightly apocalyptic writings have been countered by important strains of thought that point to the continued, even heightened importance of place for the construction of self and identity (S. Taylor 1). Reflecting debates surrounding place and identity within postmodern theory, the relationship between space and place is increasingly understood as incomplete, shifting, contextual, and constantly in motion, shaped by complicated networks and webs of power. And far from usurping the local, processes of globalization are in fact conceived by theorists such as David Harvey as requiring and drawing upon the specificity of place as a way of generating meaning and value for different goods and commodities (Hubbard and Kitchin 9-10). In a similar vein, Arjun Appadurai points out that while virtual neighbourhoods, for instance, mobilize ideas, opinions, money, and social linkages, these often flow directly back into local places, even lived neighbourhoods, in myriad material and symbolic ways (195). Peter Geschiere even suggests a "return of the local," evidenced in the spread of what he calls "autochthony," which is the embracing of a sense of self derived from being "born from the soil" (1-2). This proclivity, he argues, represents both a reaction against (selected) forces of globalization, and a return to what is considered to be "the most au-thentic form of belonging" (1-2), that is, the experience of being rooted, by blood, within a place. So while the significance of place in general and "the local" in particular have been rendered weakened by some, others have rightfully pointed to their persistence in influencing individual and collective identity.

ii: materiality and imagination

Recent criticisms, such as Harvey's and Geschiere's, reveal how approaches to space and place within

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postmodern theory and theories of globalization have attended to fluidity, mobility, and flows at the expense of materiality. Pointing to a lack of academic inquiry into "the rural" as an intersection of identity and axis of experience, Barbara Ching and Gerald Creed, for instance, argue for a new definition of place that departs from much dominant usage (6). Used "nearly interchangeably," space and place, they argue, are often employed to capture the "more fashionable" components of identity, further erasing the role of "real" or material places in identity formation (6). In assuming a purely metaphoric and inherently urban conception of place, many researchers, they claim, also fail to recognize the interaction of place with other nodes of identity such as class, race, and gender (22), and overshadow how identity can be imaginatively rooted and socially constructed in material place. To this end, they argue for a "middle-ground" in which place can be both metaphoric and material—a grounded metaphor.

While I disagree with how they seem to map "place" onto "the rural," I believe Ching and Creed's critique remains salient. Indeed, Tanya Richardson, writing about place and identity in contemporary Ukraine, echoes their concerns, arguing that while many scholars insist on focusing on the "cultural flows, practices, and relations that are not so isomorphic with place," people perceive and experience places as productive of sociality and meaning (106). Richardson conceives of place as a process, that is, an historical production composed of the merging of the material, the perceived, and the imagined (106). She points out, though—and I forward this notion, as well-that recent critiques of place and culture in anthropological writing have denaturalized the relationship between place and culture to such an extent as to "think themselves out of place" (37). Such conceptions of place also mask the ways that individual and collective senses of belonging are shaped by and hinged upon the material and symbolic manifestations of place that emerge out of individual and shared experiences of living in a particular place.

II: Identity, belonging, and rootedness

A distinctive form of space that emerges out of history, particularity, and everyday lived experience, place can be understood as fundamental in providing a locus of identity and sense of belonging among those who inhabit it (Hubbard and Kitchin 6). For some theorists, however, mobility has weakened so-called traditional ties to place such as birthplace, hometown, or local community, and has altered our sense of place (S. Taylor 22). According to Appadurai, in the absence of these traditional ties, people lack "easy" identities in relation to place (195). Indeed, for Anthony Giddens, we currently "live 'in the world" in a different way from previous eras of history (186). For Giddens, new communication systems, coupled with the impersonal, abstract nature of modern institutions, render our current state of being-in-the-world one of "expanded contexts" whereby the immediate physical locality of where someone lives is no longer the hub of important social relations or events in our lives (146). "Thoroughly penetrated by disembedding mechanisms" such as contemporary consumerism (199), place-based constructions of identity are for Giddens no longer salient, but lost to consumption, as people express themselves through the goods and lifestyles they can purchase, and face a constant pressure to keep moving (S. Taylor 24). Such approaches to identity propose identity as a project in which individuals "make" themselves as they wish to be through life choices and activities, regardless of, or even in spite of, their context of place (S. Taylor 8).

I concur, however, with Sarah Ahmed, who suggests that home and movement are not necessarily directly or neatly opposed; people's identifications with and relationships to place are, rather, much more complex than either "rooted belonging' or 'rootless mobility" (3). And places themselves do not have fixed identities that "exist separately from the language practices that produce them" (S. Taylor 10). Rather, places must be understood both as flexibly constructed by people through their own attachments and narrative productions of self, and as reflecting these multifarious identities back to its occupants (S. Taylor 11). Here, place is understood as having a continued relevance for, and dialogic relationship with, individual and collective identity. And despite increasing mobility, our physical situatedness in time and space places us; our bodies locate us physically in place, which localizes at least some aspects of our lives and identities, as well as our searches for and senses of belonging. As I will demonstrate in the following sections through exploring historical memory and embodied knowledge, it is within the interplay of the materiality of place and the imaginary sense of place that a sense of individual and collective belonging to place emerges. I will then explore how an attention to queerness, and rural queerness in particular, provides fruitful opportunities for looking into queer identities inplace, and how attachments to place (which are themselves often classed) can actually frame the development of queer subjectivity.

i: memory, history, and belonging

Inextricably tied to place, memory is also a process, which is continually unfolding (Hoelscher and Al-

derman 348). Both particular and universal, memory is also a social activity; it functions as an expression and active binding force of group identity (348). Both memory and place are woven into the fabric of everyday life in that while personal memory makes place out of space, collective memory contributes to peoples' material and symbolic understanding of place through shared knowledges of buildings, streets, historical events, and other particularities of the place, as well as their sense of belonging to that place and their fellow inhabitants (350; Keogan 8). As Yi-Fu Tuan argues, we strengthen our sense of self by accessing our imaginative and material past; objects anchor time, and place, though shifting, allows us to recapture our personal history (187). Sites of memory, then, can include geographical places and their physical features such as monuments, buildings, and public displays, as well as their more symbolic attributes, such as shared memories, historical occurrences, origin myths, and each individual's sense of her or his self within that place (Hoelscher and Alderman 349). Tied to and shaped by place, memory consists of an ongoing dialogue between the material and symbolic aspects of the past and the continuously unfolding present; working to "crystallize identity" (Keogan 8), symbolic objects and narratives can help reinforce collective bonds, albeit momentary or fleeting, between people and their place.

Collective memory, Keogan argues, thus "emerges out of geographically bounded political contexts that are shaped by ongoing struggles over material resources and collective identity" (47). Landscape, in this sense, can operate as a "storehouse" for collective or social memory; it frames the lives of an exponential number of people, and its features, particularly in the case of urban landscapes, outlast many generations (62). In this way, landscapes and cityscapes

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can be imbued with what are perceived and experienced by residents as intrinsic qualities, which though shared, in a sense, are also "polysemic and unstable through time" (Ashworth and Graham 3). The past, however, as Richardson points out, exists in the present in much more complex ways than dominant historical narratives make apparent (23). Place, for Richardson, acts as a kaleidoscope, in that a place's history can be seen as formed through the interaction of "multiple coexisting yet irreconcilable 'lenses" which both expose and conceal (22-23). Richardson's notion of the kaleidoscope reminds us that the notion of collective memory when applied too liberally can reify memory and imply a sort of temporal unity among people's memories of place. It also helps get at the uneven ways history is embedded within place and circulated through popular memory in that people's senses of the past are continually reinvented by both themselves and larger structures of power to reflect new presents, and the desire for new futures.

Here, Taylor's idea that people's life narratives are "nested" within larger narratives (S. Taylor 66) is a useful way of conceptualizing both the temporal nature of memory's grounding in place, and the relationship between place and collective memory. Taylor argues that as a result of our capacity to connect events that have occurred within different temporal contexts, our life narratives are imbued with references to history and the historical construction of place (66). This "nesting" of one's own life narratives within larger, historical narratives of place works to extend not only one's connection to a particular place, but also, through collective narratives of group origin myths, in a more imaginative and symbolic way, to the fellow inhabitants of that place (66; Ashworth and Graham 2). An individual's sense of belonging to a place is thus a process that, embedded in personal and place histories, is framed by both imaginative and material senses of place, which, providing an impetus for collective belonging, can extend to fellow inhabitants of that place.

Richardson also explores the connection between memory, place, and collective belonging, using the concept of historicity to highlight how the intersection of national histories with personal memories can produce uncertainties in the "imagination of continuity," which can complicate or disrupt the sharing of a common statehood or sense of place (42). The concept of historicity, which has been used in anthropology to explore issues of imagined community, can be defined as "that which is 'located in the spaces prised open between history and memory" (72). For Richardson, the concept of historicity disrupts the binary framework of "history" and "memory," which attributes history to official accounts and memory to individual subjects (72). In weaving together personal memories and historical narratives, the concept allows new perspectives on people's personal histories as it highlights the way people narrate a sense of personal and collective continuity in light of unpredictable circumstances and ongoing change (75). Belonging, in this sense, occurs at the intersection of personal and larger historical narratives, whereby people's shared sense of or attachment to a place is being continually remade. Uncertainties or slippages between personal memory and the historical narrative and collective memory of place can create fissures in people's imagined sense of belonging or community. Belonging, in this sense, requires either continuity of historicity or collective disruption.

ii: embodied knowledge and sensory ways of knowing

Richardson also reminds us that place, like memory, is a "phenomenological experience," which is rooted in the senses and the body (20). Yi-Fu Tuan similarly contends that that one's sense of place is acquired through both knowledge of a place and its "feel," which, comprised of experiences, sights, sounds, smells, and rhythms, are repeated day after day (183). In this way, he argues, "man-made" or physical space can shape human feeling as well as social roles and relations, that is, it "teaches" (102). It teaches not only through literal signage and posters, but also through its impact on the body, which res-ponds to its expansiveness, verticality, mass, interior spaciousness, light, odour, sounds, and touch in both sensory and emotional ways (116). The relationship between built environment and human emotion has been explored at length in the literature on urban planning. As Emily Talen argues, material design affects numerous non-physical realms, such as "choice, access, opportunity, interaction, movement, identity, connection...security, and stability" (152). The images, landmarks, and symbols of a neighbourhood function as "identity space," which can serve as a "rallying point" that "binds disparate people and places" (152). Shared knowledge of streets, landmarks, and the material landscape, and the sensory impacts this materiality has on the body, can act as binding forces, which connect people to place and, through this shared sense of place, imaginatively to each other.

iii: queer identities in place

As Mary Gray argues, spatial relations play a pivotal role in the particularities and meaning of indivi-

duals' claims to queerness and the formation of queer identity spaces (8). In this way, gay culture has been theorized as having a special relationship with urban space. Indeed, the queering of urban public space has been historically linked to the emergence of gay politics during early twentieth-century America (D'Emilio 104). Throughout the 20th century, gay spaces such as bars, cafes, and neighbourhoods created the possibility for collective consciousness, struggle, and community (D'Emilio 104; Valentine 146). The establishment of such spaces provided public space in which political consciousness and movements for public recognition could emerge; they provided safety, visibility, and a sense of commonality (Valentine 146). Gayle Rubin, among others, has argued that "erotic dissidents" such as gays and lesbians required the anonymity and heterogeneity of an urban setting (155). Certainly, while the size, density, and diversity of urban populations work to insulate and alienate individuals from one another, such factors have also been theorized as providing the ideal setting for subcultural formations (Tonkiss 8). The city's capacities to create visibility, consolidate capital, and foster political power among spatially bound groups rendered it the key site for the formation of early gay and lesbian identities (Gray 7).

Not only then has the development of gay community and identity been theorized as paralleling processes of urbanization, but, as Halberstam points out, the construction of gay subjectivity has itself been embedded within a narrative of rural to urban migration, which maps the psychological journey of "coming out" onto a physical journey to the city (36-7; Weston 40). In this way, Gray argues, the community histories of North American gays "cohere through and hinge on unrelenting narratives that imagine rural spaces as...closet[s]" or "pre-modern

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trappings" (9). Purportedly isolated from gay identity, this narrative of progress positions the rural as the necessary shadow against which the political accomplishment of urban gay visibility can be measured and its urban superiority sustained. Not only do these "metronormative" understandings of queerness spatialize queer individuals as inherently urban and thus blatantly disregard those queer individuals who identify with and live within rural areas (Halberstam 36), such understandings also fail to conceptualize how queer identity can be rooted in place. Indeed, because queer identity is often situated within a symbolic urban space that necessitates a travelling away or escape from one's homeplace, the ways that queer identities can tied to or embedded within physical locations—one's hometown, for instance—and the ways spatial mobilities (or lack thereof) are framed by class have been ignored. Before delving into a more detailed discussion of rural queerness-in-place, I will first expand on the notion of travel as a place-making practice.

III: Travel, displacement, placelessness

Travel, Rebecca Solnit writes, is "a psychic experiment...One can explore the remoter reaches of the psyche by wandering across literal terrain" (viii). Wandering "offers the opportunity to find out who else one is, in that collapse of identity into geography" (Solnit 7). But, she reminds us, "arrival, like origin, is a mythical place" (3). Travel, for Solnit, is at once imaginative and material; a journey through a space between material yet imaginative places, travel emerges as a traversing of places yet is itself a placemaking practice. In *Belonging: A Culture of Place* bell hooks conceives of her own traveling away from her rural home to new places, cities in particular, as a journey across physical and imaginative space—a

spatial practice that further rooted her back home. In her essay, "Kentucky Is My Fate," hooks conceives of her home state as her destined place to settle. Its materiality, that is, its rolling hills, trees, openness, sounds, and smells, as well as its abundance of personal memory and history, called her back, first as a temporary visitor, and then as a permanent inhabitant. But this calling required a traveling, a moving away; she claims to have felt more intensely "Kentuckian" after leaving than before, as the imprints of her geographical home on her psyche and habits became more apparent. As she states: "all my longing to belong...was waiting for me in Kentucky...to remember and reclaim" (hooks 21). It was while she was away that her brief returns to Kentucky gave her a sense of belonging where, "experiencing unbroken ties to the land, to homefolk to our vernacular speech," she felt a sense of belonging both to place and to those in that place (24).

The sense of belonging and identification with place hooks experienced during her travels between her home state and elsewhere echoes Richardson's assertion that "home" is both a physical locale and a set of practices; home can be thought of as an existential experience that is entangled with the materiality of place (19). Here we see how a sense of "home" -that is, belonging to people and place-though emerging out of physical location, is a feature of the imagination. As hooks describes, "bringing my Kentucky ways with me wherever I made homeplace sustained my ties to home and also made it possible for me to return home" (24). Here, the materiallyderived aspects of place were imaginatively transported across space, providing hooks with a sense of place that, though inextricably tying her to her home state, mapped onto other, temporary locations she inhabited, transforming them from space to place. For, indeed, as Solnit reminds us, "[w]e are often in two places at once. In fact, we are usually in at least two places" (7).

The stance taken by hooks, Richardson, and Solnit stands in stark contrast to that of Knopp, for whom places are mere "passings' that 'haunt' 'us" (126). For Knopp, people's (and queer people's in particular) "identity quests" send them on physical and imaginative journeys through space and time on a search for the people, places, and relationships that will give to them individual and collective security, solidarity, and "integrated wholeness" against a heterosexist world (122-23). For Knopp these searches are a result of the forced (because of homophobia) or voluntary disavowal of one's roots and the subsequent urge to move-physically, emotionally, spiritually, imaginatively—and "radically remap" their worlds and places, that so many queer people experience (123). To this end, he argues, many queers embrace being out-of-place and, feeling more intimately connected to the experience of moving itself, have an "ambivalent relationship to both place-ment and identity" (124). This ambivalent relationship to place, which, he argues, has been "under-appreciated and under-developed" (124) in the literature, is a result of a lack of attention to movement, flux, and flows within queer and geographic thought.

Knopp's approach to place is, for me, hardly sufficient. As stated above, I, and many others, do not think that the concepts of flows and mobility have been under-examined within anthropological, geographic, or queer literature—quite the opposite, in fact. But I also disagree with Knopp's argument on two more bases. First, as Weston has argued, the narrative of coming out is often mapped onto a physical and symbolic journey between rural and urban places, where "being queer" is inherently placed as urban (40-41). Far from out-of-place, queerness here emerges as firmly planted and historically rooted

within an urban space, which becomes transformed for and by the queer into a place of safety, community, and anonymity. In this narrative, the city operates not only as a place, but the place within which queer identity is rooted; it is a "homeland" and "symbolic anchor" for queer community (Weston 49). As Halberstam and Gray, as well as my own MA research on rural queer identity and experience remind us, however, not all queers leave home to become queer; many rural-born queers, for instance, experience a rootedness and sense of place in their rural hometowns that overrides any desire to seek out their "urban homeland," or, once that homeland has been sought, calls them, much as it did with hooks, back home (Halberstam 27; Baker).

Indeed, such identifications with place are illustrative of a broader conception of rurality, an oftenignored yet immensely pervasive thread of placebased identity which, governed by familiarity, familial affiliation, and community participation, can actually provide rural queer individuals with a means of both acceptance and queer expression alternative to dominant models. Attention to identity in-place and community belonging can uncover unique examples of queer acceptance that fly in the face of predominant configurations of rural hometowns as predominantly homophobic. Rural queer communities must be understood as a "complex interactive model of space, embodiment, locality, and desire" (Halberstam 45); while hegemonic constructions of mainstream queer identity are inflected with urbanness, so too are rural queer identities entwined with spatially constructed no-tions of rural-ness.

As Gray points out, many rural queers enact a "politics of rural recognition" which privilege one's credentials as "just another local" (37) and denounce claims of difference. The familial reliance, local power dynamics, class relations and cultural margina-

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lization inherent to rural areas may render them illsuited to the strategies of visibility taken up by the predominantly middle-class, urban-focused North American GLBT movement (Gray 30). So it must not be assumed that rural places are "endemically hostile" or somehow incapable of making room for queer difference (Grav 30). Rather, in order to foster belonging and visibility in rural areas, rural queers must work through the structures of rural life, especially the dynamics of class, gender, race, and place (Gray 4). Rooted particularly in family connections, familiarity and belonging are central to the structures of rural life. In this way, Gray argues, the invoking of family can operate as a key strategy in the politics of rural queer visibility; not only does it allow rural queers to avoid marginalization and be integrated into their local communities, it also maintains their access to the bare necessities needed to simply get by (37). At the same time, family can also be a key motivating factor in prompting rural-born queers' return to, or desire to remain in, their hometown. Far from placeless, rural queer identities and communities highlight how queer identities can be firmly rooted, both physically and symbolically, in place.

Second, I question whether "placelessness" is itself a possible condition, and if "displacement" may be a better term. I am not sure that anyone can be literally without place and, furthermore, choose to be so. While Knopp argues that for many people placelessness is a "commonly sought after experience" (124), I would argue that Knopp's supposedly placeless queer subject is not only extracted from material context, but also inherently privileged, particularly in terms of class. Not only, as mentioned before, are people, as physical bodies in material contexts, "always emplaced" (Allnut 3), but people's sense of place and movement between places, queers'

included, are shaped by classed identifications, which remain unacknowledged by Knopp. Indeed, as Taylor reminds us, class manifests in an everyday sense of place, in terms of limitations, boundaries, and movements, as well as connections, (dis)advantages, inclusions, and exclusions (Y. Taylor 161). Elizabeth McDermott similarly points out that attachments to place forged through identification with a working-class background can cultivate distinct and more localized understandings of what being queer means-notions which differ greatly from more middle-class and spatially-mobile perceptions (206). So while Knopp insists on conceiving place and placedness as a chosen condition, not only must we consider how any supposed choice is shaped by identifications such as class, we must also question whether or not one can actually be out-of-place in the first place.

To this end, I prefer the concept of displacement, particularly Richardson's notion of displacement-in-place (37). Richardson's ethno-graphy turns its focus to those who, though remaining in place, experience displacement in their home place, but continue to establish connections there, despite being in a situation of "overwhelming transformation" (37). Here, displacement emerges as a situational experience that is both material and metaphoric; an imaginative sense of displacement, though working to settle one's sense of place, can occur without movement. Richardson's notion of displacement-in-place also echoes Solnit's claim that one can be, and usually is, in at least two places at once. Place here is thus an imaginative state that is mapped onto material places in intertwined layers.

IV: Conclusions

Throughout this article I have shown how the symbolic and material bases of personal and collective memory and their situatedness in the material and symbolic elements of place underscore how belonging, though an ongoing process, is borne out of a dialogue between the imaginative and material aspects and manifestations of place. Storehouses of personal and collective memory, material places prompt both personal memories and collective narratives of history which, continuously on-going and in the making, can provide a basis for, or disruption in, collective identity and belonging. Sensory elements of place, that is, the manifestation of materiality on and within the body, also foster shared senses of and belonging to place. Questioning the plausibility of "placelessness" as a possible condition, and an innate aspect of queerness, I use the notion of travel, as expressed by bell hooks, and displacementin-place, offered by Richardson, to explore "belonging" as both material and imaginatively rooted in place, and have used rural queerness as a grounded example of and how attachments to place can actually frame the development of queer subjectivity.

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