

Reconsidering Place: Troubling The Urban/Rural Binary For Artist Practices And Organizations - Notes

Saturday, April 27, 2019 | 10–11:30 AM
Report from the Field - Selected via Open Call

Organized by Emily Artinian and Fawn Daphne Plessner, Street Road with presentations by Emily Artinian, Fawn Daphne Plessner, Matthew Fluharty, and Emelie Chhangur.

The field of art is framed by a normative belief that urban spaces constitute a ‘center’ and rural spaces a ‘periphery’. This imaginary is increasingly challenged by concepts that ambiguate conventional understandings of the ‘urban’ and the ‘rural’, as well as other framings such as ‘suburban’ or ‘exurban’. Such designations don’t capture today’s variegated social and cultural spaces, comprised as they are of axes of relationships and mobilities amongst multiple places, including online spaces. This limited terminology reifies place through colonial vocabularies and concepts and thereby reinforces the racialization and industrialization of space, also leaving out important Indigenous concepts and relations to place. Further, it can sustain immobilities, even as mobility and access are increasingly assumed. This session draws out speakers’ and attendees’ perspectives to examine working in multiple in-betweens, aiming to raise new questions about the cogency of claims to centrality and marginality.

NOTES:

This panel is going to be much about geography, and turning geographies upside down and questioning them.

Emelie Chhangur:

Excited to share a bit of Toronto with you folks. I have been a suburban curator for 15 years. There is a notion of “out there” that stuck with me when I started. “Out there” was a vision but also an operative concept. Extending itself constantly and being a transformative concept, that is a concept of difference that it differs from itself constantly evolves and transforms. The institution itself is a concept of project we decided. “Out there” as an operative concept of difference was not about being different from downtown however. It became different from itself. That is the art institution different from the concept of an art institution and questioning the way it tries to function, its protocols and processes.

Slogans and misperceptions aside, our local was now more sensitive to audience development and to the ethics of the community engagement. But also to the demands that being on the periphery as curators.

In 2017, [Art Gallery of York University](#) (AGYU) began to articulate through its programs that each project needed a new approach, each individual, each group, community or aesthetic frame required us to rethink our own institutional protocols, and modes of production and engagement. For example outreach to communities became what I have come to refer to as “inreach.” Inreach is designed to transform the very nature and function of the institution from within. If used our so called centralized position to experiment socially engaged practices that produce long term alliances between the gallery, artist community group, and our locality. This changed our values and curatorial mode at AGYU.

I am going to use a few projects to talk about the concept of inreach:

1st project: “The awakening”

This project happened between 2009 and 2011. It was the first time that the temporality of my institutional practice was called into question. It was a collaboration between local parkour and the [Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation](#). The whole first year was about developing a relationship and conceiving and hanging out. We brought these individuals and groups together to create what we called a civic ceremonial that was staged inside the [Art Gallery of Ontario](#).

It made me think about what it takes to engage with folks who have no perceived natural process and how they work with these institutional protocols and deadlines, and marketing.

We followed different types of protocols. We made sure everybody had a voice, and had the opportunity to speak and be heard, to follow the consensus model. We brought in these cultural protocols from the Mississaugas and to the project itself. It took 3 years to make this project; for this project it was not just about the temporality, it was also about adopting different kinds of protocols to meet the methodological demands of the project.

Per our institutional protocols, we pay our artists, but to pay the Mississaugas, dancers and the drummers, was a bit more problematic. It was perceived as buying their culture. And frankly to pay an artist, I have to ask for their federal governmental stuff (nationality, SSN, etc.) and that was very offensive to our First Nations friends. That was another year of negotiations around finding the appropriate ways to have a relationship that wasn't based on something more than the contractual.

So, we decided together to instead fund the language camp. We were able to productively participate in their culture by facilitating that was really meaningful to them.

This was one example where I started to perceive my curatorial program to extend over 3 years and not have a two months exhibition. To extend the temporality of the projects based on what the projects themselves need.

2nd Project: Ring of Fire

This was a collaboration with Trinidadian artist [Marlon Griffith](#). Due to the established friendship with the Mississaugas, I now bring artists to talk to them to know about the history of my country. And this speaks to long term relationship that extend beyond the project themselves.

Ring of Fire was a 300 person street procession that we staged down in the middle of downtown Toronto. It was a collaboration between the Mississaugas, poets and rappers, and disability dancers. We worked together for 2.5 years.

Through this project I started questioning the civic role of a contemporary art gallery. So engagement became the subject of curating, an approach to cultural work as a curator and not something that a curator does. Staging these civic ceremonials in order to bring folks close to the civic part of their city. The 52 division of police, the city hall, all were involved in the project and I considered them part of the curatorial set. I am interested in the role that the gallery plays in brokering these kinds of relationships between individuals to make civic structures actually work for the people.

3rd project. I am running out of time.

This is the Toronto subway map; it took 2 years to make. Myself and 2 artists from NE Brazil and 20 spoken poets and rappers shot a film called “Rise” as a way to showcase the amazing talent of the suburbs. Because going from “out there”—to “in reach”—which was a degraded view from downtown and that nothing really happens in the suburbs. But these folks who won an award were part of the Toronto cultural gestalt.

Emily Artinian: I’ve titled this presentation ‘The center is always in motion. Thinking typologies of place as relational.’ I want to draw out how place is relational and temporal. And also how words like rural, urban, suburban are very problematic terms and connected to colonialist histories.

An example of typologies as relational: ‘urban’ gets used to describe the old steel town of Coatesville within the context of Chester County. This is sometimes how it is represented, and when it is it often carries class and racial discrimination—sometimes unconsciously and often consciously. So the use of this word in this context is always already problematized.

[Street Road Artists Space](#) is located on a five acre triangular site, with three buildings, at the intersection of Street Road and Route 41. You can see it appears quite rural, but just down the street are a number of suburban developments called things like Willow Tree View, you can imagine. Also, Route 41 is a major arterial from the Port of Wilmington to points west with 25,000 cars and trucks/day.

I went to the session yesterday on residencies in non-urban places: In our breakout discussion group I ended up saying “Do everything,” in the context of thinking about communities and engaging them. What are the things you do when you run a space, especially an ‘out there’

space? You have to do everything—do a lot of work connecting it to nearby people and communities but also to perceived centers (like cities such as Philadelphia).

We want to theorize in this panel how we think about space broadly, but it's also important to talk about some specific examples. So to begin, I want to get personal and give a kind of 'confession' and lay out the structure and make explicit the resources that fund Street Road: I founded it personally, it grew from my own artistic practice, and also, financially, I was able to found it when my father passed away and left his real estate holdings and company. He practiced real estate in Chester County for 35 years. So Street Road is funded and run by one individual, using accumulated capital, 'extracted' from land. I don't pay myself; our budget runs from 20-50k a year that we spend from personal money.

This first slide shows a nearby site, the Walmart Supercenter along the Lincoln Highway/US Route 30. This is in Parkesburg, PA, 30 minutes from Street Road. My father worked for about a decade to buy, 'develop,' and sell this land to a big box entity. I grew up in the area, knowing this site as farmland, with my father trying to acquire it, and trying to build relationships with developers in Philadelphia, and with the understanding of this as one of his achievements as a real estate professional.

I think it is important to bring that up, because we are talking so much about gentrification in almost every session here at Common Field, and in all of our work I think, and I founded Street Road partly as a way to think through what inheritance is and to also challenge received notions of property ownership and being very conscious of the fact that the accumulated capital that is being used to make art is made from this land and from transactions that happened between people who live in this area, and so from a kind of gentrification. Most projects hosted by Street Road have some connection to land ownership.

1st Project: Homma Meridian

This is one of the first projects we did with [Kaori Homma](#), a Japanese artist who lives in London. She installed this in Paris, Tokyo, and also here in Cochranville.

The installation involves putting a stripe across a North South line of longitude, a mark which represents 'moving' the Greenwich Prime Meridian to different sites. It is important to Kaori that the line is temporal and disappear over time because the point is to challenge controlled geographies.

The line is painted across the grass and across two buildings. Eventually, the artist wanted us to stop mowing that part of the land. That is about three years ago and it currently it has several tall maple trees that are babies from the other maple trees.

When I mentioned the "do everything" thing above, I was thinking also about spatiality and bringing people together from multiple locales. This slide shows kids from the [Garage Community and Youth Center](#) in nearby Kennett Square participating in a workshop with Kaori

on Skype; many of these kids are immigrants themselves and living in our region. Those connections are key, and the crux of the matter, connecting the artists from further afield with local people, and also questioning what 'local' means.

2nd project: Crisis Farm (Seed to Table)

This is by [Maryann Worrell](#) and [Doug Mott](#) from Phoenixville just outside of Philadelphia. Worrell first developed the Crisis Farm during a residency at Burren College of Art in Ireland as a challenge to large scale agriculture and monoculture farming, and it is a multilayered project. At Street Road, it is a table that has a planter bed at the center and it involves participation whereby people come together as a group to plant in the Spring, and then re-convene again, hopefully the same group, to harvest and eat together at the same table. This is a permanent installation. It puts farming directly in touch with people.

3rd Project: Lost Highway

This slide shows a work by UK-based [Danny Aldred](#): you see a fax machine printing out on a continuous reel/scroll. Every day for an entire summer, Aldred would take a screenshot of our road, Route 41, on Google Street View, from the UK, then print it, and fax it over to us. This work was shown alongside that of Gerald Harris, a Chester County based painter who often paints this same road, in a practice that is informed by Brandywine River traditions.

4th Project: Clouded Title

To wrap up and to lead into the next presentation, I'll briefly introduce *Clouded Title*, a recent project, developed with fellow panelist [Daphne Plessner](#).

Clouded Title is a real estate term: any time there is a contested ownership, there is a cloud on the title to a property. This project began as an exhibition and is continuing as a series of dialogues, with a possible future publication. We invite multiple groups (including, for example, The School of Living—a community land trust—Clusters and Entanglements, a phenomenological reading group in Manchester UK, environmental lawyer David Boyd who works on the idea of land and the environment having legal 'personhood,' to name a few), bringing these people together into conversation with each other to unpack ownership from an artistic perspective but also multiple perspectives, in order to understand ownership in new ways.

Daphne Plessner:

I am based on Pender Island, which is located on the southwest tip of what is now called the Province of British Columbia, Canada. I lived on the Island as a child (40 years ago) and recently returned to take up residence. The *Clouded Title* project emerged from a consideration of living within [WSÁNEĆ \(Saanich\) First Nation](#) territory and on lands that are in fact unceded, but otherwise appropriated by the British Crown (1850 – 1982) and now, the Canadian State (1982 – present). Hence, I reside on land that is *clouded in title*.

To trouble the 'urban'/'rural' binary that informs colonial imaginaries of place, I will first briefly summarize some of my own thoughts on what constitutes the problems of colonialism within the current political moment of settler occupation of lands designated as 'rural'. Colonial concepts of 'ownership' are captured in vocabularies such as 'rural', 'urban', 'countryside', 'wilderness', etc. and continue to inform and be performed in multiple ways. Following a brief outline of some consequences of the use of this language, I will then turn to a discussion of my own art intervention called *Citizen Artist News: Clouded Title* (that takes the form of a newspaper) that set out to make visible the problems of settler logics and practices within the local, 'rural', community of Pender Island. The art intervention was launched during Street Road's *Clouded Title* research workshop and pop-up exhibition on Pender Island in April, 2018. *Citizen Artist News: Clouded Title* is the first of three art interventions (further publications are to be launched in the summer of 2019 and 2020).

Within Canada, British colonial systems of mapping and surveying lands are the mode through which the State continues to classify and dominate terrain. These techniques of power are embodied within settler culture and underpin assumptions of entitlement and 'ownership' of land, that in turn, are instituted as jurisdictions of the State. This language and practice of mapping also negates Indigenous concepts and systems of claim-making within a terrain and continues to disrupt Indigenous *relations* to land. Specifically, W̱SÁNEĆ relations to land are not based on notions of 'ownership' or possession of land, but on a system of stewardship and responsibility to care for land as a living being. Currently, Pender Island is designated as a 'rural' community, but is now in fact an overpopulated 'suburban' community. The designation of its 'rurality' also determines the domain of local government, voting districts, etc. that continue to suppress systems of W̱SÁNEĆ First Nation governance within their territory. The fact that Pender Island is within W̱SÁNEĆ territory is not at all visible within the region, nor is it properly acknowledged within local systems of government (e.g., Island residents do not pay land taxes to the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nation but only to the colonial government). Also, the colonial language of mapping and 'ownership' that frames the conceptual categorization of land and peoples, more widely informs concepts of nature that are in conflict with Indigenous perspectives and histories.

In the 40-year period of time that I was away from the Island, there has been an escalation of suburban development, brokered and promoted through local government. There is a direct correspondence between the colonial governmental agenda to accelerate non-Indigenous 'settlement' of *unceded* territory (hence, Pender Island's suburbanization) and the entrenchment of the State's appropriation of lands that underpins private profiteering through its promotion of a real estate market.

Street Road's *Clouded Title* Research Workshop and the *Citizen Artist News: Clouded Title* art intervention

The art intervention (dissemination and launch of the newspaper) that was staged for Pender Island directly engaged with issues of the 'ownership' of land, detailing its rationale (both historical and current) that emanates from colonial logics of private possession and the sanctioning of land appropriation through the [Douglas Treaty \(1852\)](#). It is important to note that the Douglas Treaty embodies British cartographic vocabularies that enfold claims to land. The newspaper therefore focused on the Treaty to draw attention to the biases contained within its interpretation and meaning and to make visible the ongoing asymmetrical practices of colonization of lands that of course favour the settler community. To do this *Citizen Artist News: Clouded Title* brought to the fore the perspectives of W̱SÁNEĆ writers and other Indigenous

scholars who talk about the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nation's own history of the Treaty's making: a history and interpretation that articulates how and why the Treaty is a troubled document. The Treaty is problematic namely because it makes claims to a purported 'sale' of land that in turn, suppresses the W̱SÁNEĆ telling of its meaning and history as a 'peace' treaty. These different interpretations of how the Treaty is to be understood continues to inform the kind of relationships that persist today: on the one hand, the settler state sees the Treaty as a 'sale' of land, and on the other, the W̱SÁNEĆ see it as a peace treaty and a set of promises that were to be reviewed annually, establishing equitable relations between British settlers living within the territory.

Due to these conflicting and asymmetrical interpretations of the Treaty, the *Citizen Artist News: Clouded Title* therefore invited readers to think through the false logic of colonial appropriation of W̱SÁNEĆ lands. The art Intervention (newspaper) drew attention to local (Pender) Island residents' performance of the fiction of a land sale and settler inscriptions of virtuous (British) history and belonging (as manifesting in nascent grass roots Historical societies) where identity, entitlement and relations to land pivot on a conception of land as a capital 'resource' braided together with idealizations of private property as a "rural idyll" (building of 'Dream homes' etc.). From the 1990s to the present, the island has been exploited as desirable 'real estate' and a (self-satisfied) leisure-retirement, 'safe' and 'untroubled,' quasi-'gated,' community. Formerly, it was a habitat/home for abundant animal life, now much depleted. It is now an environ of diminished and degraded non-human lives due to the escalation of suburban development. The decreased population of non-human beings are also under further threat from the acceleration of Industrialization in coastal waters (the proposed transport route for oil and gas tankers through its waters, etc.).

A one-day pop-up research workshop on the Island was hosted by Emily Artinian (Street Road) and me. This 'deterritorialized' event was in dialogue with Street Road, not as a quasi 'educational outreach' program, but as means of extending the conversation and interrogation of 'ownership', with the aim of examining local (Pender Island) claims and understandings and indeed, the implications of purported 'ownership' of Indigenous land—W̱SÁNEĆ territory. Pender Island is primarily a retired, middle class, community with a majority of residents of British ancestry. However, it is also now something of a riddle, with grassroots organizations of historical societies that are proactively engaged in continuing the inscription of the island as a narrative of British colonial virtue. The intervention then was targeted at co-residents to trouble those assumptions in fundamental ways.

To share information with Island residents about how Street Road's *Clouded Title* project was examining alternatives to the capitalist-driven concept of 'ownership,' the workshop included printed matter of participating artists' projects, including the installation of a sculpture by Denise Holland, and the display and launch of the *Citizen Artist: Clouded Title* newspaper. We also co-chaired a panel discussion with Mavis Underwood, Member of Council, Tsawout First Nation and Elder Earl Claxton Jr., Tsawout First Nation, David Boyd, Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and the Environment for the United Nations, and Robert Clifford, Legal Scholar specializing in Indigenous Law, Tsawout First Nation. The discussion pivoted on the implications of the Douglas Treaty and also explored different starting points, perceptions, and critiques of the notion of 'ownership'.

Matthew Fluharty: We are talking about the rural context in contemporary art, here are the two recent books that come out: WhiteChapel Gallery book series on Rural. I am the Founder and the Executive Director of the [Art of the Rural](#). I am also the Co-Director of the [American Bottom Project](#). I am from Appalachia, and I live now in Winona, Minnesota. It is a small town.

Art of the Rural will be 10 years old in January. It began as a blog. When web 2.0 opportunities were slowly reaching the rural areas. Rural areas still had internet connectivity issues.

As a board member of Common Field, I want to give a shoutout to all the other board members who are here. Common Field has been the lead organization for making space for folks from rural America to share their work.

This is our mission statement. There are a lot of words, it is very conceptual but what our work really is about social dance circles, barbeques, exhibitions, newspapers, pop ups, etc.

The context for our work is the world that wasn't fundamentally different after the presidential election in 2016, but looked and expressed fundamentally different. Largely by folks outside of rural America. The world rural is used in many of these slides.

If you can imagine a large chart, a chart that is all about progress and success; the day after the election began this large interlaced meeting of lines where on one hand the rural America became much more visible in the American media, because we started to put the blame on the rural people for Donald Trump and realizing potentially more in suburbs a misunderstanding. In the last three years the world desired to find a common ground. There is more knowledge and resource available in our field.

To return to the point of center of periphery and that binary, what is it that emerged in these years since this period has been to some degree efflorescence of outreach programs which I believe are fundamentally flawed. I believe the narratives and the projects must be driven by the people in rural America, hands down.

We have examples of institutional projects coming in relation to these communities. Really briefly I will give you a lightning view of what we do in the Art of the Rural.

Our work is local, regional and national. Part of the other context that surrounds rural vs suburban work, depend on how you look at numbers. Rural America is roughly 20% of the population, and receives 2% of American arts profit. And that gap is real. So when we talk about rural work, we have to inherently acknowledge that we know that the social conditions would be different than the urban places, but the basic infrastructural difference that is there. Because that gap is there is not just about funding, but that it is about the social texture of a community and that is a challenge in rural places.

I think in a nutshell, Art of the Rural is founded consistent to the conversations so far, and counted on how we build trust and how we build trust over a long period of time.

The projects that I will mention briefly are multi year projects.

1st project: “Public lunch”

Our home based project in Winona, MN. The American Midwest has had intense flooding and real challenges especially for farmers. These statements could be made by farmers growing up around rural Winona. There are actually statements from our friends in immigrant and refugee community in Winona.

2st project: “American Bottom Project”

One project is the newspaper that has been circling around, and explains in better detail is the American Bottom Project, which was a 6 year project that looking at East St. Louis flooding plan. It is called the American Bottom, because until the Louisiana purchase, it was the end of America; it was the bottom western lands of the United States. It is half rural, half urban by the southern agriculture lands and the numerous industrial suburbs of the middle and northern part of that region. It is really defined by extraction and largely by extraction for the benefit of St. Louis which is on the west side of the river. It is a region that has never talked about itself as a region because of the logic and pathology of extraction. But, we are working with ton of folks of that network for that newspaper alongside of the website.

3rd project: “Rural Urban Exchange”

A project we do regionally in the state of Kentucky where we were seeking to bring to other regions of the country is the “Rural Urban Exchange.” This project is lead by colleague in the Art of the Rural, alongside [Appalshop](#) (celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.) This work is long term and multigenerational. We have been doing really powerful art in social justice work. This work in a nutshell, up until 3 weeks ago was not funded by a single foundation or grant. It was driven by folks like you see in this room here who sought to come together across racial, geographic, cultural, and historical reasons to build a human network. To build a human network, in its initial stage did not have an outcome, but out of it has come all sorts of amazing collaborations to begin trust and network.

4th project: High visibility on location in rural America.

Which is envisioned as a multi year collaboratively facilitated/curated exhibition which will move across different regions in the next presidential cycle.

This is a photograph by [Santiago Forero](#) called *Mexican/American Gothic*. It allows me to talk about how population has grown in rural America, especially by the folks of color.

The assumptions that we have about rural America by large (depending on the region and the community) is our right to be challenged.

5th Project: [Rural Generation](#)

We are proud to work with a large collision of folks on a gathering in what we hope will become essentially a national collision of rural and rural partners. Our summit is in 4 weeks in Jackson, Mississippi and rural regions. I was hoping my last line could be inviting you all but we sold out yesterday. But, please tune in, there will be a next iteration next fall.

Where I have been with this work over the last 10 years, is that it is absolutely about visibility, and acknowledging that we simply can't do this work unless, the public, private and individual funding structures in the long run can change. The social crisis is continuous, but the emanation of it we have experienced in past years will only cycle through more intensely. This is a conversation about practices, but also how we work with our friends and partners. My hope in our work together in next few years is not to forget that there is human core to it all. In a non dogmatic way, what is the spiritual component of this work and how we can we grow into this work in a deep multigenerational way as well.

EA: We see the Q&A as a conversation.

AM=Audience member

AM1: I have a question. I am in Greensboro, a mid sized city, 3rd largest in NC. Maybe this more of a comment: the South in general gets referred to as to rural. I don't know what there is to unpack about that since we are as diverse as other parts of the country.

DP: For these kinds of conceptual baggage and traces of North and South being divided and connectedness between rural, urban, etc. I find it totally extraordinary. There is a rejection of the colonial vocabulary like wilderness. So the designation of North, South is problematic. It infuses every discourse in culture and cultural production.

MF: That is a important geographical question. In terms of how social practice what pains me most is a lack of undressing of the South. We have so much to learn from them.

AM2: I am Rubina. I was at a workshop yesterday talking about how rural space or how we defined it as non-urban stays as the non urban center. I have a homestead in central Wisconsin. It is a population of 155. I moved there from Portland, Oregon via Los Angeles, Upstate NY, and I kept getting smaller and smaller. I am attracted to the things you are talking about, the notions of how we see the rural and the misconception post-election. That is was the rural's fault, but there is so much progressive action is going on in these areas. I also have seen a back to the land movement from 20s to 60s. Those generations had children, who went off to those cities and whether they have been pushed out or they have decided to move back to these rural areas and reinvest in their childhood homes, they have brought a lot of that progressive action with them. It is not just defined by the farming industry we see or this notion of Trumpland, but it is a lot more diverse. And going with the idea of center, we actually feel more center from where we are from the interconnectedness. There is tons of conversations about what future looks like.

EA: I want to come back to the relationship between cities and rural spaces in particular in relation to the American Bottom Project. That the way that we are all in a soup together. We tend to create binaries though. When it comes to funding issues, attention, and thought and understanding it is that we are all in the same soup. Even a little of calling in not calling out of Common Field that I have brought up a couple times that when are asking the question of “Why Philly?” We should also be asking “What is Philly?” I know the writers, but I don’t think in particular they are speaking to a whole. Rob Blackson in his presentation ended with “We want to get to all corners of the city.” But, I want to say that all corners of the includes a lot more than the city boundaries which are artificial lines.

AM3: My name is Austin. I recently moved to Philly from a small rural town in Texas. Can you talk about art initiatives in less populated spaces, and the people who are less curious about these initiatives. How do you engage with those people?

MF: It is interesting because outside of conversations like this, I rarely talk about Art of the Rural. The organization is called Art of the Rural because I needed something for the Blog URL, but we don't talk about this as Art because it brings so much baggage especially to a rural community. What is often important to those communities, is really how hierarchical art is, and the gap that we have in our leaders in the field and that is the material in the living culture in non metro spaces is largely material that the hierarchical dominant culture has not even paid attention to. But, there is this space for new radical narratives to express. That kinda animates a challenge, because it has to be human cultural focus. Every community is different but there could be a major reaction to that. You put that in the center of a contemporary conversation and that really changes it.

DP: Intervention is totally invisible as an artwork in certain context. It is normally invisible in the community that it was launched. I am interested in the intersection of politics in it. To interrogate the aesthetics of the place and the politics. I am more interested in the actual engagement and intention of the intervention. I am not worried about labels whether it is art or not. Its impact is important and continuous.

AM4: This is partly in response to that. My name is Monica. I am from an area in Washington state that the original rightful lands of the Yakama Nation, in the boundaries of where I live is called Palmsburgh. I moved there from Seattle where art was the first entry to a conversation. Moving to Ellensburg where there was really no structure for the support of art, my experience was lonely. Over time I learned to meet a conversation with “What are the values of this community?” If they are not art what are they? What is the language of this community? I learned a lot of the local vernacular. And, with those people who were setting those vernacular. What was important was education, economy, transportation, and learned how to have those conversations with the people in power, about what was important to them and how art could facilitate that. One of the results was working with the city council about how the arts could move their agenda forward. Common issues such as education, health, etc. We were able to

implement a percent for arts which is pretty high per capita ratio arts funding by comparison with the rest of the state. Helping develop that infrastructure from ground up.

AM5: I am the director of a 35 year old arts organization called DiverseWorks in Houston. We had a lot of engaged communities that were not getting a representation. We recently did a deep dive in how we were functioning in the current climate in Houston and decided that we were finding out that most communities in suburbs are very diverse and that the artists we worked with or the even our interns had to come to center city to engage or have any kind of support for their creative capacities. We did a project called Project Freeway, but we had a hard time being there and getting to know those areas that the highway was connecting. We felt like weirdos because a lot of people don't know how to process conversation. We are currently thinking to just do a fellowship for artists in those communities to support them to do whatever they want to do, as a better way than for us to visit these communities.

EA: People want to move to an urban center because they feel they need to go to city center engage. I am going to tie it to arts education. There must be 50 million artists in Chester County. But there isn't a connection in our systems of arts education and those tend to be in cities and around the dominant culture. Here in Philly, Anderson Mennette founded a collective model artist based university structure that any group of artists can collectively use the curriculum and not pay for arts education. It is really taking off especially in York, PA. There is not many infrastructure or artists to have conversations about what they are doing, but that was one example I wanted to share.

EC: For me operating on the periphery has meant forging relationships with folks in my locale, but there is always also the desire to do work outside of our Locale. Speaking to artists and building relationships with those spoken word poets and rappers took a lot of time, but it was about inviting them into the gallery somehow and we created a spoken word mentorship program working with junior poets and it has been going on for 12 years now. Senior poets create a curriculum and delivering those workshops to baby poets (youth). Now, baby poets from 12 years ago, are running their own programs at the HYU. The desire to work at the other side of the city in Scarborough, also came from them. They wanted to work suburb to suburb and create suburban to suburban conversations. Creating the conditions through an art project for a conversation gave them agency over how and why they were creating a connection.

DP: this is the total dissolving of the binary. And, it is generated through the connectedness.

EC: We used the gallery to create new discourse. We did a show called "Migrating the Margins" which was a two year research trajectories through the greater Toronto area and the suburbs to theorized aesthetic amalgamation. All of a sudden the suburbs are part of the center. An I was arguing that the aesthetic gestalt of the city has changed. Suburb (Scarborough) was no longer outside because the visual culture of the suburb (Scarborough) is no longer outside. Creating projects that change the frame of visual culture seems to inspire folks to continue to push at that. I have been there for 15 years, it has taken at least 10 years to change the gallery

and the relationships. Over the past 5 years HYU is overflowed by those folks and we are slowing trying to turn it over to them to create their own projects. Use artists to facilitate these new relationships and constitute these new aesthetics and paradigms, and also work with artists from elsewhere/outside to help facilitate that. It creates a different dynamic and localities because we are being seen as brokering those relationships with outside.

MF: What is exciting about that practice is that it is really embodied. Talking about rural/urban binary, it goes back to this question, it is the degree to which we are mentally and conceptually grappling with those two words and we actually embody that.

After Donald Trump got elected a lot more people started following us. Urban cultural artists who would email us and say this election has eliminated the divide. I think we are at a moment wanting to dismantle capitalism but still hold a space for asking questions about equity, and the value we are bringing as artists.

EC: My whole social life is wrapped in these crazy long projects. I go to the poetry slams, I hang out with all of my folks even as a curator. So there's this shared sense of time, and also seems to break the barrier between the institution and their communities/practices.

AM6: My name is Terry, I live in West Philly. I wanted say something about your space and the amount of time it took to make a sense of belonging for community and transform it to their needs. I was working for a urban organization in downtown Wilmington and serving a very complex and mixed population. It started as an arts center for people with behavioral and mental health disorders and then over time it transformed itself to a drug control center for people experiencing homelessness with housing insecurity. What happened over years that the membership had specific needs they needed met. The person who ran it started off with concept that this is only an art center, and you have to be making art to be here, but over time, the membership drove what the space needed to happen there and started to using it as a networking center as a place to gather their basic food needs, a place to work with each other, and they also brought a vision of what they needed artistically. What kind of work they needed to make, to see, what they wanted us to bring to them. I think letting that go, and letting the space revolve into what they needed took 7 years. It really opened my eyes about hierarchical nature of art, whether it is rural or urban, and being with different groups and having an enormous respect to their experience and it is so easy to categorize and commodify what is the kind of art form we are trying to facilitate rather than allow people to come to us with their need.

EC: I think it is about methodologies. Teach philosophies from the culture as the practice of the contemporary art. Using different cultural forms as ways of making makes it understandable because it is using the same language.