

The City of Richgate: A/r/tographic Cartography as Public Pedagogy

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Abstract

The City of Richgate project worked with eight intergenerational immigrant families and examined immigrant experiences and narratives through a community-engaged process that employed a/r/tography as a methodology. As such, the research also investigated the extent to which a/r/tographical research could visually and narratively portray the analysis of data collected by the co-a/r/tographers. After interviewing and collecting images from each family, large artistic gates (banners) were created. This first phase of the project revealed the power of images in situ, and thus the power of a/r/tography in situ. For the community members and co-a/r/tographers meanings were constructed within ongoing a/r/tographic inquiries described as collective artistic and educational praxis. The second phase involved the identification of important places by each family within the City of Richmond. After analysing all of the data, several works of art were created with each family in mind: bus shelter

images juxtaposing close-up and far away geographical images; side-by-side images portraying historical and contemporary images of family ideals and/or issues; banners illustrating families in meaningful poses; and archival collections portraying the importance of identity and memory in the transformation of culture. This phase culminated in a citywide exhibition of the artwork performing public pedagogy. The exhibition questioned the idea of a City of Richmond having a community centre, and instead exhibited many Richgates, or conceptions of Richmond. Rather than having a city centre, there are many centres, a Network of Cities of Richgates, where centres are constantly changing and shifting to reflect the narratives of individuals living in a psycho-geographical region of a city.

Richgate: a community-engaged art project

The City of Richmond, British Columbia, is a city that has recently come to represent east meeting west, the Pacific Ocean meeting a rugged terrain, farmland meeting urban landscapes. It is a city on the edge of the continent, separated psychologically from the rest of Canada by the Rocky Mountains yet bordering the American north-west. In the constantly shifting definition of this place, the displacement of the native people and the history of settlement by Europeans and non-Europeans play significant roles in its identity formation. In the past two decades, the source of immigration of people to British Columbia has shifted from Europe to Asia. It is within Richmond and its history as a gateway of welcome, that our community-engaged art project is uniquely situated. Although several of the eight participating families are Chinese-Canadian, the project has evolved to include participants with ethnic backgrounds from Estonia, Japan, South Africa, Western Europe and India, reflecting a micro ethno-demographic profile of Richmond's wealth of diversity.

Our research involves community-engaged arts practices that explore issues of identity, place, displacement, community and the changing nature of geography within the City of Richmond. It focuses on the expansion of processes and events that give landscape a sense of place in ways that resonate with lived experiences and cultural traditions. Working with a 'multi-centred' community forces us, as art writer Lucy Lippard (1997, 240) suggests, to question the construction of place in ways that a 'mono-centred' community ignores. Multi-centred communities are not simply denoted by the ethnic makeup of their constituents, but are multi-centred because of their ever-changing relationships to people and place. Within the rapidly changing landscape of Richmond, a sense of place cannot be assumed as given and static, but is constantly created and recreated on an on-going basis. The aim of the Richgate project [1] is to document the City of Richmond by recording visually and orally the stories and images of its community members and thereby come to understand what it means to *feel at home*. As the artist educators involved in this project, we initiated several community-engaged arts projects, work-

ing from the premise that the arts are powerful forces for rearranging and re-engaging patterns of community through public art as public pedagogy. Working as public intellectuals, we interacted with the community collecting personal stories of *home* and *away*, photographs and family artefacts, and producing narrative videos from the perspectives of the participants in the project (see also Bickel *et al.* 2007).

In this article [2], we examine these texts from the perspective of aesthetic cartography – a walking form of mapping and creating community. In what follows, we explore this concept of walking and cartography in order to investigate the relationship between public space, pedagogy and community-engaged art. We explore pathways to de-centring cultural centres in favour of multi-centred, rhizomatic contextual connections. These connections are found in storied prepositional evocations that serve as a basis for public pedagogy in the cartographic spaces of the Richgate pathways. As a result, Richgate participants and Richmond residents are encouraged to linger in the in-between public spaces that are often ignored, and search for their stories (textual and visual) of 'home' that may or may not resonate with those shared in the cartographic installation we will share with you here.

Opening up the gates

The title of our project came when Gu Xiong shared with us that the translation for the City of Richmond into Chinese was *The City of Richgate*. Though this was one interpretation, we knew other families would have their own interpretation. Though Chinese families may be emphasised in our project, many cultural groups are represented. In the beginning we were able to gather six families [3] to work with us on our a/r/tographic inquiry (Irwin 2004; Springgay *et al.* 2008). Over the next year, we interviewed each family several times and collected images they believed represented their journeys. We also took our own photographs, kept our own field notes, and dialogued with one another about our sessions with each of the families. We held large group gatherings with all of the families and the a/r/tographers. Some of us made artwork that

corresponded to an aspect of the project while others read widely; still others participated in the creation of our first collaborative exhibition (see Irwin *et al.* 2006). In the second year of the project we added two more families to ensure a larger cross-section of cultural representation.

In keeping with the intention of the Research Creation grant programme, we wanted to create works of art coming from our a/r/tographic inquiry. Using this arts practice based form of research allowed us to use our artist and educator practices as a basis for inquiry. Moreover, ensuring the coming together of 'art' and 'graphy' emphasised the necessity of theorising and practising through a variety of 'texts'. As such, rhizomatic connections were encouraged, explored, examined, interrogated and celebrated. Data became avenues for re-searching that which was misunderstood, taken-for-granted or understood from a different perspective. In addition, conceptualising creative products and possible installations or exhibitions became acts of rhizomatic opportunities. Determining what, when, how and for whom to perform/present became ethical acts situated within our relational interpretations of how each family understood home and away. As the process unfolded we created large image-based *gates* (Figure 1), with each gate dealing with one family's experiences of immigration by telling a visual narrative of a family's struggles to understand an adopted homeland, while, in a broader sense, exposing the implications of dual/multiple cultures and past/present dimensions on identity, place and community.

Although these gates were originally conceived through acts of translation, they soon became opportunities for making connections among diverse ideas. In rhizomatic fashion, we knew gates have always been important throughout history. Gateways to Japanese temples are similar to those found in Tai, Buddhist and Hindu cultures. In contemporary times, gates are also found in our cultures and languages in other ways. For instance, security gates at airports are an attempt to protect travellers while other gates control waterways through dams. Gateways of all types are important to an energy flow. Some act as guardians to peace and freedom while



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others inspire an enactment of individual freedoms. Each symbolises an opening, and going back through a gate may enact another new opening. By choosing gates as metaphorical structures for our first art exhibition, we were able to ask inquiry-based questions such as: what personal and social connections might community members consider? Moreover, by understanding the rhizomatic nature of a/r/tography we were also recognising how many contemporary artists (and educators) are using conceptions of rhizomes to portray, interpret, analyse and critique the subjects and processes of their inquiries (see, for instance, rhizome.org/info/index.php). In the following discussion, rhizomatic conceptions help us interpret and create new pathways of understanding public pedagogy.

Walking beyond the gates

In discussing public art and artists working with community, educator and activist Paulo Friere (2000) stresses the importance of shifting power relationships through dialogue. When collaboration is done with caution and respect, everyone becomes co-authors of actions performed on and in the world. He describes the dialogue involved as a process and not an end, and recognises that public art creates a site for ongoing spaces of meaning making. Extending this practice, public artist Ilya Kabakov (2004, 180) argues that dialogue exists between the space of community and the art work(s) that are created for those spaces. This type of dialogue he argues is 'silent', and offers 'a more profound and intricate contact with the place where [the art] is

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Figure 1
Gates: Beer, R.,
Gu., X., Irwin, R.,
Grauer, K.,
Springgay, S., Bickel,
B. (2005). *Richgate
Exhibition*,
installation
photograph. Art
Gallery of South
West China
University,
Chongqing, China

located'. The artist negotiates the sites between the space of community and the artwork and listens attentively for the 'intervals, the voids, the spaces between objects' (Kabakov (2004, 180). In the stillness of this in-between space the artist initiates a new conversation, and thus the art re-generates itself not as a product of representation, but as something that exists in relation to community, space and the objects found in the environment.

Working through this understanding of a 'silent dialogue', the art works created for the Richgate project examine the relationships between people and place, and thereby the spaces of community. Artist and educational scholar Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005, x) describes public art as 'places of learning' where personal memories reach into 'public spaces and events' and extend 'social histories and events into personal experience'. Places of learning provide opportunities for people to feel the materiality of community and to provide questions and perspectives that can be carried over into other situations in ways that open the future to new possibilities for living and working together.

The Richgate project invited the participant families to guide the artist educators on walks within their community. Through walking, a path or a space is opened up in which the everyday rituals of coming and going are retraced. Participant families took the artist educators to three different locations in Richmond that had significance to them. On these walks, family members told stories while leading the artist educators along the pathways of their weekly rituals which included their homes, the library, parks, the leisure centre, their favourite coffee shops; shopping; and daily commuting by car and bus. The walks also navigated through places of worship and memorials, as well as to places that no longer physically existed but remained graphic and significant in the participants' memories. The walks as an aesthetic practice became a symbolic mapping of their experiences of moving to and living in Richmond.

The Richgate project has given particular attention to the concepts of mapmaking and walking as forms of aesthetic cartography.

Contemporary theories of mapmaking argue that it is a creative activity that focuses on the process instead of the object of maps (Springgay 2005). The creative activity of making a path recognises the ways in which our bodies define a set of fundamental spatial relations that orient us within spaces of community and in relationship to objects and places. It is where the 'here' of the map intersects with the 'now' (Hall 2004). When we consider mapmaking through the concept of walking, cartography shifts from being a 'point' or fixed location to an encounter between people and places. Such encounters recognise that we are always interdependent with others. Visual culture theorist Irit Rogoff (2004) suggests that by shifting our navigational orientations from 'over there' to 'over here' the contingent nature of spaces and communities is emphasised. She sees this remapping as a way to develop an understanding of 'emplacement' within culturally diverse, multi-centred societies like Richmond.

For several decades many artists have been interested in site-specific work and how the creation, installation and reception of an artwork are situated in the contextual conditions of a particular location. Furthermore, as Miwon Kwon (2002) argues, the term 'site' needs to be re/imagined beyond a particular location to 'sites' that are not geographically bound, but rather, are informed by context. This relational understanding is constituted through social, economic, cultural and political processes in what Nicholas Bourriaud (2002; 2004) calls *relational aesthetics*. For both Kwon and Bourriaud, 'sites' and 'situations' become social engagements that change conventional relationships between artists and their artworks and audiences. Rather than simply receiving and interpreting art, audience members become analysers or interlocutors, even active participants in the artworks. Art is no longer just about visual style but social purpose. Education is no longer just about individual achievement but social understanding and contribution. Richgate is a project based in relational aesthetics, relational learning and relational inquiring. It is often in these relational spaces that surprisingly rich connections are made. Such is the case in recognising the significance of prepositional evocations.

Walking through prepositional evocations

What follows is a brief story about one of our families. In telling this story, we frame our ideas around the work of British Columbian author Carol Shields, whose book entitled *Unless* (2002) tells a story about a mother's struggle to understand her daughter's decision to be a street kid. Every chapter in the book is another story using a preposition, with the preposition 'unless' used as an overall theme for interpreting the situation at hand. One might ask: *unless* one thing happened, would something else have happened?

Gabriele Ailey was born in Poland, where her family was forced to resettle after being driven from their land in Estonia, her German Baltic ancestors' home since the early 1700s, by the Bolsheviks. In 1945, with nine-day-old Gabriele, Gabriele's grandfather led his family to Germany where transitional settlements were waiting. Gabriele recounts this story:

I have to tell you that my grandmother was the one who carried me and she said: 'if I hadn't carried you, you wouldn't be alive'. You see it was cold, it was January ... and they had little food ... I remember listening to my grandfather talk about hearing the cannons and hearing the Russians right behind them and always being fearful ... He trusted in God's leading and looking back he saw God's hand in all the unforeseen obstacles that led him and his family through the unknown dangers to safety.

Although allowed to live in Germany, Gabriele's father decided to leave Germany for North America. He felt no connection to Germany and wanted his children to know the experience of freedom in North America. Sponsored by the Lutheran Church, Gabriele's father emigrated to rural Northern Alberta with his wife and four young children. Sadly, Gabriele's mother died shortly after arriving in Canada and the ensuing years were difficult for the family as they homesteaded, learned a new language and adjusted to a new culture.

Gabriele's familial roots are kept alive through preserved written histories, paintings, newsletters, large extended family reunions and return

visits to historical home sites. Brian, Gabriele's husband, is part of this history keeping, and is an honorary member of the House of Wieso, Gabriele's family estate. Brian reflects on the differences between his stable Canadian life and Gabriele's experiences:

I've always moved within a stable country so I haven't had to put resources into maintaining a family unit ... I've always moved from a reasonable place to a reasonable place, with a rule of law to a rule of law. Her family was uprooted and they never knew for 20 years what was going to happen to them. All they had to support them was their family history and one another.

Brian's family, in contrast to Gabriele's, has lived in Canada since before Confederation, settling in Ontario when it was Upper Canada. His mother's family has eight generations and his father's family has one generation in Canada. Moreover, his experience as a pilot has given him a unique perspective on Canada.

Gabriele and Brian initially moved to Richmond in 1970 when Brian took a position as a pilot with Canadian Pacific Airlines, based at Vancouver Airport, after he retired from the Canadian air force. They raised their two sons in Richmond and became active members of the Richmond community. Gabriele comes from a lineage of female artists and is herself an artist. She has been instrumental in the growth and development of the local art gallery and art programmes within the school district. As a teacher who taught in the Richmond School District for many years, Gabriele's own immigrant experience enabled her to act as a valuable transitional mentor for her many immigrant students and their families (Figures 2 and 3 detail Gabriele's family narrative).

Unless the Bolsheviks had driven Gabriele's family from her homeland; *unless* Gabriele's father decided to move to Canada; *unless* the Lutheran Church sponsored her family; *unless* her mother died and she was left with her father and siblings in a foreign land; *unless* she met Brian while teaching at an air force base in Northern Alberta; *unless* they moved to Richmond for Brian's position as a

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pilot, where would she be today? These (and other) *unless* scenarios cause us to look at situations as prepositional in nature. *Unless* is a preposition but so too are the words *through*, *on*, *by*, *with*, *as*. Each of these is an in-between relational word that causes us to step back and understand our a/r/tographic inquiry in different, yet evocative, ways. The gates in our exhibition acted as prepositional folds, the in-between spaces between the past and the future: the present becoming the middle space. The gates in the above stories, that is, the stories of immigration portrayed in the Richgate family gates, portray a series of *unless situations* bringing the families to their current life stories. Without prepositional awareness, stories would not exist. Nor would the art. Furthermore, a series of *unless situations* are re/created anew in each locational telling.

Carl Leggo, a poet and educator (who coincidentally lives in Richmond), believes the noun/verb relationship in the English language needs to be troubled. He asks us to consider the power of prepositions to utter movements:

The word preposition is derived from prae (before) and ponere (to place). A preposition is a word of relation/relating. A preposition connects elements of a sentence. A preposition makes a proposition possible. A preposition is a marker of place. A preposition does not stand alone; it is always a part of the sentence. Prepositions are generally taken for granted. Living un/grammatically is living with awareness of the prepositions, with attention to the ways that prepositions position subjects and objects. Prepositions keep things in motion, unstable, mobile. Prepositions signify act/ing, relating, connecting ... The pose or position or place of a preposition is not stable. It is always a fecund place. (1998, 178)



As a/r/tographers pursuing educational and artistic interests, it is important to point out that the pedagogically relational potentialities found in the connections made possible by the prepositions *between*, *through*, *among*, *with*, *as*, *along*, among others, are just as profound between learners and teachers/learners as they are between texts, between images, and between texts and images. Complexity theories of learning (Davis *et al.* 2000) describe learning as never being predictable and as participatory in nature. For a/r/tography this means that the many rhizomatic connections and situations made throughout the inquiry process are unable to be separated into parts. Our situations (as well as other situations not described here) are folded and unfolded together, creating a whole that 'can be simultaneously seen as a whole, a part of a whole, or as a complex compilation of smaller wholes' (Davis *et al.* 2000, 73). In this sense, learning is concerned with concepts rather than isolated facts, and especially the interconnections between concepts – making learning rhizomatic.

Walking within pedagogical cartography

Walking with Gabriel as she remembered her family's long historical walk became a new site of learning. Fragments of her story were recounted while walking through her present home landscape with the artist educators through fields and the downtown centre of her local suburb. Each of the families took us on walks to places that held meaning to them. As 'places of learning', the walks retrace the ways in which the families create meaning out of their movements – both literally (immigration) and conceptually (within a



community). The walks, although through everyday spaces such as the library, suspend and disconnect prior assumptions and meanings, and through these shifts or displacements recreate new points of connection and meaning.

The spaces of navigational experiences were documented through digital photography, video and voice recording by the artist educators. In recording these walks particular moments were captured, interrupting 'the flow of time', creating a 'stable place' to 'dwell in and return to' (Tuan 2004, 26). For those that have lived in Richmond for an extended period of time these symbolic walks became 'memory maps' (Davis 2004, 130) where conversations centred around places that were no longer there, and what was missing in the landscape appeared more vivid than what was presently there. Paths are usually understood as modes of access to future relationships but are also records of previous pathways and interactions. Memory mapping allows for an expression of loss for what previously was. Mapping as pedagogical cartography is a constant negotiation of past and future in the present, thereby creating an awareness of constant shifting in identity as reflected in place.



A/r/tographic cartography as public pedagogy

During the third year of the project (spring 2007), several Richgate installations were displayed simultaneously and as a whole, created cartographic evocations. Moreover, the implicit and explicit storied prepositional evocations acted as memory reminders or thoughtful provocations about multi-centred communities.

By incorporating the concept of walking into various community-engagements, the project as a whole addressed the implications of living in-between cultures and contexts. We'll describe each engagement in turn. The original gates were installed inside Richmond City Hall and by *opening up the gates* of each family, community members began to see the symbolism of the multi-centred community of Richmond. The 'side by side' series (Figure 4) consisting of historical images of home juxtaposed with recent images taken in Richmond were mounted alongside museum cases that contained archival objects from the *collections in families* (Figure 5).

The *you are here* photographic memory maps were mounted in eight bus shelters throughout the City of Richmond (Figure 6).

Large photographic banners representing each of the families were installed on eight poles in the Richmond Cultural Centre Plaza. These *banners outside the Cultural Centre* (Figure 7) metaphorically began to de-centre Richmond's institutional cultural centre.

Extending the community-engaged art process, students at a number of Richmond schools were invited to draw and write about their favourite places in Richmond. *Postcards from home*, the resulting exhibition, was displayed at the Richmond Museum. As luck would have it, a local

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Opposite page:

Figure 2

Side by side:
Beer, R., Gu, X.,
Irwin, R., Grauer, K.,
Springgay, S., Bickel,
B. (2007). *Richgate*
city-wide exhibition,
photograph.
Richmond City Hall,
Richmond, BC,
Canada

Figure 3

Collections of
Families:
Ailey, G., Beer, R.,
Gu, X., Irwin, R.,
Grauer, K.,
Springgay, S., Bickel,
B. (2007). *Richgate*
city-wide exhibition,
installation
photograph.
Richmond City Hall,
Richmond, BC,
Canada

This page:

Figure 4

Bus Shelter:
Beer, R., Gu, X.,
Irwin, R., Grauer, K.,
Springgay, S., Bickel,
B. (2007). *Richgate*
city-wide exhibition,
photograph.
Richmond bus route,
Richmond, BC,
Canada

Figure 5

Banners outside
Richmond Cultural
Centre: Gu, X., Beer,
R., Irwin, R., Grauer,
K., Springgay, S.,
Bickel, B. (2007).
Richgate city-wide
exhibition,
photograph.
Richmond Cultural
Centre, Richmond,
BC, Canada

Theatre Company provided playwrights to collaboratively work with two of our families as they wrote plays of their Richgate stories. These were based on *living within contradictions*. Lastly, *walking beyond the gates* is the aesthetic cartographic walking experience that threads its way between these installations and experiences creating personally unique, yet socially connected, pathways of understanding.

Opening *up* the gates
Side *by* side
Collections in families
You *are* here
Banners *outside* the Cultural Centre
Postcards *from* home
Living *within* contradictions
Walking *beyond* the gates

Each of these installations represents a storied evocation, a prepositional evocation. Moving in-between these storied evocations becomes a conceptual mapping of an a/r/tographic cartography. Situating each of these community-engaged art works in various public spaces invites the larger community of Greater Vancouver into a walking pedagogy where stories, memories and images mingle. Rather than understanding each of these artworks as individual objects, the public installations, both inside community spaces and outside along the streets and other public spaces, intersect with each other and are threaded together with the personal images, memories and stories that viewers bring to the encounter. It is this complex intersection that constitutes aesthetic mapping, where different assemblages take light and new understandings, identities and spaces of learning are formed.

Tracing the rhizomatic pathways for which the lives of the Richgate families and Richmond community members have intersected through these installations, becomes a multi-centred approach to understanding community and public pedagogy. Rather than seeing the City of Richmond as having a centre, or Richgate, it becomes a *Network of Cities of Richgates*, with a multiplicity of centres, identities and landscapes

situated within the storied evocations of those who call Richmond home. In fact, it may be more appropriate to call it a Conflux [4] of Richgates where the psychogeography of a place is explicitly recognised. Community-engaged art projects, such as the City of Richgate, become sites for walking among places of learning with invitations for questioning, greater understanding and sharing. In essence, a/r/tographic cartography opens up rhizomatic pathways for public pedagogy where community members begin to experience the lived and living landmarks that are seldom recognised in typical maps. Rather than members of the public being given a map of the City (an object), they created an aesthetic cartography by walking (a movement) among the prepositional situations brought to the attention of the public by way of various aesthetic activities. Encouraging members of the public to use their own bodies to define spatial relationships within the community orients them to movement through objects and places. Public pedagogy is no longer about a fixed location telling a fixed story at the present time; it is about encounters between people and places in and through time. Public pedagogy begins from people sharing their lived landmarks making their locally conceived maps just as worthy, if not more, than the Mercator projections we have come to associate with mapping. It is through these lived landmarks that we realise the power of prepositions to encourage movement: movement of thought, movement of feelings, movement of bodies. Our encounters with others are always interdependent. From this cartographic perspective, artistic events cannot be limited to visual style or presentation but must also be about social purpose, and education cannot be limited to personal achievement but also involves social understanding and contribution. The traditional notion of a city being a large, permanent and organised community is reconceptualised as a network of rhizomatic pathways. A public pedagogy that recognises this new conception resists mapping that favours centralised understandings of home and away. Instead, through the help of aesthetic cartography, community members are encouraged to create, share and/or change their relational under-

standing of what home and away mean. The power of the arts in public pedagogy is paramount as individuals and collectives explore a *Network of Cities of Richgates* in their own environments.

Notes

1. We wish to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their generous support of our research programme entitled 'The City of Richgate: Research and Creation into Community-Engaged Arts Practices' (2004–8).

2. An earlier version of this article was presented as a paper at the Arts Based Educational Research Conference, Bristol, 5–7 July 2007. We thank the delegates for their helpful comments on our research.

3. We wish to thank our families for granting us permission to work with them on this project and for allowing their names to be shared. Their contributions have been incredibly important. The Chinese families are: (1) Mei Lin, Tam Wang and Crane Wang; (2) Bob Duan, Linda Gu and Ying Duan; (3) Yuzhang Wang, Hong Yang and Steven Wang; (4) Gu Xiong, Ge Ni and Gu Ye. The Estonian family is: (5) Gabriele and Brian Ailey. The German family is: (6) Kit Grauer and Carl Grauer. The Japanese and Chinese family is: (7) Pauline, Michael, Madison, Cameo, and Margaret Sameshima. The East Indian family is: (8) Charan, Vicki, Hardeep, and Betty Gill.

4. Conflux was an arts festival devoted to a psychogeographical mapping of Manhattan (see confluxfestival.org/conflux2008/).

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