

Dis-ing the Main Drag and Walking toward the Public Good in *Here Be Dragons*: Mapping Queer, Asian-Canadian Identity in Kitchener, Ontario

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A young man, who self-identifies as Asian-Canadian and queer, decides to leave the small, socially conservative southwestern Ontario city where he has grown up. He decides to perform the story of this departure, its origins, its process, and its possible outcomes. The performance takes the form of a map, and before long he maps a terrain vastly different from what most who live in the city would recognize as home. As a performative process, mapping is explored as an attempt to apprehend where we are, who we are, and with whom we share the process. Mapping and walking together become an embodied experience carried out from a particular point of view that makes possible both an awareness of multiple perceptions of, and orientations toward, place. Walking and mapping are not just the combined acts of creative-research; they also serve as methodology. José Estaban Muñoz argues that “identities-in-difference” emerge out of a failed interpellation within the public sphere. Disidentifying with the dominant sphere allows for the emergence of a counter-public sphere; the landscape is the same, but the way it is mapped, used, and understood is different. Refuting both identification and counter-identification—or assimilation and anti-assimilation—*disidentification* allows for a third mode of dealing with dominant, embedded ideology that uses the idea of “working both on and against” as a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within. In this article, Andrew Houston articulates how disidentification was mapped and experienced as a form of *dis*-orientation in *Here Be Dragons*, a multi-media, site-specific performance staged as part of IMPACT '11, wherein the audience were invited on a journey of displacement; a mytho-geographical mapping of queer, Asian-Canadian identity in downtown Kitchener, Ontario. In *Here Be Dragons*, identities-in-difference are experienced as the audience—the tourists to this domain—walk within the testimonial terrain of a young man, navigating a landscape of edges and antagonism in their hometown.

Un jeune homme qui se dit lui-même homosexuel et Canadien d'origine asiatique choisit de quitter sa petite ville conservatrice natale, dans le sud-ouest de l'Ontario. Il décide de jouer le récit de ce départ, de montrer ses origines, son déroulement et ses possibles conséquences. Ce jeu prend la forme d'une cartographie et, bientôt, le jeune homme trace une carte très différente de celle que sauraient reconnaître la plupart des habitants de sa ville. La cartographie devient ici un processus performatif, par lequel on tente d'appréhender où nous sommes, qui nous sommes et avec qui nous partageons cette démarche. Ensemble, l'action de cartographier et celle de marcher deviennent une expérience incarnée, réalisée à partir d'un point de vue donné qui permet d'être à la fois à l'écoute de diverses perceptions de l'espace et conscient de multiples orientations possibles. Marcher et cartographier n'est pas qu'un acte de recherche-création; c'est aussi une méthodologie. José Estaban Muñoz fait valoir que les « iden-

tités dans la différence » surgissent d'une interpellation dans la sphère publique marquée par l'échec. Se désidentifier de la sphère dominante permet l'émergence d'un espace qui s'oppose à la sphère publique; le paysage est le même, mais les façons dont on l'appréhende, l'utilise et le comprend sont différentes. En réfutant à la fois l'identification et la contre-identification—l'assimilation et l'anti-assimilation — la *désidentification* représente une troisième façon de négocier l'idéologie dominante, fondée sur l'idée de « travailler à la fois avec et contre » comme stratégie visant à transformer de l'intérieur une logique culturelle. Dans cet article, Andrew Houston explique comment la désidentification a été tracée et vécue comme forme de dés-orientation dans *Here Be Dragons*, un spectacle multimédia en site spécifique, présenté dans le cadre de IMPACT '11, qui invitait le public à vivre une expérience de déplacement : tracer la carte mytho-géographique de l'identité homosexuelle et canado-asiatique au centre-ville de Kitchener, en Ontario. Dans *Here Be Dragons*, le public—les touristes dans ce domaine —fait l'expérience d'« identités dans la différence » en se promenant dans le terrain qui sert de témoignage à un jeune homme, naviguant un paysage de limites et d'antagonismes dans leur ville natale.



What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.
— Michel de Certeau

A Context for Mapping and Walking

Mapping can be considered a particular kind of text. As a means of representing our relationship to place, mapping can take numerous forms, from drawing on a piece of paper, to a sequence of events etched in someone's memory, to an itinerary generated instantaneously by an online way-finding service, or a map created by professional cartographers. As a performative process, mapping is an attempt to apprehend where we are, who we are, and with whom we share the process. Mapping and walking together articulate an “embodied experience carried out from a particular point of view that ‘makes possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception’” (Merleau-Ponty, qtd. in O'Rourke xvii-xviii). In the project discussed here, walking and mapping are not just the combined acts of creative-research; they also serve as methodology.

As an approach to defining identity in relation to place, the following account of the site-specific performance *Here Be Dragons* was inspired by famous walking-mappers in history, such as the Situationists who created maps to highlight the psychogeographical contours and architectural articulations of modern cities. Echoing this tradition, the landscape mapped in *Here Be Dragons* encompasses the immediate, physical, and urban environment in which many of us walk, the actions and perceptions of pedestrians, and certain cultural and ideological filters through which it is possible to view this experience. The performance charts less the physical distances that separate two parts of a city, and more an experience of walking through this city at street level. Mapping becomes a methodology of identity construction as well as a methodology of performance creation through walking that is entered into collaboratively by both artists and audience.

An Opportunity to Map

About four months before IMPACT '11,¹ the Artistic Director of the festival, Majdi Bou-Matar, asked me if I wanted to contribute a performance. I quickly pondered the factors: I knew the festival was struggling financially, I was an inexpensive local alternative to a more costly international candidate, I am pretty competent with tight deadlines, and Majdi is my friend. Even considering all this, four months isn't much time to produce a show. I was hesitant, but then the festival's theme drew me in. The IMPACT Festival is a biannual international theatre festival, produced by the MT Space;² the focus of IMPACT '11 was performing the displacement of immigrants and aboriginals. I'm neither an immigrant nor an aboriginal, but I still feel displaced in Kitchener-Waterloo, my place of residence for the last ten years or so. I immediately envisioned a series of maps detailing the routes, landmarks, guideposts, places of refuge, and other markers for people who for one reason or another feel displaced. Perhaps one person's map could be useful to other people; perhaps these maps might reveal traces, situated knowledge, or other social strata not perceived or navigable by others without the map's assistance. Perhaps these maps might yield something of an inner journey as well; the experience of following someone's lead through an unknown territory of intimacy rarely risked in a public space. Lucy Lippard states that "[t]he 'naturalization' of maps—the myth that maps show the world the way it really is—veils the fact that maps are cultural and even individual creations that embody points of view" (102). Maps author what their makers want to show, and resistance is difficult. In this project, I wanted to challenge the hegemony of authorless, powerful civic maps through the collaborative creation of performative maps that could disidentify with this civic strategy, and in so doing might positively reorient others to do the same.

Despite the tight deadline and a small budget, I was inspired by this project's potential, but I initially had no idea whose map would be revealed. As serendipity would have it, in conversations with two former students within the week, experiences of displacement emerged. It quickly became obvious that both would be perfect collaborators for the IMPACT project: both had very real experiences of being displaced in Kitchener-Waterloo. Despite being born here, educated here, and given a lot of opportunities to thrive here, both were struggling with this place, and as a result, each young man had either left, and returned for visits, or was about to leave. I contacted the two later that week and suggested the idea of creating a mapping performance, maybe even an exit strategy, or at least something that gave shape to their feelings and experiences, that might be a guide for others. They both agreed to join the project.

In this map-making venture, my two former students, Johnny Trinh, David Lam, and I were joined by Nancy Tam, another artist, who was enthusiastic about the project, and coincidentally, also in the process of leaving town. Nancy was born in Hong Kong, and immigrated to Markham, Ontario, when she was about ten years old. She had come to Waterloo for university, but after working as a composer in the area for six years, she had decided to move to Vancouver for a graduate program at Simon Fraser University. When we first discussed the project, Nancy told me that since her young teenage years, she has been itinerant, first leaving her parents' home due to stress with her father, and then leaving successive relationships. More recently, Nancy called a series of student housing rentals home. She had begun to think a lot about her displacement. So as our collaboration began, Nancy's idea of

“home” was basically a list of ten things kept in a couple of suitcases—she had more of a portable refuge than something permanently fixed in a place and time.

The urban space of Kitchener-Waterloo does not just exist. According to Henri Lefebvre, such spaces are produced as a result of strategic political activity based on economics and knowledge, but also that spaces may exist beyond these parameters (102-3). There is not just one social space, but many spaces. We wondered, what was the social space of displacement in Kitchener-Waterloo? How could we map it, and furthermore, how could we orientate the broader public toward awareness and understanding of such a space, or spaces. Could our map, or maps, translate social tensions—of race and sexual orientation—into a performance that in turn intervenes in the dominant imaginary landscape of a place? We hoped that our map-making might guide people toward a better awareness of this landscape of overlapping and competing social spaces, and in this we knew that our map must also create its own space: a path of identity retained in memory, and carried through voice and action, along mobile, alternative trajectories.

Walking and Mapping an Intimate Terrain

We began our collaborative process with map-making following some techniques I had learned from Deirdre Heddon, a Scottish performance artist with an interest in mapping and walking. We drew maps on large pieces of paper, describing the routes, landmarks, and contours of each artist’s “square-mile of home.” In this process we focused on how the terrain we were mapping revealed itself through walking, and how a single route through a landscape could elicit several narrative junctures. In her performance entitled *Tree: A Studio Performance*, Heddon describes these topographical connections in the following way:

You can find or make a route,
my story in your story.
Your life is not yours alone.
You can find or make a route,
your story in my story.
You can be here and there.
You can find or make a route,
my story in your story.
One person’s present
is perhaps someone else’s theft.
You can find, or make a route,
your story in my story.
The frame is always porous.
You can find or make a route,
my story in your story.
Your story in my story.
(151)

In the beginning, all four of us were collaborating on a kind of auto-topographical map. There was autobiography, but as facts were filtered through our varying perceptions and experiences

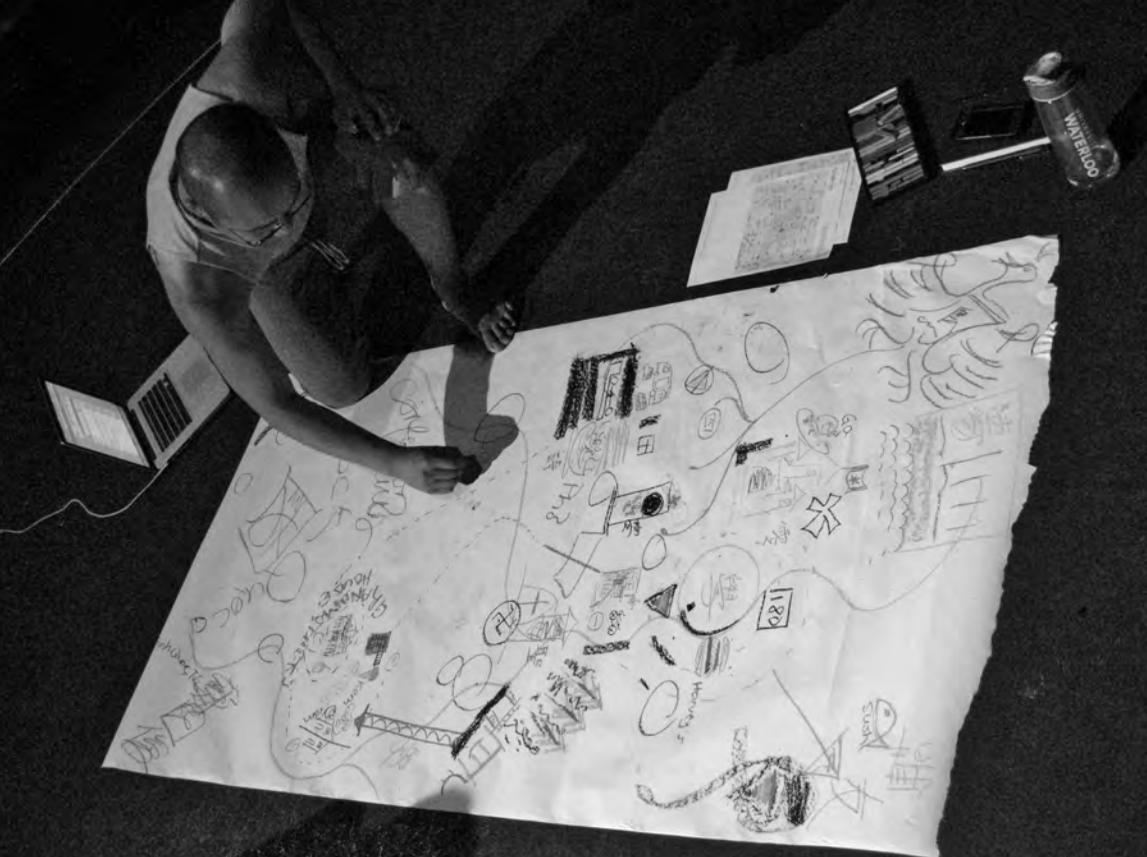


Fig. 1. Johnny Trinh mapping his “square-mile” of home on paper during the devising of *Here Be Dragons*. July 2011, University of Waterloo. Photo by Andrew Houston.

of place (Heddon’s “porous frame”), what was emerging was part creative and part factual; an act of selecting, ordering, editing, forgetting, embellishing, and invention. This dramaturgical weave of narrative, perspective, and space among other things, is what saved this exercise from becoming a superficial form of nostalgia—that is, it became more an example of reflective than restorative nostalgia. Svetlana Boym makes this distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia in her analysis of post-communist urban cultures, where she observes:

If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space. (49)

While restorative nostalgia is intended to shore up traditional imaginings of a mythic collective past and future, reflective nostalgia positions the individual in a flexible historical trajectory. In the beginning of our project, narrative-based mapping provided a kind of performative agency that placed Kitchener-Waterloo, our location, into a space of instability, challenging the status of what we thought we (and others) saw in the place. As Heddon maintains “the challenge for all autobiographical performance is to harness the dialogic potential afforded by the medium, using it in the service of difference rather than sameness” (qtd. in Mock 15). When autobiographical narrative is located in a certain place, it thereby becomes topographical; it opens autobiography to multiple ways of knowing and relating through navigation.

Topos, from the Greek, for place; *Graphein*, to scratch, to draw, to write. Topography, then,

is the writing of place. Adding *auto* to this mix is to admit the self that writes every place, since topography, like autobiography, is a creative act of interpretation, perspective, and location. As geographer Tim Cresswell writes, “[p]laces, like selves, are not simply given but are made. Places are constructed by people doing things and in this sense are never ‘finished’ but are constantly being performed” (39). In our work, the maps almost immediately outlined fissures in the landscape that reflected certain tensions, biases, dangers, and pleasures—to do with race, sexual orientation, and our various relations with place. The public terrain began to take on the sometimes hostile, sometimes bemusing, and always ambiguous dimension of the places of memory that have marked and continue to overshadow my colleagues’ relationship to the home we were mapping. The framework for the map was as follows:

- Map the “square-mile” of your home.
- Identify four places where you chose a certain direction, and how this choice (in your life’s journey) changed everything.
- Identify ambient hubs on your map; that is, places where you have met with significant differences (racial, sexual, generational, and so forth).
- Identify certain landmarks from your past that still govern your navigation today.

From the mapped responses to these four important coordinates emerged the creation of the text, action, and sound throughout the project. For example, David mapped places where he remembered coming out to a friend. The experience was positive as the friend was supportive but nevertheless David remembered shivering uncontrollably in a bus shelter before this event. Nancy recalled the trials of learning to speak English and the isolation of a schoolyard playground, in mid-January, before she had made friends. Johnny gave us specific coordinates in south Kitchener, locations of love from family, love with other boys, and incidents of violence (or the threat of violence) that shaped his childhood.

At this point in the process, as the Caucasian, heterosexual director of this project, I was wondering how these maps might serve to guide the journey of others, particularly for individuals, like myself, whose experiences differ considerably from those of the map makers. We often discussed these differences during the process of creating the performance. We wondered, what if the creation of maps that marked the journeys of displaced peoples, however defined, within our cities and neighbourhoods, was a way of articulating and putting into practice what John Dewey refers to as “the habits of associated living,” that is, the ways through which individuals may pursue the “process of discovering the means by which a scattered, mobile, and manifold public may so recognize itself as to identify and define its interests” (*The Essential* 390). Dewey reminds us that democracies require substantive and ongoing attention to the “hard-won idea of a public good: a good that, being more than the aggregate of individual interests, denotes a common commitment to social justice and equality” (Dewey, qtd. in Nixon 1). In discussions with my co-mappers on this project, we wondered how our mapping process might reveal a landscape of relations with others that might promise an experience of the “public good.”

Our initial devising process based on personal maps yielded texts and improvised physical scores that revealed strata of a landscape I hadn’t quite anticipated: a terrain of intimacy mostly hidden from public view, and therefore likely remote from any reckoning of a public

good. In her excellent analysis of Theatre Replacement's *BIOBOXES*, Christine Kim articulates a similar dimension of cultural politics common to racial minorities in Canada, where racialized bodies are encouraged to "keep the intimate details of their existences to themselves when the dominant public seems disinterested" (190). In animating the personal maps of my collaborators, the intention was to push for a different orientation to (walking with) a (racialized) body in public space, capable of both intimacy and social change, of having narrative whispered in your ear while being cognizant of the other structures that shape the interaction, and of thereby responding to the affective and political registers of the everyday. In order to facilitate this level of intimacy with our future audience members, who at this point we envisioned as tourists to this realm, Johnny and David began walking their childhood neighbourhoods while recording thoughts, memories, and other impressions. We liked the idea of "intimately broadcasting" experiences and insights into a soundscape broadcast via MP3 players with headsets. We wanted to use sound in its relationship to place and identity, to recognize the social acoustics of multiculturalism and let racialized and sexualized subjects make emotional, and thereby political, demands in ways that resonate.

Putting *Here Be Dragons* on the Map

Our mapping process continued to develop around the exploration of physical scores based on walking, and then the application of this work to the southern downtown core of Kitchener, near the location of other IMPACT '11 performance venues, but more importantly the location of Johnny's square-mile of childhood. More than just an attempt to develop the work in a specific location, the idea here was to reconcile the pedestrian (bottom-up) with the cartographic (top-down). Beginning with the top-down concept (e.g. "square-mile' of childhood"), similar to modern cartographers, we developed our performance space from rectilinear marking out of territories and then gradually incorporated more information and depth, from the perspective of a pedestrian. Once on the ground and on the go, the bottom-up narratives we created resembled an older, less technological approach to mapping, one where the pilgrim, initiate, or immigrant, follows and enacts a series of proscribed actions, directions, and advice for survival.

We decided early on that we would try to layer our maps; that is, we sought to dramaturgically weave together their respective narrative journeys, so that our audience—those who activate the map, or the orienteers of its coordinates—would have a choice about how they pieced together the combination of the three maps. Johnny's map became foundational to *Here Be Dragons* in part because of its proximity to other venues of the IMPACT Festival, and also for the way it reflected experiences common to David and Nancy. In particular, Johnny's map was the clearest articulation of a path of departure, which united all three artists. In keeping with his actual plan in life—to leave Kitchener for grad school—we began to shape the performance as a map of departure, a process of him taking account of his hometown before leaving it—perhaps for good. In the following analysis, my primary focus will be on the first part of Johnny's map, and the first half of *Here Be Dragons*, which illuminated his experiences of King Street,³ and his father's influence on his life. The second half of the performance explored the territory of the Market Square and a disused women's clothing store, where his mom had been a seamstress; this part of the performance layered in Nancy's

and David's maps. For the purposes of the present analysis, the second half of *Here Be Dragons* could be considered an expandable node on Johnny's map, a site of mapping where the strata explored through mirrors, change rooms, video, and social media represented a mnemonic container he opens one last time before leaving for good.

We begin the performance at the Hong Kong Plaza; we invite our audience to meet there, as if they might be on a rendezvous with an old friend. When they arrive, they receive a program and an MP3 player. When Johnny arrives, he tells them he is leaving the city, and asks if they might accompany him on a kind of "walk down memory lane," on his way to the central bus station. He suggests that there are layers to this story, and that the best way to appreciate the journey is for them to listen to their MP3 players and follow his lead. Before everyone tunes into the soundscape on their MP3,⁴ he offers an anecdote about the Hong Kong Plaza and his father. He offers a glimpse of his father's history, a refugee from Vietnam, who came to Canada with his mother with the help of a Catholic Church sponsor, and this is what brought them to Kitchener. In his father's voice, Johnny speaks of working in restaurants, factories, and other menial labour; he describes sixteen-hour days, balancing three jobs, language lessons, and busing and walking for many kilometers to get to work. He details the experience of work in a rope factory that literally burns the flesh from his hands, and his sense of achievement he feels when he can claim expertise at a difficult job:

I watch, you see I watch everything, and that is how I got promoted. Learning how machine work, finding I love how machine work. After it feeds through, I got to the other end where it roll into this big roll, so you see, can you see me, by myself, rolling this big 200 lbs. coil?
(*Here Be Dragons* 1)

Johnny speaks these words in the neighbourhood where the rope factory stood on King Street, where his father worked, and then in front of a restaurant where his father had also worked, and his family ate meals regularly.

In the way the texts of *Here Be Dragons* map the past there is an effort made in this articulation to not so much reclaim this history but to put it in direct relationship with the process of *being* in the present. This map connects both Johnny and us to a past, a past that we would have no other way of knowing. Johnny's father's story is not on the map that City Hall will give you, nor is there any indication of his father's impact on the place where we experience this story. This text is a queer son's attempt to reconstruct and better understand his identity formation through equally powerful identifications, counter-identifications, and disidentifications with his father and his dad's own unique relationship to the signs of colonization.

Mapping Disidentification

José Esteban Muñoz refers to disidentification as a hermeneutic process of production and a mode of performance, which I argue is not unlike our process of mapping in *Here Be Dragons*. "Disidentification can be understood as a way of shuffling back and forth between reception and production" (Muñoz 25), and this is precisely the dynamic in the act of reading and orienteering which happens when a subject maps or follows a map through a given space. For the mapper, disidentification is the hermeneutical performance of decoding a cultural

field (e.g. a neighbourhood's landmarks) from the perspective of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy.

In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz looks to projects similar to ours, where cultural performers negotiate between a fixed identity disposition and the socially encoded roles that are available to such subjects. The essentialized understanding of identity (i.e. men are like this, women like that, Chinese people are such and such, and queers are so and so, etc.) by its very nature must reduce identities to lowest-common-denominator terms; that is, such an understanding resorts to the simplest and therefore easiest to read coordinates in a given place. Socially encoded scripts of identity are often formatted by phobic energies around race, sexuality, gender, etc. Muñoz understands the labour of making identity as a process that takes place at the point of collision of perspectives that some critics and theorists have understood as essentialist and constructivist. This collision is precisely the moment of negotiation when hybrid, racially predicated, and deviantly gendered identities arrive at representation. In doing so, a representational contract has been broken; the queer and the coloured individual come into perception and the social order receives a jolt that may reverberate loudly and widely, or in less dramatic, yet locally indispensable, ways.

Muñoz attempts to catalogue these sites of emergence. He looks at performances that can all be considered acts of emergent identities-in-difference. These identities emerge from failed interpellation within the dominant public sphere. Here emergence is predicated on an ability to disidentify with the mass public and instead, through disidentification, to contribute to the function of a counterpublic sphere (Muñoz 7), that is, the creation of an alternate map of territory familiar to all. He then draws on the analysis of French linguist Michel Pêcheux, who extrapolates a theory of disidentification from Marxist theorist Louis Althusser's influential theory of subject formation and interpellation. Althusser's *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* was among the first articulations of the role of ideology in theorizing subject formation. For Althusser, ideology is an escapable realm in which subjects are called into being or "hailed," a process he called interpellation (127-35). Ideology is the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. The location of ideology is always within an *apparatus* and its practice or practices (maps and their orientation), such as the state apparatus of Kitchener's City Hall, or the late-capitalist consumer landscape found on the main street of my city, and likely any other city.

Pêcheux built on this theory by describing the three modes in which a subject is constructed by ideological practices. In this schema, the first mode is understood as "identification," where a "Good Subject" chooses the path of identification with discursive and ideological forms. "Bad Subjects" resist and attempt to reject the images and identificatory sites offered by dominant ideology and proceed to rebel, to "counteridentify" and turn against the symbolic system. The danger that Pêcheux sees in such an operation would be the counterdetermination that such a system installs, a structure that validates the dominant ideology by reinforcing its dominance through the controlled symmetry of "counterdetermination." Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressure of dominant ideology (identification, simulation) or attempting to break free

of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this “working on and against” is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always labouring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of the local or everyday struggles of resistance (Muñoz 11-12).

A Map that Doesn't Line Up

The soundwalk that follows Johnny's opening monologue is a performance of disidentification insofar as it navigates a line between reflective nostalgia, dis-ownership, and leave-taking. While the audience listens to this soundscape, walks with Johnny, and watches his physical score, they are also navigating and noticing a part of downtown Kitchener that is complicated; this neighbourhood is challenged socio-economically, but there is more to it than that. While there are certain resonances between Johnny's soundscape map and this place, for the most part things “don't line up,” to borrow a phrase from Muñoz. Muñoz suggests that in these moments when things don't line up reflexivity is informed by and through a process of queerness *and* hybridity (84).

The soundscape echoes the phrase “I come from...”. The effect is akin to the repetition of certain elements in the landscape, the parking meters, the street signs, the seemingly endless expanse of cement sidewalk. The text begins with the following observations:

I come from a world that fell into a confusion of identity and ownership, I am a product of confusion of ownership.

My family arrived into a predominantly German town, filled with loyalists to a new and old Berlin. In the periphery were farmers from a Mennonite mimetic way of life—with buggies, spokes, and horses to draw heavy loads.

My family carried their heavy loads on their backs, with long bamboo poles, and buckets of water or rice, like some awful mid-80s film about the Vietnam war, only it wasn't a film [. . .]

The humanitarian flag of Canada bound a budding community that didn't know it would soon explode into cultural ghettos—but without the gang wars, just train tracks dividing socio-economic status—where the rich like Tolkien's sacred elves would migrate to the west of Waterwoo, and the labourers, degenerates, and immigrant folk delved deeper into Sketchiner. (*Here Be Dragons 2*)

This map takes us through a part of King Street that City Hall would like to call the “Multi-Cultural District,” in part because civic planners hope that more restaurants might emerge, and more patrons with money from “Waterwoo” might dine here, but in fact this part of Kitchener's main street has more than its share of church-run thrift shops, vacancies, same-day loan franchises, variety stores, and sex trade workers. The city promotes the Farmer's Market, just down the street, because the business conducted there is more in keeping with how City Hall would like to promote Kitchener to visitors, and even to those of us who live here.

The initial challenge for the audience—or those who have become orienteers to Johnny’s map—is that for many of us, this neighbourhood is familiar and we begin navigation with a selective gaze that ignores everything but what is necessary for the task at hand, and therefore we only see what we expect to see. Over the four performances that made up the run of *Here Be Dragons*, part of the audience was local and the other part were visitors, here for the IMPACT Theatre Festival; yet even for those from out of town, this section of King Street is familiar. Similar to so many Canadian inner city streets, this is a place of mostly banal transition, or as Marc Augé would call it, a “non-place,” or a space of displacement (78). The non-place is the manifestation of a world increasingly concerned about commensurate, unproblematic exchange—of money, of commodities, of information, and of people. It is the location where history, language, and all facets of identity are abstracted for the ease of mediation, movement, and evaluation through the mechanisms of trade and travel. For Augé, a non-place is in part characterised by solitary individuality, and the fleeting, temporary, and ephemeral experience of simply passing through somewhere (78). Nevertheless, the process of experiencing the map guides us into an orientation of disidentification to our surroundings when a certain detachment occurs between what we are actually looking at and what Johnny is inviting us to see and experience. Psychogeographer Wilfred Hou Je Bek maintains that “the ability to communicate about places in names you have yourself found the language for, the name of it reflecting the reason why it is named as it is, creates a strong emotional relationship with these objects” (qtd. in O’Rourke 5), and these coordinates of hopes, miseries, challenges, and dreams, shared intimately with those following the map change our experience of this landscape forever. As Kitchener’s main street becomes a place of altered perception, *Here Be Dragons* approximates a dream track of toponyms characteristic of the song cycles of Australian indigenous peoples, where the world is read as a reflection of reminders of lived experience, and especially stages in the journey of totemic ancestry. Each toponym, or the enactment of specific features of the landscape through sound and movement, corresponds to a memory trace that is at once individual and collective, mythical, and historic.

A few blocks north, past the Farmer’s Market, by the various stores run by churches that sell donated clothing, Johnny remembers:

I thanked the Lord for giving me a uniform of grey and white. Diving into the anonymity of Catholic school, where you were able to slip through the cracks with a simple slouch and an unraised hand [. . .] I wore no pink triangles, but somehow they found me [. . .] By the time I graduated high school, they had to remove 10 lockers because people needed to remind me of what I didn’t know I was... (*Here Be Dragons* 4)

And finally, at an intersection in Kitchener infamous for drunken brawls and arrests, where in front of the Canadian Association of Mental Health building, the city has erected a Speaker’s Corner, the soundscape guides us to remember Johnny coming out:

And discovering Club Renaissance. A literal hole in the wall that for the first time in my life, gave me a place to feel free. Club Renaissance was described as a place where gays can be gay for the weekend, before returning to their daily lives. Living with Gay, like Dying from AIDS, a secret of misunderstanding... (*Here Be Dragons* 5)



Fig. 2. Johnny Trinh performing his map of dis-identification on King Street, Kitchener, in a performance of *Here Be Dragons*. September 2011. Photo by Andrew Houston.

Johnny dances on the civic monument dedicated to free expression. In my ten years in Kitchener, I have never seen anyone actually speak publicly at Speaker's Corner, so it is liberating to see Johnny dance here, and the soundscape says:

I come from a go-go box that bore a million teenagers before and after me, hiding from the witch hunts of being queer in Kitchener, and defying the broken lockers, broken homes, broken banks, broken families, broken spirits, and those who tried to break my will. (*Here Be Dragons* 5)

The Ethical Demand of Enacting the Map

In *Here Be Dragons*, we tried to map a change of perspective on our city. Perhaps it was an exercise in marking territory and providing some “psychological home land security,” as Lucy Lippard refers to it (102); but more so, we tried to provide an opportunity to revise “the” civic map through navigational performance and use. A mode of mapping that resists, demystifies, and deconstructs the universalizing ruse of the dominant culture; that is, we challenged ourselves, and those who became orienteers in this process with us, to find unique ways of reading (and contributing to) the official map of the city.

In his book *Art as Experience*, John Dewey argues that the task of aesthetics is “to restore the continuity between the refined experiences that are works of art and the everyday events, doings and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience” (10). In *Here Be Dragons*, we tried to intersect art with life. “Receptivity is not passivity,” says Dewey, “nor is it mere recognition, which is perception arrested before it has time to develop so that it can serve some other purpose. In recognition, we fall back on a previously formed scheme”

(*Art as Experience* 54). When we recognize a person on the street, as a friend or stranger, we greet one and walk past the other. Recognition goes no further. Conversely, perception consists of a more engaged series of responsive acts that accumulate toward immersive engagement, and how we approach difference in others. Perception involves a process of reconstructive doing, of “walking the walk” so to speak, in which consciousness becomes alive. This act requires the implicit cooperation of motor elements, as Dewey comments, “an act of perception proceeds by waves that extend serially throughout the entire organism.” It entails “the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy. To steep ourselves in a subject matter, we have first to plunge into it” (*Art as Experience* 54-55).

Our audience was invited to take such a “plunge”; that is to say, they were invited to walk the walk of disidentification, and thereby engage in an act of orienteering that works on and against the dominant, abstract civic ideology of the transitional, “non-place” being mapped, as well as the conventional role of spectatorship in performance. Addressing spectatorship in site-specific performance, Keren Zaiontz identifies such “audience labour” as:

[N]ot simply a matter of delegating critical acts to participants but is an encounter with those acts that occurs through such kinesthetic operations as touch and movement. By coming into contact (or proximity) with the discourses that are being dramatized, spectators navigate the artwork through what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call a “smooth space,” a space perceived through direct physical engagement (12).

Zaiontz elaborates a concept from Laura Marks in *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, when she explains that smooth spaces are necessarily experienced at “[c]lose-range” and “navigated not through reference to the abstractions of maps or compasses, but by haptic perception, which attends to their particularity” (12). The labour of audiences for a site-specific spectatorship at “close range” shifts the parameters of conventional spectatorship for how it disrupts the binaries of performer/spectator and representation/real to that of “beside.” Zaiontz draws on Eve Sedgwick to help illustrate how conceiving of spectatorship as beside conventional roles and parameters of representation command a range of analytical possibilities that do not end in opposition (8). In *Here Be Dragons*, the act of walking beside Johnny as he guides us through the landscape of his life is a particularly good example of Sedgwick’s notion of “beside” because the primary aim of the performance is to break down the potential dualistic boundaries between Johnny and those following his lead, as Sedgwick explains:

Beside permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: non-contradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. Its interest does not, however, depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who’s shared a bed with siblings. *Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations. (qtd. in Zaiontz 8)

The experience of our audience orienteering themselves on King Street, guided by Johnny’s map, and navigating a path of disidentification through familiar territory, is a process of occu-

pying the place of being “beside.” The audience is beside Johnny, beside the ideological norms of the landscape, and beside conventional theatre spectatorship insofar as in the process of enacting Johnny’s map, they are enacting demands of the map that require paralleling, differentiating, and identifying with him through this process.

The act of spectatorship through mapping disidentification in *Here Be Dragons* created a role of ethical agency in those who enacted Johnny’s map; here is a role that challenges conventional theatre binaries: representation/real and spectatorship/performer, and in this process creates an experience of disidentification that is relational, performative, and contingent on varying local contexts. For the public, site-specific mapping performance challenges the hegemony of authorless, neoliberal civic maps through the collaborative creation of performative maps that disidentify with this civic strategy, through a performance that may situate itself “beside” hegemonic forms that so often limit the potential impact of theatre to represent this civic territory.

Mapping Ontological Capacity for the Public Good

To conclude, I want to consider how, as a Caucasian, heterosexual director of this project I am embedded in the same disidentificational terrain mapped by Johnny, Nancy, and David. As my artistic practice may pursue Dewey’s notion of “the public good,” it should promote an understanding that my autonomy is defined in relation to the social, the fabric of the map, so to speak. In directing the devising process of *Here Be Dragons*, I tried to start from the premise that being a good, fellow citizen with my collaborators, both artists and audience, requires becoming embedded in the mapping process, and therefore remaining cognizant and critical about my location. Such a sense of embeddedness might then give rise to the demands and pleasures of a “we.”

Once artists and audiences alike consider that we are all located and following a map, despite a variety of contexts, this realization might allow us to become more adept in practices of reflexivity, of understanding the particularities of one’s own positionality and location. Jennifer Simpson reminds us that such reflexivity “demands a sense of how one inhabits and navigates locations of both power and oppression, and of how one’s own relationship to practices of power and domination bears on the lives of others” (212). Simpson takes the epistemological concept of reflexivity one step further when she describes an ontological approach to relationships and power called “pivoting the centre” (212). Pivoting the centre concerns the “how” of one’s fit with others, and thereby this process can overcome years of navigating a landscape of the normative; rather, pivoting the centre requires that one is able to believe “in the possibility of a variety of experiences, a variety of ways of understanding the world, a variety of frameworks of operation, without imposing consciously or unconsciously a notion of the norm” (212-13). It is not so much a process of intellectual analysis, rather pivoting the centre is a process of navigating an experience that is different from your own and evaluating that experience by its own standards, within its own context and milieu. Crucial to Simpson’s articulation of pivoting the centre is the idea of a “variety of frameworks of operation” (213). Pivoting the centre requires an acknowledgment of multiple, disidentified worldviews and value systems, and it also makes demands on how we listen. Pivoting the centre is, in ontological terms, a way to be with others—indeed, to be *beside* others—that

both takes into account the power of dominant norms yet simultaneously insists that it is possible to set up modes of living, relating, and navigating that engage more just forms of subjectivity. This is the terrain of public good—a mapping of democracy—that we attempted to create in *Here Be Dragons*. Listening to stories is one part of the work of democracy; listening to some stories is more difficult than listening to others. This kind of exchange takes work: to listen, to collaborate, and to map, walk, and navigate together. In *Here Be Dragons*, I tried to do my part to realize this kind of public good.

An Aftermap

I miss Johnny, David, and Nancy. They come back for visits, and since *Here Be Dragons*, I've worked with Nancy and David on other projects when they've been back in Kitchener-Waterloo temporarily. Johnny has been busy working out west, mostly in Saskatchewan, where he is a graduate student. He tells me that eventually he would like to live and work in Toronto, so he will be closer to his parents, who still live in Kitchener. I think the experience of creating and performing *Here Be Dragons* was part of a rite of passage for him, not unlike most young people who leave the cities where they grew up, to pursue higher education and/or employment opportunities elsewhere; the performance we made together marked an important transition in his life. As a graduate student at the University of Regina, Johnny has continued the work we started, to reclaim parts of his past and, through performance, put these memories in direct relation with what he's experiencing in the present, in Saskatchewan's "Queen City." From what he tells me in emails and via Skype, he is continuing to shape his identity through performance, and for this I am happy and proud. The work of mapping performance has made tangible an important part of this process. Identities are the names we give to the different ways in which we are cultural orienteers: positioned by, and positioning ourselves within, narrative-maps of our past and present.

Notes

- 1 IMPACT (International Multicultural Platform for Alternative Contemporary Theatre) is a biennial international theatre festival organized by MT Space in the Waterloo Region of Ontario. Beginning in 2009, this festival has evolved as a platform for the stimulation and development of the indigenous and culturally diverse theatre landscape in Canada. The festival focuses on interdisciplinary, intercultural, and physical productions.
- 2 The MT Space (Multicultural Theatre Space) is Waterloo Region's first and only multicultural theatre company. Founded in 2004 by Artistic Director Majdi Bou-Matar, the MT Space strives to develop forms and practices that speak to, draw upon, reflect, and constitute Canadian contemporary community.
- 3 King Street is the main street of both Kitchener and Waterloo, hence the reference to "Main Drag" in the title, which is a colloquial term for the main street of a city or town.
- 4 Listen to Johnny's soundscape here: <http://www.andyhouston.net/audio/herebedragons.mp3>

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