

Compared to “the Big City”: Cultural Discourses of Emplacement in the Rural Community

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The ability to orient to locality, have a space of one’s own, map the physical organization of a larger area, and have a sense of one’s existence in a place relative to other spaces is made meaningful through talk. Using cultural discourse analysis in concert with theoretical notions of dwelling and genius loci, this essay examines how rural community residents’ talk emplaces—talks into being coherent notions of place and actively places people within given locations discursively. In practice, interlocutors’ discourses of emplacement are grounded in talking about their relationships with the people with whom they share place and a sense of how their existence in the rural community is made meaningful against contrasting modes of dwelling in the city.

The ubiquity of place to human experience makes the academic study of place central to theorizing how people come to understand who they are and where they are located. As philosopher Edward S. Casey (1996) argued, place—not time and space—is “the most fundamental form of embodied experience” (p. 9). Emplacement is an ongoing (discourse) event—not a thing—characterized by “getting into, staying in, and moving between places” (p. 44). To think about emplacement is to orient to the concrete experiences, embodied presence, and more abstracted relationships, memories, and cultural knowledge of place. From Casey’s phenomenological perspective, a person’s sense of place (i.e., emplacement) is known by existing in that place (i.e., embodied experience), and to be in a place is to be continually perceiving it. That is to say, we perceive place and our perception reflects the places that we sense in our midst. It is this our ongoing emplaced experiences that constantly bind us to place; to emplace is to recognize “that we are not only *in* places but *of* them” (p. 19). Furthermore, place is collectively shared and imbued with culture. As Casey extends:

[P]laces qualified by their own contents are articulated (denoted, described, discussed, narrated, and so forth) in a given culture. We designate particular places by the place terms of the culture to which we as place designators and place dwellers belong, but the places we designate are not bare substrates to which these terms are attached as if to an unadorned bedrock. They are named or nameable parts of the landscape of a region, its condensed and lived physiognomy (p. 28).

Casey’s philosophical approach to emplacement underscores “local knowledge” of place, an understanding of place in general is established through emplacement “*in this place*” (p. 45). In this way, I can know “what is true of other places over *there* precisely because of what I comprehend to be the case for this place under and around me” (p. 45). A person’s understanding of one place allows them to understand, for the most part, other places in the same region. Subsequently, places are broadly perceived and rendered according to the familiar features and cultural practices of the particular place a person (or group) inhabits.

While Casey’s work provides detailed philosophical framing, Feld and Basso (1996) call for ethnographic field studies—preferably focused on language use—that centerpiece native perceptions and experiences of particular localities in their constructions of place. As cultural anthropologists, they intended for such ethnographic accounts to illuminate “local theories of dwelling”—the local articulation of cultural practices that emplace, potentially explicating how people fuse location *in* a place with their life experience (p. 8). Following this call, the field researcher’s task beguiles them to “locate the intricate strengths and fragilities that connect place to social imagination and practice, to memory and desire, to dwelling and movement” (p. 8). A communication perspective stands at the interstices of these calls for orienting to language in use and inductive theorizing of place, which support studying localized discourses of emplacement.

With Casey's philosophical discussion of emplacement (but not so much the phenomenological orientations to embodiment) and Feld and Basso's call for ethnographic studies as a backdrop, this project is interested in how language is used to emplace—the ways that people's discourses locate them in a place and establish their relationship to that place. Making sense (i.e., understanding) of *place* (i.e., characteristics of existence in a space) necessitates exploring local discourse to further understand how people make (i.e., talking into being) *a* sense of place (i.e., orientation to and/or identification with place). Using a particular case, this essay looks to localized discourses in which interlocutors talk about the small town's unique features so as to locate themselves in that place and establish their relationship(s) to their rural community. Expanding upon the idea of "sense of place," and buttressing local theories of emplacement, two conceptual notions guide this discussion: *genius loci* and *dwelling*. *Genius loci*, translated "spirit of place," is invoked to conceptualize felt connections to place made meaningful through talk and that come to be important (incomplete) descriptors of locality (Norberg-Schulz, 1980; Strecker, 2010). Broadly, *dwelling* indexes the active practices of establishing and maintaining self in place, which govern how people act and interact (Heidegger, 1971). Although distinctions have been drawn, *genius loci* and *dwelling* exist in a reciprocal relationship. Felt connections to place influence how we interact, and our actions and interactions influence our sense of place. Both terms encompass how people orient to (talk into being) and identify (situate self in place), or emplace. To theorize discursive acts of emplacement, this essay draws on Carbaugh and Cerulli's (2013) methodological orientation towards "cultural discourses of dwelling." Following the ethnography of communication tradition (Hymes, 1974), cultural discourse analysis (CuDA) emphasizes the centrality of place and its meanings through attention to discourses of dwelling and their interconnections to talk about being, acting, relating, and feeling (Carbaugh, 2007).

The question remains as to why study place in the rural community. Beyond notions of rurality being relatively unstudied/understudied themes in the communication discipline, rural spaces have long been in decline (Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Craycroft & Frazio, 1983; Davidson, 1996; Doering, 2013; Longworth, 2008). Quite literally, rural communities are disappearing from the landscape as a result of population loss and economic instabilities. A confluence of social factors—including the lure of opportunities in metropolitan areas and the seemingly inevitable loss of young people following post-secondary education—and economic impacts—such as the ongoing commercialization of agriculture practices, volatility in farm commodity and land prices, and the continued loss of regional manufacturing centers—have contributed to the decline of rural communities in recent decades. In a 2012 address, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack's pointed out that "Rural America, with a shrinking population, is becoming less and less relevant to the politics of this country, and we better recognize that, and we had better begin to reverse it (Doering, 2013, para. 3). Vilsack comments extends to a lack of political influence, which further calls into question the future of the rural communities and appeals for urgent actions to be taken at the national level. Rural communities, specifically within the U.S. Midwestern region, are in a space and time of critical transformation that threatens what has been the long-time stability of the region (Longworth, 2008), a reality that has far reaching repercussions when considering the contributions of the region to the national and global marketplace.

These ramifications are not isolated to rural community ways of life and economies. When the contributions of places are disregarded, places are forgotten. In the end, the decline and disappearance of rural spaces is suggestive of historical and social disconnections from these vast places and their cultural practices. Extending from their physical locations, rural communities are located between and peripheral to metropolitan areas, existing in "flyover states" and as exits along interstate highways that move people and goods between cities and regions. The harsh reality is that these places are situated to go unnoticed by the people who simply travel through and around them, which, in turn, changes society's ability to notice the importance and relevancy of these places and understand their unique ways of life (Bloom, 2001; Longworth, 2008; Maharidge & Williamson, 2008). Although much discussion about the viability and vitality of small towns in primarily rural states centers on economic influences and population loss, the cultural, social, and historical implications of rural communities as places of identification cannot be mitigated. As I have

previously argued (Reinig, 2012), rural communities are endangered not only because people leave, but also, because people become detached from the cultures and ways of life associated with that place. Yet, people still reside in rural communities. In this way, relational and emotional connections to place, enacted membership practices, and privileged ideologies of community cannot be overlooked as distinctive dimensions of place that a communication study of interlocutors' discourses of emplacement would be uniquely situated to address. Through an analysis of discourse from members of one rural, Midwestern community, this essay seeks to answer:

- RQ 1: How do interlocutors' discourses serve to emplace them—talk place into being and place people in that place—within the rural community?
- RQ 2: How are contrasting discussions of city-life developed to emplace people in the rural community?

A review of communication scholarship on place, an extended discussion of *genius loci* and dwelling, and an overview of investigative methods all precede analysis of ethnographically-obtained rural community discourses.

Conceptualizing Place

Place in Communication Scholarship

Place is a broad category of study addressed through diverse, interdisciplinary perspectives, including a small, yet growing constellation of studies in communication. Past scholarship within the communication discipline has emphasized the rhetorical study of space and place (also referred to as the "rhetoric of everyday life"). Drawing from the writings of de Certeau (1984), Heidegger (1971), Lefebvre (1974), and Massey (2005), among others, rhetorical critics have taken an interest in people's interactions with their material surroundings. Broadly, this body of rhetorical scholarship seeks to locate language and meaning in physical spaces, presuming that language is actualized in a momentary space and is perpetuated when meaning is assigned (Ackerman, 2003; Lefebvre, 1974). Blair, Dickinson, and Ott (2010) orientated rhetorical scholarship to spatiality, arguing for "the study of discourses, events, objects, and practices that attends to their character as meaningful, legible, partisan, and consequential" (p. 2); according to this definition they forward two understandings of "meaningful." First, "meaningfulness" can be understood as emotional, affective significance; that is, discourses, events, objects, and practices convey evocative importance, an understanding that is reflective of the common usage of meaningful to describe something as significant. Second, "meaningfulness" in the study of place and space is grounded in the assumption that discourses, events, objects, and practices are "filled with meaning . . . [and] are composed of signs that may take on a range of significance" (Blair, et al., p. 3). These bifurcated notions of meaning then situate the communicative importance of place and space, and serve as a springboard for orienting to research.

The rhetorical study of space and place has emphasized studying everyday life to understand how mass culture produces and reproduces itself in spaces (de Certeau, 1984). Taking a critical perspective, the focus on mass culture has been brought to bear in the study of rhetoric by conceptualizing place as the confluences of the material and the symbolic, and as having material consequences (Blair, 1999). Rhetorical critics are concerned with rhetoric as it occurs in the material worlds of public spaces; hence, communication scholarship has been underscored by a particular emphasis on the study of public memory, nostalgia, and consumer culture (see Aden, 1994, 1995; Aden, Raho, & Beck, 1995; Blair, Jeppsen, & Pucci, 1991; Dickinson, 1997, 2002, 2006; Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2005, 2006; Dickinson et al., 2010; Ott, Aoki, & Dickinson, 2011); as well as public engagement (Ackerman, 2003, 2010) and social movements (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011). These studies have examined the visual, physical, and active use of space as a rhetorical text, taking research to "the field" to describe and critique. Discussion of the discursive dimension of place and its meaningful interpretation in everyday talk is minimized in this orientation, with the active creation of social and personal identifications with places remaining understated, yet central to their academic claims.

Despite dismissing questions of how place is discursively constructed through everyday talk, scholarship focusing on public memory and nostalgia offers useful parallels for grounding the study of

everyday discourses of emplacement. As an example, Dickinson (1997) critiqued how personal identity and memory are indelibly linked, with memory further structuring the rhetorical performance of identity in "memory places" of an urban neighborhood. Specifically, Dickinson (1997) studied Old Pasadena as a site of nostalgia and consumption in line with postmodern experiences of fragmentation from the past, positing that identity is no longer defined by family and community, but, rather, by spaces of consumption. Spaces such as Old Pasadena, thus, represent the symbolic in the material.

Themes of nostalgia and memory are noted in other communication scholarship concerned with identity formation in places. Aden's (1994, 1995) studies of the films *Field of Dreams* and *When It Was a Game* underscored how place, as depicted on screen, created nostalgia for the past and a sense of security that is lost in contemporary culture. Similarly, Cooks and Aden (1995) explored the symbolic construction of place and structuring of community in the television show *Northern Exposure*. Turning away from the screen, Aden, Raho, and Beck (1995) emphasized how the physical *Field of Dreams* film site served as a text to be interpreted by visitors, both individually and in the creation of a perceived community with shared meanings. Their analysis of narratives from interviews with visitors to the site underscored the value of empirical findings in discussions of place.

Additional scholarship has emphasized how visual orientation and construction of the built environment function to invoke identification and consumption. Sites of study have included the café (Dickinson, 2002), the grocery store (Dickinson & Maugh, 2004), and the shopping mall (Stewart & Dickinson, 2008), which have all placed a particular focus on urban and suburban spaces and post-modern experiences of fragmentation. Additionally, works on public memory have emphasized public memorials (e.g., Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Dickinson et al., 2010), while other scholars have critiqued museum spaces as sites of identity negotiation (e.g., Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2005, 2006; Taylor, 2010). Unfortunately, with the exception of Aden et al., scholars have not oriented to rural spaces as sites of identity formation and public memory.

The discussion of discourses of emplacement is not inherently accounted for according to theoretical underpinnings and scholarship in the area of rhetoric and spatiality. However, three overarching connections can be noted, particularly in regard to material space and public memory. First, studies have emphasized an interconnected relationship between collective identity and the communal sense of belonging in a place. The studies reviewed legitimize how meaningful identification might be created and sustained within places, and how spatial constructions influence people's experience. Studies of nostalgia and public memory have underscored the ability of places to impact meaning-making, although they have not necessarily accounted for how that meaning is expressed by people in conversation. Second, memory of/in places has the ability to prompt affective responses; in this way, places possess meaning and have the potential to prompt emotional attachments. Bonding to place might be further noted in people's discursive descriptions of place, which are not widely included in the scholarship reviewed (Aden et al., 1995). Third, memory is created through the material and symbolic, which included, according to Blair et al. (2010), language, rituals, communication technologies, objects, and places.

Ultimately, the rhetorical perspective that dominates current discussions of place in communication literature is not interested in the ways that people's talk creates notions of place or how they articulate their affective attachments. Hence, current emphasis on critique does not provide a useful framework for discourse scholars who are interested in social interactions that create meaningful connections to locality. I turn then to *dwelling* and *genius loci* to situate subsequent analysis of how people orient to and make place meaningful in talk.

Dwelling and Genius Loci

The concept of *dwelling* is derived from Heidegger (1971), who argued that the act of dwelling was a fundamental characteristic of being human, even though it is not often acknowledged as such. For Heidegger, practices of building and having dominion in place are the means to the end, dwelling; that is, to dwell means to set one's self on remaining in and sustaining place. Those who dwell seek to actively create, maintain, and understand the place in which they live. As Heidegger wrote, "To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards everything in nature" (p. 149). Dwelling names the practice of being emplaced/emplacement, and is

perpetuated through actively “sparing and preserving” (p. 149) one’s locality. Theorizing the relationship between the emotional (heart) and the cognitive (head) that characterizes how people understand localities, Basso (1996) further distilled Heidegger to argue that dwelling is constitutive of lived relationships to locality. That is to say, human beings have dynamic, felt connections to the physical world that influence how they act and interact within it. To dwell is to actively establish connections and maintain self in place. Although Basso uses the term “sense of place” to talk about affective bonding and meaning making, I prefer *genius loci*, particularly because it circumvents confusion that might arise from glossing “making sense of a place” (i.e., understanding characteristics of a space) with “making a sense of place” (i.e., constructing identification with place).

Genius loci is an ancient notion that translates to “spirit of place” and is adopted from the contemporary work of Christian Norberg-Schulz in architecture. In his presentation of *genius loci*, Strecker (2010) argued that “[p]eople strive to create meaningful existential spaces where they can get a foothold, where they can dwell” (p. 256). In this way, “spirit of place” buttresses Heidegger’s discussion of dwelling by naming the affective process of making the act of dwelling in a place meaningful. To this account, Norberg-Schulz (1980) remarked:

Man [*sic*] dwells when he can orientate himself within and identify himself with an environment as meaningful. Dwelling therefore implies something more than “shelter”. It implies that the spaces where life occurs are “places”, in the true sense of the word. A place is a space that has character. Since ancient times the *genius loci*, or “spirit of place” have been recognized as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life. (p. 5, as cited in Strecker, 2010)

Place is understood as having a particular *genius loci*, or character/identity that humans must make sense of in life. Theorizing *genius loci* posits “identification and orientation as basic human needs and dispositions” (Strecker, 2010, p. 263), a claim that follows Heidegger’s assertion that acts of dwelling are fundamental to human experience. Dwelling, then, is an orientation and identification with place that brings significance to experience through establishing *genius loci*. That said, place is an organized whole, not the sum of its parts. *Genius loci* then attends to place as “comprehensive totalities where various elements interact with one another and create . . . a ‘sense’ or ‘spirit’ which cannot be reduced to any of its properties. . . [but] can be nevertheless evoked by them” (Strecker, p. 267; see also Tyler, 1987). A parallel point is made by Casey (1996), who contended that place cannot be characterized by a singular genius, but yet can still be coherently articulated.

In this way, articulating affective meanings of place will always be an incomplete endeavor in practice; yet, nevertheless, place is imbued with meanings that become embedded in everyday discourses of emplacement. To begin reconstructing dimensions of *genius loci* and dwelling in rural community talk, I turn to cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh, 2007; Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2013; Scollo, 2011).

Methodology

Cultural Discourse Analysis: Being, Acting, Relating, Feeling, and Dwelling

Cultural discourse analysis (CuDA) focuses inquiry and analysis on the dynamic relationship between culture and communication (Carbaugh, 2007); it follows from the ethnography of speaking/communication research tradition, which provides both a theoretical and methodological orientation to studying language in use (Hymes, 1974). CuDA operates from the assumption that “communication both presumes and constitutes social realities” and provides “meta-cultural commentary” (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 168). By “meta-cultural commentary,” Carbaugh (2007) meant that when people communicate, “they say things explicitly and implicitly about who they are, how they are related to each other, how they feel, what they are doing, and how they are situated in the nature of things” (p. 168). CuDA orients researchers to account for five radiants of meaning in the interpretation of cultural discourses: being/identity, acting/action, relating, feeling, and dwelling (Carbaugh, 2007; Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2013; Scollo, 2011). Each radiant asks specific questions about active meanings in available cultural discourse.

Carbaugh and Cerulli (2013) have further developed cultural discourses of dwelling, applying the five radiants of meaning to interpretations of place. In doing so, terms for two radiants are

amended (i.e., being becomes identity, and acting becomes action), however, emphasis remains on the same indicators of cultural meanings.¹ The being/identity radiant asks what it means to be a person who is associated with a specific place (Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2013). Analysis may orient to social identity terms that express who a person is (e.g., Coloradan or farmer) or that reference pronouns (e.g., we). The acting/action radiant attunes to what people understand themselves to be doing in that place (e.g., farming or waving). Acting/action underscores how actions are implicitly and explicitly coded as locally meaningful. The radiant of relating focuses on talk about relationships between people, with a particular sensitivity to relationship quality (e.g., “those from around here” [Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2013, p. 9]). Messages surrounding how a person feels about, for instance, their hometown or neighborhood, are coded in the feeling radiant (e.g., “pride” and “loyalty” [Carbaugh & Cerulli, p. 9]). The dwelling radiant is guided by the question, “How, if at all, are [people] identifying their landscape, relating to their environment, and establishing their place within it?” (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 176). Cultural discourses of dwelling locate people in places, conveying how particular identities, actions, and ways of feeling and relating are made significant in places. Although the five radiants of meaning are analyzed individually, they are interconnected and occur in concert with each other, contributing to how the other radiants are understood. In this way, being, acting, feeling, and relating contribute to the localized meanings of dwelling, which frame a discursive orientation to the study of place. Analysis in this project uses the radiants of meaning to locate and reconstruct how dwelling and *genius loci* are communicative constituted in rural community discourses of emplacement. Analysis then proceeds through theoretically driven thematic analysis.

Research Material Collection and Thematic Analysis

The analysis undertaken in this essay is an extension of a larger ethnographic field project (Reinig, 2012), which included over 40 hours of participant-observation, 11 ethnographic interviews, and five member-check interviews, with interviews lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. Although the larger ethnographic study was not focused on “place” per se, references to particular differences between the rural town and the city were mentioned in all of the interviews. This essay focuses on excerpts from five interlocutors—one community member over age 30 (i.e., Rita) and four young people between the ages of 18 and 30 (i.e., Leah, Dan, Chris, and Nicole)—who all reside in one rural community in the U. S. Midwest region¹. With the community of study located at a relatively accessible driving distance from a larger, metropolitan area, interlocutors are not completely unfamiliar with more densely populated cities, their traffic, and their conveniences. Various experiences outside the rural community inform interlocutors’ responses. For instance, some individuals had pursued higher education and/or vocational training in or near regional cities following high school graduation. Other people frequently traveled to the city to visit family (or friends) who had relocated, or to engage in various cultural and economic opportunities (e.g., the arts and shopping). Some interlocutors—whose discussions are not included in this data set—commuted to the city for ongoing employment.

In subsequent analysis, interlocutors’ accounts of small town life and rural spaces, and contrasting discussions of “city life” serve as the unit of observation; cultural discourses of being, acting, relating, feeling, and dwelling provide units of analysis. In the Coding specifically focused on discourses (i.e., creating the unit of observation) where the term “city” appeared in transcription. Some of these instances include talk where the transcriber (also the author) replaced location names with iterations of “city”ⁱⁱ to remove identifying place names. Compiling the units of observation also looked to specific interview questions that asked interlocutors to describe their way of life in the rural community and/or express what the community meant to them.

The synthesis of interview discourse paid particular attention to: (a) where people discursively locate themselves in a place (i.e., how they identify/orient/dwell in the community of study), (b) how the ways they speak about their attachment to that place are bound to conceptions of “rural-ness” (i.e., what it means to be of/live in a/this rural community and relate with its members)

¹ All personal names used in this essay are pseudonyms.

and, furthermore, (c) how understandings of place contrast (perceived) city ways of life, arguably, as a means of underscoring the value of place and community in one's life, or emplacing. Focusing on "cultural discourses of *not dwelling there*" (i.e., "like compared in the big city"), which emphasize the (perceived) antithesis assigns meaning and implies identification with culturally imbued ways of being, acting, relating, feeling, and dwelling within the rural milieu (i.e., interlocutors are not *just* complaining about despise city life). In other words, analysis seeks to understand how dwelling, acting, relating, and being are made meaningful against ideologies of what it means to "be," "act," "relate," and "dwell" outside (i.e., not inside) the rural community.ⁱⁱⁱ Ultimately, themes noted in analysis constitute notions of dwelling, (i.e., the active establishment and maintenance of self in place that influences action and interaction) and *genius loci* (i.e., affective connections to place that make location meaningful) that serve to emplace.

Rural Community Discourses of Emplacement

Waving: How to be "friendly" with your neighbors

When describing their way of life in the small town—a point of inquiry early in interviews—interlocutors often mark dissimilarity to the city life by noting specific differences in how people act and relate. Their comments are further suggestive of their feelings about alternative ways of being and demonstrate their affinity for localized ways of dwelling. These commentaries underscore important themes regarding the "spirit of place" in the rural community. In the following discourse, Rita compares the friendliness of people in the rural community to her daughter's neighbors in the city, underscoring the central practice (radiant of acting) of waving in the rural community as a way of relating and being "friendly." Rita explains:

People [in the rural community] are friendly. You get to know everyone. You need help, they're there. We can help them. We can give—we can give our help to them.

[Content omitted]

It's just like a big family. Really. I mean you know that they're there for you and we're there for them and just about the—I think it's just about the same answer to a lot of these questions because we go back being a family and— There's very kind people and you want to— It's just a good feeling and I know—I am going to give you an example: Like my daughter who lives in [the city]. They're in a nice community, but they really don't know their neighbors— just two people or maybe three [people]. [Line numbers 1-9]

In this meta-commentary, Rita begins to construct a dimension of a *genius loci* grounded in being and acting "friendly" and relating "like a big family." She explicitly characterizes the "good feeling" that comes from "know[ing] everyone" and subsequently having assurance that reciprocal helping relationships exist between herself and her "kind" community members. To provide a more concrete, and contrasting discussion, Rita continues comparing her way of life to her daughter's in the city, remarking:

R: Yeah. It's sad. Cus that one neighbor, she just waters. I was in the backyard of Sara's and she just watered her flowers and just kind of waved. Not even wave sometimes.

It's like, "Come on." You know?

L: Could you live in a place like that where you didn't know your neighbors?

R: No. I want to know [people]. Yeah. [Line numbers 10-14]

Although she was not asked about city-dwellers, Rita's contrasting statements in lines 10–12 situate her affinity for rural community life against experiences of city ways of being, acting, and relating; her final comment, "I want to know [people]," suggests a discourse of emplacement that orients and identifies her as wanting to be among familiar people. In this way, Rita's example about her daughter's neighbor not waving explicitly accounts for how rural community members are supposed to be, act, and relate when dwelling together. In the rural community, people are expected to be "friendly" and "help" each other because of the close "family" relationships. In contrast, people in the city are not "friendly" and do not engage in common "friendly" behaviors, such as waving. In this way, waving is more than a common friendly courtesy; it is a sign that city dwellers do not act according to rural expectations to care for/about their neighbors. How could a person live in a place

where they did not know their neighbors cared about them? Rita's comments "'Come on'" and "I want to know [people]" situate how she feels about waving as a meaningful way of relating and acting. Thereby, (not) waving is a concrete characteristic associated with place that allows Rita to characterize acts of dwelling and invoke a part of a *genius loci* in the rural community.

"[I]t would be like boom, boom, boom, and get off the phone": Being, acting, and relating

Rita's discourse about friendliness and familiarity is further supported by comments from other interlocutors. When asked to name some of the positive characteristics of the rural community Leah said, "Open, caring, loving. Happy. Those are hard. I think everything about Westfield^{iv} is positive." Leah continues by giving examples from her current experience starting a new teaching job, describing:

I got so many like "congratulations" cards from the elderly in the community, which is—I mean if I went to Chicago I would never get stuff like that. You know what I mean? People were just so accepting. And when like I do projects with my kids and they have prayer partners with Catholics in the community those elderly people, they call me and it's no big deal for us to talk on the phone for 20 minutes just about how life is going, whereas if someone elderly called someone in a bigger community it would be like boom, boom, boom, and get off the phone. So people just have a lot more patience. And their feelings are genuine. I don't think—I'm not saying they're not genuine in a big city, but you just when you walk down the street [here] people wave. Like even he [referencing her fiancé] had to get used to [when] we would go out to eat and everyone would like—it would take 20 minutes to get to the table because everyone wanted to know how you were doing. I think that's a good thing to have in a community. [Line numbers 15-26]

Leah assigned abstractions of being (i.e., open, caring, loving, happy, accepting, having patience, and being genuine) as "good thing[s] to have in a community," discursively suggesting a localized *genius loci* valued in her experience: people want to know how you are doing, and you want to know how they are doing. In this way, her emotional connection to place is related to how she and other people dwell with one another. Her supporting examples draw on contrasts of the city life and specific ways of being, acting, and relating that contribute to particular expectations about how a person should dwell in a place. Like Rita, Leah brings discussion back to the concrete practice of waving as a way of acting in line with rural community friendliness, yet Leah made other suggestions about how place is assigned significance according to the relationships people have and can invoke, turning her discussion to "talk" about "how you were doing" as an example of how people orient to each other.

In establishing dimensions of *genius loci*, Leah and Rita's talk serves to emplace them, to express the significance of the rural locality in their lives. Being, acting, and relating is attached to notions of the "spirit of place," situating interlocutors firmly in the rural locality. In lines 13–14, Rita connects notions of identity and relationships to the rural community space as a meaning-filled place where she wants to live. In lines 24–26 specifically, Leah associates talking and relating with features of community that occur uniquely in the small town; lines 15–24 locate her in a familiar place that differs from the city. Place is not talked about as simply physical location, but rather in terms of a shared understanding of community and familiarity.

"Stop . . . and talk to people": "trust" in your neighbors because "they want to help you"

In another exemplar discourse contrasting city ways of being, acting, and relating, Dan equates living in the city with a lack of trust and friendliness among one's neighbors, noting:

D: I like how you know people. You can trust people. Or you always think you can trust people. You're not constantly looking over your shoulder thinking somebody's going to do you wrong. Like compared in the big city, you know there's just more people. More problems, but:::
[Content omitted]

L: What things do you like about living in a small town?

D: I like the—just the sense of community.

[Content omitted].

D: Being able to trust people. And yeah. Just not worrying all the time that— I mean bad stuff happens all the time, but you always got people that want to help and people that— I mean you are just surrounded by people that love you and want to help you. [Line numbers 27-36]

In lines 27–30, Dan’s discussion of what he likes about the rural community shifts to contrast the small town to the city. His comments frame an ideology about being able to “trust people” in the small town, echoing the sentiments of his fellow small town residents in other interviews. At another talking turn, Dan directly associates “the big city” with “more people” and “more problems,” suggesting concerns about the frequency of misconduct and crime. Talking about how “you always think you can trust people [and] . . . not constantly looking over your shoulder thinking somebody’s going to do you wrong” supports his points and characterizes ways of being, acting, and relating associated with place. Moreover, trust is discursively constructed as feeling a “sense of community.” That is, being able to trust people is not so much about worrying that people will wrong you and, thus, should not be trusted, but rather, that in times of hardship one can trust that their community family will be there to support them. While Rita and Leah talk about “friendliness,” Dan invokes trust to characterize an aspect of *genius loci*; place is associated with particular beliefs about the people one shares place with. Expanding on this idea, Dan continues:

I don’t want to withdrawal myself from people, but I could see where some people like to be on their own and— I don’t know— Being in a big city— There’s a little bit— I don’t fully understand it, but I lived for three years and— I don’t know—

[Content omitted]

[It’s weird to me] that you can be living next to somebody and not know who they are and what they do. Which I was okay with it, but like I would go out of my way to try talking to somebody and they think that you’re priding [*sic*] in on their privacy or something. I was just trying to be nice. They wouldn’t want to talk or something like that, which was kind of weird to me. I mean back here you would be driving down the road and then just stop in the road and talk to people. [Line numbers 38-47]

In the way that small town residents trust in each other for support, city people are too “withdrawn.” Dan presents a dimension of a *genius loci* about rural community life that can all too easily be overlooked as a critique of the city life. Dan’s continued commentary about his experiences living in a city supports a more nuanced understanding of trust and security in community, reiterating a rural way of being that he did not personally experience during the three years he was away. This lack of friendliness was peculiar, if not deeply frustrating. Contrasting the *genius loci* Dan is creating, he disconcertedly questions: if bad stuff happens in the city, would people come to help you? Dan grants that “privacy” seems desirable, but could not get over not knowing his neighbors as he talks about his struggle to dwell, or establish himself in his new environment. His comments in lines 43-45 reinforce culturally imbued ideas of how to dwell with neighbors. Although “priding” might be explained as a verbal slip from “prying,” “pride” provides an explanatory characteristic of city dwellers that interefedwith Dan’s ability to orient to city ways of being, acting, and relating in that place.

Like prior discourses, Dan underscores a rural way of being, acting, relating and feeling: being a person means that you take time to talk to the people you share a space with. He describes how people stop “in the road” to acknowledge each other in the rural community, often through “talk/talking,” (a point also shared by Leah in lines 19 and 25–26). Not knowing one’s neighbors leads to disconnection. Folks in the rural community expect to know each other rather personally, and struggle to understand why someone would want to live in a situation where they did not “know their neighbor.” In this way, how one dwells in the midst of people is attached to the “spirit of place” one defines from their experience. For Dan, *genius loci* is not as much about physical safety as it is about emotional security that connects him to place.

“Crabby” people, “traffic,” and being “in a super big hurry”: The city pace of life

By now a rather curious conundrum as emerged in analysis: for an essay focused on *place*, dwelling, and *genius loci*, discussion has emphasized the radiants of relating, acting, being, and feeling, rather than characteristics of the physical space associated with Carbaugh’s (2007) notions of cultural discourses of dwelling (see also Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2013). However, all the radiants of meaning are useful to establish how interlocutors emplace themselves and others in the rural community, or, conversely, in the city. In this section, analysis attempts to further tease out the orientations to dwelling, turning to the discourses of Nicole and Chris.

Like earlier comments about phone calls (i.e., Leah: “[I]t would be like boom, boom, boom, and get off the phone”), waving, (i.e., Rita: “Not even wave sometimes. It’s like, ‘Come on.’”), or meeting your neighbors (i.e., Dan: “they think that you’re priding [*sic*] in on their privacy or something.”), interlocutors perceived differences in ways of acting, being, and relating between the rural and the urban that change how people dwell in these spaces. Nicole’s commentary provides further explanation for the contrast in the rural and city ways of being and acting, emphatically commenting:

I’ll summarize my view of small town life. I love it! And I’ve gone to the city. I’ve been to Hollywood type of big city. I’ve been to Omaha type of big city. I’ve been to Chicago city. I could not live in a big city. It’s just too—Everywhere. High paced. Too many crabby people. I like to feel comfortable and when I’m around people I don’t know I’m not as comfortable as I am when I’m around people I do know. So again, I like small towns. I couldn’t live in the city. [Line numbers 48-53]

Describing the city as “high paced” is followed by a comment about the relative number of “crabby people,” suggesting that what it means to be a person living in the city is associated with stress and irritability that arises from that way of living. Describing “too many crabby people” further contrasts with the ways of being and acting “withdrawn” in the city and “friendly” in the rural community; people are too busy and self-involved in the city. Nicole’s discourse can be interpreted as a blunt critique, yet perhaps “high paced” and “crabby” more closely suggests (again) an overarching theme shared among fellow community members: that people in the rural community want and expect to know each other, or to play with Nicole’s words, “I [want to be] around people I do know.” “Friendliness” is not only attached to the significant meaning of security and familiarity in the rural community, but also speaks back to Rita and Dan’s points about knowing that other people are willing to help each other. In this way, interlocutors begin to allude to a sense of belonging and identification, or “being friendly,” that characterizes *genius loci*. It is this “spirit of place” that comes to inform, albeit still expressed more implicitly, their orientation to dwelling and, ultimately, emplace them in the rural community.

In his first interview, Chris describes the rural way of life as “laid back” and “smooth going;” in contrast, he characterizes the city as: “it’s always like everybody’s in a super big hurry.” When I returned to chat with Chris in a member-check interview he had just returned from spending the weekend in the city. Chris observed that living there “would never be for me.” His reasons compares the pace of life (or dwelling) with the number of people in a place and the speed of traffic.

C: I respect it a ton. Like the city life and all that, but it’s just something that wouldn’t be for me. But because it’s so different.

L: [In what] ways?

C: It’s like you want to go out with friends and do whatever. Like here you leave and it’s putt, putt, putt. There’s no traffic. Whereas there [in the city] it’s like DRIVE as hard as you can. You get to your place and it’s like people, people everywhere. Just anywhere you go there’s people.

[Content] [Line numbers 54-64]

I mean it’s not like I’ve never been there before or anything. It’s just every time is quite the experience. And different people. All kinds of different people. It’s like before we were taking. Here you know everybody.

Chris's comments about "all kinds of different people" speak back to the reoccurring theme throughout participant discourses about dwelling: orientating and identifying with place is predicated on knowing and caring about the people with whom one shares a locality. Chris and Nicole's comments also suggest that dwelling in a place might have something to do with not being constantly surrounded with people moving quickly through life. Chris's comments about traffic make a banal observation about how fast people move through the city space versus slower driving in the rural area. Talking about traffic implies a deeper level of interpretation about how to dwell in a space, how to create a dwelling in a place where people (literally) have time and space to enjoy the surrounding area, and, in Chris's case, not to be surrounded with people who interfere, rather than support, this way of dwelling. Nicole's later comment supports her and Chris's earlier statements about the pace of dwelling. She characterizes the rural community, saying:

It's simple. It's busy. I'm always really busy. Always something to do. But when you talk to somebody who lives in the city I think that they would agree that it's a different kind of busy or a different kind of activity that you can do all the time. But it's just more simple, you know, I just don't need a specific place to go. You know. It could be a field or just you know fishing at a pond. It's just stuff like that instead of (pause) go-kart racing or something like that in a big building or going to giant theater. It's just simple. [Line numbers 65-70]

Underscoring a "spirit of place", Nicole's comments in lines 67-70 grant differences in how rural and city people dwell and "create meaningful existential spaces where they can get a foothold" (Strecker, 2010, p. 256). Nicole's earlier "too many crabby people," "high paced," and "too everywhere" comments cannot be mitigated in their sentiments as they imply both self-involved city people and a lacking sense of orientation to place due to the fractured and fast-paced lives city dwellers live. To Nicole and Chris, the question remains: How might a city dweller establish a sense of place amidst all that chaos? Notions of emplacement then are not limited to relationships to the people with whom you share space, but also to the ability to orient to locality, to have a small space of one's own, to be able to map a larger locality and know its physical organization, and to have a sense of how one's existence in this place is made meaningful. In the end, for members of the rural community, *genius loci* is understood as an attunement to other people and place that governs how residents (wish to) dwell.

Conclusions & Theoretical Contributions

Ultimately, looking at what it means to dwell in light of being, acting, relating, and feeling offers culturally situated discussions of what it means to be *in* and *of* a particular place, and to emplace one's self through attempts to express aspects of *genius loci* as experienced when dwelling in (the rural) space. Returning to the research questions that frame this essay, interlocutors' talk serves to emplace them—to talk place into being and situate people in the place(s) they inhabit—by presenting concrete discussions of cultural practices assigned to place that establish affective connections and a sense of place associated with the rural locality. Among interlocutors in this study, practices of being, acting, and relating are underscored in explicit discussions about the ways that people interact with their neighbors. Talking about "waving," the nature of phone calls, and "stopping the middle of the road to talk" describes a "friendliness" that is attached to what it means to be of a place. Moreover, interlocutors emplace themselves in the rural community by developing contrasting discussions of place and ways of being associated with living—or rather, dwelling—in cities. According to interlocutors, city dwellers do not act according to rural expectations to care for/about their neighbors. "Pride," disingenuous sentiments (i.e., "crabby people"), the pace of life, and detachment from others are characterized as confusing and frustrating. Broadly, these descriptions name defining characteristics of the rural community and establish a practical sense of place as centered on people who shared common affinities for the small town, yet notions of emplacement are not limited to the types of relationships people have with one another, but are also made available in the ways that people talk about place, belonging, local organization, and create a sense of how where they dwell exists in relationship to other places. In other words, emplacement is granted according to a sense of belonging in a given place.

From the beginning, this essay has offered a grounded analysis of discourses of emplacement, weaving together various theoretical orientations to place with arguments for communication research that orients to (cultural) discourses of (em)place(ment). In practice, place is never far from discussions of communication; after all, no discursive act is devoid of contextual implications that interlocutors must continually orient to when they interact. As Carbaugh (1996) surmised, communication is “double placed”—meaning that discourse is both located in places and constitutive of sense of place (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 38). Analyzing discourses of emplacement highlights the latter while expanding this notion to theorize how language—however inchoately—locates people in a place and establish their relationship to that place. This study of discourses of emplacement seeks to orient and nuance future theoretical discussions of how sense of place is communicatively constituted in interaction, while not discounting communication as emplaced. In other words, the focal concern of this essay is how people talk *about* places, not how people talk *in* places, keeping in mind, of course, that when people talk *about* places they are also talking *in* places, and that places become meaningful, in part, because of the people and events that happen *in* their bounds.

In his philosophy of emplacement, Casey (1996) argued that place holds our existence somewhere. Places are not simply physical positions, but rather are held together by emplaced experiences. In this way, language is not used to talk about place as a general universal locations—an *anywhere*—but rather as *somewhere*. People’s understandings of one place allow them to understand, for the most part, other places in the same region. Subsequently, places are broadly perceived and rendered according to the familiar features and cultural practices of the particular places a person (or group) inhabits. Following from Casey’s (1996) arguments that local knowledge serves as the frame for rendering place—that is, that familiar features and cultural practices are the framework for perceiving place—this project points to how emplacing descriptions of the rural community are constituted by talking about “*not dwelling there*”, or living in the city.

While discourses of emplacement can be treated as theoretical extractions for study, they are constituted through practical, cultural commentary about (a) local practices, (b) affective belonging, and (c) descriptions of locations. In this instance, turning to strategic features of interlocutor talk—the urban–rural dichotomy—illuminates how talk emplaces; talking about the alternative—living in a more urban or suburban space—allows interlocutors to thoughtfully argue for why they continue to live in the small town, even when they frequent the city and have significant connections to places and people there too. Notice that interlocutors are careful not to discount why someone might want to live in “the big city,” and yet, do not emplace themselves there. Moreover, they bring “the big city” into the discussion; talking about the urban milieu was not accounted for in the intentions of the interview/er. As a discourse strategies, talking about concretely understood qualities of “the big city” (e.g., traffic and waving) and how people dwell there is further suggestive of more abstracted senses of place that are more difficult to express. In other words, talking about the cultural practice of waving locates in talk more abstracted cultural assumptions and constitutes a sense of emplacement. Once more, returning to Casey’s claims about local knowledge of place, studying strategically dichotomous talk extends theorizing of how people are emplaced—both *in* and *of* places—and yet have sufficient knowledge of the other locality that serves to frame their local understanding and preferences for dwelling.

In terms of further directions of study, notions of the urban–rural dichotomy and various positions in between could provide fertile ground for continued exploration of discourses of emplacement. Although less directly suggested in this study, additional field studies might delineate competing discourses between the urban and the rural, and the ways in which each is framed and contrasted to each other in talk. Extending this argument into other sites, additional studies might emphasize how local ways of speaking about place are tied to building local theories of how to act in places. That is to say, this study began a conversation about how local, cultural assumptions about place governed discussions about how to act in places, yet showed a careful hedging of normative judgments and a more nuanced understanding of “the big city.” For interlocutors, place and people are intimately connected to how they emplace themselves. Continued inquiry might focus on the confluence and consubstantiality of sense of place with a sense of community. Taking a more directed cultural discourse analysis (Carbaugh 2007; Carbaugh & Cerulli, 2013) approach, research could

extend theorizing by asking “What does it mean to be a person *in* and *of* the rural (or urban) community?”; “How is ‘emplacement’ talked into being according to cultural assumptions about what are considered the ‘natural’ ways of dwelling in a place?” and “How are discourses of emplacement coded as distinct modes of action, with the multiplicity of codes pointing to contrasting ways of being and acting?” Thinking again about characterizations of place as partial, to talk place into being (i.e., to emplace) is to select a particular way of speaking about place over other possible characterizations, which begs the question, “What cultural assumptions about place—positively or negatively valenced—are made as people are strategic in their discourses of emplacement?” These future directions for research suggest that this study—despite rigorous theoretical grounding—is still limited in the arguments it can make given the nature of the discourse it draws from to make these claims. In addition to exploring other research sites, future research would benefit from finding more examples of the rural–urban dichotomy in everyday talk that would increase the sample size.

To end, I would like to go back the beginning. Casey, Feld, Basso, Heidegger, Carbaugh and others provided several theoretical arguments and constructs for approaching the study of place. Underlying their (and my own) arguments are several fundamental assumptions, including: (a) places make people part of *something*; (b) emplacement locates people *somewhere*; (c) places and people are held together by experience (which also gestures to the rhetorical critics’ position); and (d) places are held together (meaningfully) by people. In the same way that Strecker (2010) contended that *genius loci* is always an incomplete articulation of the “spirit of place,” yet invokes the coherent whole, the ways in which people express the meaningfulness of dwelling *somewhere* recognizes that discourses of emplacement are incomplete, yet coherent. When we focus on the local meanings and shared discourses of (em)place(ment), we receive a coherent sense of place shared by members of speech community (Carbaugh, 1996). But all this theorizing is lost if we do not acknowledge the loss of meaningful places. The intimacy of belonging *somewhere* amidst people you know that, in turn, brings about the coherence of place in human experience cannot be underestimated. When we lose our sense of place, we lose a sense of who we are in the world (see Casey, 1996). As I asserted in the introduction, the future of the rural community is—although hope and optimism is not lost—bleak. It is then discourses of emplacement—the ongoing event of discursively situating self in place—that can continue to illuminate how people *in* and *of* rural communities create and maintain their (sense of) place(s) despite threat and loss.

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ⁱ For the purposes of continuity with other CuDA scholarship, I will use the terms from Carbaugh (2007) in my analysis.

ⁱⁱ The term “city” is used through this essay because it was the term used by interlocutors. Based on discussions outside the scope of this paper, it seems that “city” has a wider, yet more ambiguous scope that also includes suburban spaces.

ⁱⁱⁱ In expressing their identification with place, interlocutors share their feelings on being, acting, relating, and dwelling.

^{iv} “Westfield” is pseudonym for the community in order to protect confidentiality of place.