

The Rhizomatic Relations of A/r/tography

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Abstract

A/r/tography is a form of practice-based research steeped in the arts and education. Alongside other arts based, arts informed and aesthetically defined methodologies, a/r/tography is one of many emerging forms of inquiry that refer to the arts as a way of re-searching the world to enhance understanding. Yet, it goes even further by recognizing the educative potential of teaching and learning as acts of inquiry. Together, the arts and education complement, resist, and echo one another through rhizomatic relations of living inquiry. In this paper, we demonstrate rhizomatic relations in an ongoing project entitled ‘The City of Richgate’ where meanings are constructed within ongoing a/r/tographic inquiries described as collective artistic and educational praxis. Rhizomatic relations do not seek conclusions and therefore, neither will this account. Instead, we explore a/r/tographical situations as methodological spaces for furthering living inquiry. In doing so, we invite the art education community to consider rhizomatic relations performed through a/r/tography as a politically informed methodology of situations.

A/r/tography is an arts and education practice based research methodology dedicated to acts of inquiry through the arts and writing (see Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Irwin & Springgay, accepted; Springgay, Irwin & Wilson Kind, 2005; Springgay, Irwin & Kind, in press)¹. The name itself exemplifies these features by setting art and graphy, and the identities of artist, researcher, and teacher (a/r/t), in contiguous relations². None of these features is privileged over another as they occur simultaneously in and through time and space. Moreover, the acts of inquiry and the three identities resist modernist categorizations and instead exist as post-structural conceptualizations of practice (for example Bickel, 2004; de Cosson, 2002, 2003). By emphasizing practice a shift occurs from questioning *who* an artist, researcher or educator might be, or *what* art, research or education is, to *when* is a person an artist, researcher or educator and *when* is an experience art, research or education (see Kingwell, 2005)? These are important distinctions for they reside in the rhizomatic relations of inquiry³.

In this article, we wish to describe a/r/tographical inquiry as a methodology of situations and to do this, we share the journey of a collaborative project undertaken by a group of artist, educator, researchers working with a

¹ We are indebted to other arts and education practitioners who are exploring and creating new forms of inquiry (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Barone 2000, 2001, 2003; Blumfield, 1995; Denzin, 1998; Donmoyer & Yennie-Donmoyer, 1995; Dunlop, 1999; Eisner, 1997; Eisner & Barone, 1997; Emme, 1999; Fels, 1999; Finley & Knowles, 1995; Gouzouasis & LaMonde, 2005; Leggo, 2004; Richardson, 2000; Saarnivaara, 2003; Sanders-Bustle, 2003; Slattery 2001; Sullivan 2004; Watrin, 1999; Weber & Mitchell, 1996).

² The slashes in a/r/tography (and other related words) purposefully illustrate a doubling of identities and concepts rather than a separation/bifurcation of ideas.

³ We wish to thank the reviewers for their thoughtful and insightful comments. They provoked us to write a stronger article and to consider other rhizomatic directions as we imagine the future of the project.

number of families in a nearby city. The project is entitled “The City of Richgate” and examines issues related to immigration, place, and community within an artistically oriented inquiry. Although the project itself would be of interest to the field of art education, this article is dedicated to the elaboration of a/r/tography as a methodology of situations. The project provides a way of elaborating upon a/r/tography as a methodology that provokes the creation of situations through inquiry, that responds to the evocative nature of situations found within data, and that provides a reflective and reflexive stance to situational inquiries. These situations are often found, created or ruptured within the rhizomatic nature of a/r/tography. It is on this basis that the article is premised: rhizomatic relationality is essential to a/r/tography as a methodology of situations.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) describe rhizomes metaphorically through the image of crabgrass that “connects any point to any other point” (p. 21) by growing in all directions. Through this image they stress the importance of the ‘middle’ by disrupting the linearity of beginnings and endings. After all, one fails to pursue a tangent if a particular line of thought is subscribed. Rhizomes resist taxonomies and create interconnected networks with multiple entry points. The metaphor of a map is another image they use to describe rhizomes for maps only have middles, with no beginnings and endings: they are always becoming. Deleuze and Guattari also suggest that once a map is grasped, tracings across the map need to occur in order to resist dualistic thinking. “By inspecting the breaks and ruptures that become invisible when the more stable tracing is laid upon the always becoming map, we are in a position to

construct new knowledge, rather than merely propagate the old” (Alverman, 2000, p. 117). In this way, maps *and* tracings work together to make connections that may not have been noticed through the phenomenon itself and/or the theoretical tangents. Rhizomes are interstitial spaces between thinking and materiality (see Meskimmon, 2003) where identities and in-between identities are open to transformations (see Grosz 2001) and people, locations and objects are always in the process of creation (see Hasebe-Ludt & Hurren, 2003; Pinar, under review; Wang 2004).

Rhizomatic relationality effects how we understand theory and practice, product and process. Theory is no longer an abstract concept but rather an embodied living inquiry, an interstitial relational space for creating, teaching, learning, and researching in a constant state of becoming (see also Britzman, 2003). For a/r/tographers this means theorizing through inquiry, a process that involves an evolution of questions. This active stance to knowledge creation informs a/r/tographers’ practices making their inquiries emergent, generative, reflexive and responsive (de Cosson et. al., in press; 2003; Sinner 2004). Moreover, products and processes are conceived as relational. Process is an act of invention rather than interpretation where concepts emerge from social engagements and encounters (Darts, 2004; Dias & Sinkinson, 2005; Springgay, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005). Theorizing and practicing are verbs that emphasize the need for being in the process of producing (Irwin, in press, 2003, 2004b; Springgay & Irwin 2004). This move toward destabilizing concepts, objects, and identities is also found in contemporary art discourse where ‘site’ as a fixed geographical concept has moved to a relational concept re-imagined as a ‘situation’ within political, economic, cultural and social processes. In

contemporary educational discourse ‘sites of learning’ are re-imagined as ‘places in process’ (see Lai & Ball, 2002) or ‘pedagogies of place’ set within political, economic, cultural, ecological and social processes (Gruenewald, 2003). For a/r/tographers, situations are related to pedagogies of place through a commitment to disrupting binaries (e.g. private and public or neither) by complicating understandings as relational, singular and rhizomatic. Situated practices emphasize “experience as a state of flux which acknowledges place as a shifting and fragmented entity” (Doherty, 2004, p. 10). Moreover, relational aesthetics works to erode marginalization as the role of artist is shifted to become a facilitator, mediator and/or creative contributor within a community.

In the following accounts we share with you our rhizomatic journey through an a/r/tographical project entitled *The City of Richgate*.⁴ We begin with a prelude (a way of imagining situations) that offers insights into how we first conceptualized the project. We then introduce an interlude on a/r/tographical praxis that reaches throughout the project before introducing an interlude on a/r/tography as a methodology of situations. Though the prelude shares the conceptualizations that occurred in order to receive funding, the interludes and situations are not written in any chronological order. Situations may seem to occur chronologically but they are rhizomatic. Learning/creating/inquiring in, from, through, and with situations occurs in the in-between spaces: those spaces that make connections that are often unanticipated. As a result, their timing cannot be planned either. Situations are complex spatial and temporal processes that reach beyond linear and binary ways of understanding the world. The tentative postlude reinforces the importance

⁴ We wish to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for their generous support of our research program entitled “*The City of Richgate: Research and Creation into Community-Engaged Arts Practices*” (2004-2007).

of situations to a/r/tography by summarizing the politically informed nature of collective artistic and educational praxis. While our work is written in a linear fashion here, out of publishing necessity, we encourage the reader to engage with the work as a rhizome by moving in and out, and around the work, making connections in a personal way.

A/r/tography: A Methodology of Situations

Prelude to a Situation: The City of Richgate

The 'City of Rich Gate' comes from the translated Chinese and Japanese names for the City of Richmond⁵. For Chinese immigrants, the City of Rich Gate represents an ideological dream of a better place than their own homeland. The idea of wealth is an integral part of the early history of Chinese in Canada. During the "Gold Rush," Chinese immigrants arrived in North America to find a "Gold Mountain;" however, this was only a dream. What awaited the Chinese railway workers in the Rocky Mountains was hard labour and often death. By 2003, the Chinese immigrant population in Richmond rose to 46% of the total population. Under globalization Richmond is the gate to the Pacific region. Migrating individuals pass through its airport everyday: new immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China arrive searching for an opportunity to gain wealth and lead a better life. In turn, they've built Richmond as a new "Chinatown" - a geographically and culturally hybrid place. Yet Richmond is more than a new Chinatown. It has a rich history of immigration from many other countries in the world, most notably, those in the Pacific

⁵ Richmond is a suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia and is the site of the Vancouver International Airport Terminal.

Rim, India, Europe, Scandinavia, and the USA. Each brings their cultural traditions with them and each has contributed to the city in important ways.

The City of Richmond is a city still considered a frontier town in many ways, replete with unresolved confrontations, on the edge of the continent, on the verge of a new beginning, separated psychologically from the rest of Canada by the Rocky Mountains, bordering on the American northwest, and poised on the Pacific Rim. The City of Richmond is situated in the delta of the Fraser River and is comprised of two main islands and 15 other islands built up and shaped by the river. The city's history is rooted in fishing, agriculture, shipping and aviation with the airport forming an important gateway to the Pacific Rim. In the constantly shifting definition of this place, the displacement of the native people, the history of settlement by Europeans, and the immigration of people from non-European cultures play key roles. In the past two decades, the source of immigration of people to British Columbia has shifted from Europe to Asia. Immigrants from these countries and elsewhere offer the Canadian economy and culture another rich layer to its diversity. In British Columbia society and elsewhere, "the language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel [maintain/revive/invent] a connection with a prior home" (Clifford, 1997, p. 255). Safran (1991) describes the main features of diasporic collective experiences: "a history of dispersal, myths or memories of the homeland, alienation in the host country, desire for eventual return, on going support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" (cited in Clifford, 1997, p. 247). Broadly interpreted, elements of this description apply to many residents of British Columbia, who have in common a history of dispersal and displacement: their connection with a

prior home is strong enough “to resist erasure through the normalizing processes of forgetting, assimilating and distancing” (p. 255). For these individuals, experiences of “loss, marginality and exile reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement” coexist “with the skills of survival... strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal” (p. 256). Diasporic consciousness is thus constituted both negatively “by experiences of discrimination and exclusion” and positively “through identification with world-historical, cultural, or political forces” (p. 256). Considered from an upbeat or assured perspective, diaspora culture can be seen to celebrate the good fortune of being [Canadian] differently, of feeling global, of being able to shuttle between worlds/cultures/locations (Sontag & Dugger, 1998). Diaspora consciousness affects an increasing number of people in British Columbia and elsewhere, bringing with it new definitions of nationhood and nationality. In fact, as Clifford (1997) claims, being unfixed in geography and in static cultures is the experience of most people. Site, home, location, can be more than one place, and more likely somewhere in between.

Detouring from notions of consensus and generalization, we examine the contingencies of individual and community experience from particular situated and located points of view (Haraway, 1991) by moving away from finite visions of a fixed map or portrait to a way of seeing through pedagogical visual experiences that are interactive and dynamic while nurturing an understanding of relationships between people, objects or places (Ellsworth, 2005). These ways of seeing are best described as journeys rather than static ideas isolated from their world (Clifford, 1997; Kwon, 2002).

We began our a/r/tographical study by posing two introductory questions: What artistic products might be created through a community-engaged process examining the Chinese-Canadian experience in the City of Richmond, a geographically and culturally hybrid place? What is brought forward from a prior place in immigrant or diasporic culture and how is that culture and memory transformed and maintained through identity, place and community (see Beer 1999)? As will become evident in the interludes and situations below, these questions evolved into new yet related questions. This is an important distinction between a/r/tographic work and many other forms of research. Whereas traditional forms of research formulate specific questions to be answered, a/r/tographic inquiry emphasizes the process of inquiry and therefore questions evolve as the shifting relationality found within the project informs the direction of the inquiry. In addition to this, a/r/tography encourages all those involved to become a/r/tographers (the extent to which suits their practices) and begins with the intention to create art and write for dissemination. Art making and writing are closely linked to the process of inquiry and continuous questioning. Thus questioning through inquiry is set in motion and the rhizomatic conditions for a methodology of situations emerges.

An Interlude about A/r/tographic Praxis

Although each of us knew of one another before this project began, we had never worked together. Through a sequence of events, inspired by the newly instituted Research Creation grants through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, we came together to imagine a project that brought forward our mutual interests and strengths. In choosing a focus we explored ideas in cultural studies, visual culture,

a/r/tography, adolescent culture, educational change, community-engaged practices, and other ideas before arriving at the project briefly outlined in the prelude. All of us were artists and educators interested in collaborative inquiry and we felt we had a focus for our deliberations. Yet, it wasn't as simple as that. Upon receipt of the funding, challenges began to emerge. Some of these challenges were resolved while others have persisted. Throughout this interlude we describe the process of the project and interject with the challenges we faced. These challenges are inevitable in an a/r/tographic inquiry for a/r/tographers recognize the need to pay attention to tangents, to interruptions, and to unsettling conversations. Furthermore, it was through rhizomatic challenges that we were forced to face our underlying assumptions and beliefs before redirecting the inquiry in ways we hadn't anticipated. We were beginning to learn that the rhizomatic nature of a/r/tography offers a methodology of situations.

The title of our project came when Gu Xiong, a Chinese Canadian, shared with us that the translation for Richmond into Chinese was 'The City of Richgate.' Given the demographics of Richmond, we felt Chinese families should be emphasized in our project but we appreciated how other cultural groups should also be represented. Our first challenge was to locate immigrant families who would consider joining our project. We contacted the Richmond Art Gallery and worked with them to offer a community symposium entitled "The Lay of the Land: Looking at a Changing Land through Geography, Immigration and the Creative Impulse⁶". This event was advertised in local English and Chinese newspapers. The symposium addressed issues of demographics, geography, history, immigration and art as they are related to landscape and changing

⁶ October 29, 2004.

cities. Two members of our research team gave presentations on their artworks at the symposium. At the end of this event we introduced the project to those in attendance and invited them to contact the gallery if they were interested in working with us. Gallery staff, acting as our interlocutor, provided the participants with the ethical review forms required by our University. This event and its related publicity brought forward four families who were interested in working on the project. Though we knew we wanted to work with intergenerational immigrant families, we also knew that as a/r/tographers we needed to position ourselves within the project. We needed to examine our relationships with the City of Richmond, our stories of immigration, and our relationships with our families. We challenged ourselves to question the apparent lack of a representative sampling of ethnicities among the participants and our relationship with the participants. The four families that came forward represented three Chinese families and one Estonian family and though they did not represent the range of ethnicities in the city, we agreed that their self-nomination defined our research community.

While these challenges were being met, we also questioned our positioning in the project. As a/r/tographers, we knew we needed to pursue our own artistic and pedagogical inquiry within the project. Each of us began to imagine how our relationships with the City of Richmond could offer rhizomatic connections for our project. We soon realized that two members of the research team had very strong connections with the City of Richmond even though neither currently lived in the city. It was decided that we would include these two families in our research community. We hoped this would strengthen our connections with the other families. Although this decision proved successful in developing rapport it also caused some confusion as to the

focus of the project and it caused us to think about power relations. How could we ensure all families felt equally included in the decisions? Was this even possible? As a/r/tographers, we came to the project with a facility in education and art. Only one of the other family members had a background in art and education. What power could the families have in the project? These questions would cause us to be more reflective and reflexive as the project progressed since the complexity of the project demanded this level of awareness.

We believed that one benefit of the project was the chance to be represented as a member of the Richmond community and as a Canadian. We hoped the families would be interested in having their stories and their project artifacts kept in the city archives. Although most city archives maintain a library of the most important events and people in the community they are open to collecting other materials from the community. We believed that sharing the stories (interview transcripts and other materials collected and created during the project) of immigrant families was a valuable contribution to the archives. This turned out to be important to each of the families.

We now had six families⁷ (representing several generations) to work with us on our a/r/tographic inquiry. Over the next six months, we interviewed each family several times and collected images they believed represented their journeys. These interviews could be characterized as conversational interviews as the focus was intentionally broad

⁷ We wish to thank our families for their participation in this project. Their contributions have been incredibly important. The Chinese families include: 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.

and allowed for an emergence of ideas. Though we first envisioned one or two interviews (about 2 hours in length), the result depended upon the family. Some wanted to share more with us than could be covered in two sittings (and thus three or four were needed) while others pre-selected what they wanted to share and two visits were enough. While visiting the families, we took our own photographs of their homes and family members and kept our own fieldnotes reflecting upon our observations and engagements, yet we also collected many photographs and memorabilia the families wished to share. We also held large group gatherings for all of the families every two to three months. At these gatherings, the families were able to meet one another and through dialogue began to form community linkages. Meanwhile, as the university-based researchers, we discussed what we were learning, started to create collaborative artworks, and read theoretical work related to the project. If the families wanted to pursue these lines of inquiry with us they were encouraged to do so, and in fact, two of the families became very involved in our collaborative art project. Initially we had hoped the families would become a/r/tographers in ways that suited their interests. This turned out to be a challenge. One could claim that some family members worked a/r/tographically alongside the university-based a/r/tographers as they collaborated on the creation of art, told their stories and examined some difficult issues but the commitment to a/r/tography remained with those times in which they were engaged with the university-based researchers.

In keeping with the intention of the Research Creation grant program we wanted to create works of art coming from our a/r/tographic inquiry. With Gu Xiong's connections to China, and with some of our families having extended family in China, we decided to create an exhibition that would first travel to China before being shown in

Canada. Furthermore, one Chinese university where (Gu Xiong had worked before immigrating to Canada) was hosting a ‘Canada month’ and invited us to show our work. Knowing we would be exhibiting the work at one university, we pursued personal connections at another university that lead to another opportunity to exhibit our work. More importantly, however, was the fact that both sites were close to extended family members (two families in Chongqing and two families in Beijing). This allowed us an opportunity to engage with the extended families as a way of learning about their families, their understandings of immigration, and their reactions to the visual stories of their family members.

Conceptualizing The City of Richgate exhibition inspired many rhizomatic possibilities as the university-based researchers reviewed the data and imagined possibilities for creating art. One metaphor stood out: the metaphor of gates representing each family with a collection of gates representing a flow of immigration, a marking of place, identity and transformation, and a city of (rich) *gates*. As the university researchers we may have chosen the symbol of gates but the families supported it. In a gathering of all of the families, the exhibition plan was presented and discussed. Families were willing to work with us even if they were not confident as artists themselves. As the process unfolded large image-based gates (outside scale: 12’ wide x 12’ high with each individual banner being 3’ wide) were created for each family. Each gate portrays one family’s experiences of immigration or profound change. Each tells a visual narrative of a family’s struggles to understand an adopted homeland, and, in a broader sense, the implications of dual/multiple cultures and past/present dimensions on identity, place and community. Creating the gates as a collaborative effort was often challenging. Being careful not to

expect more of the families than they wished to provide, we attempted to balance time commitments with decision-making. Working together, families and artists made decisions on the images to be portrayed on each gate based on the story to be told and the aesthetic features to be emphasized. When families could not be involved the decision rested with the artists though the families were consulted.

As the university-based researchers, we came together on a regular basis throughout the inquiry to engage in collaborative discussions. This often meant reading and analyzing interview transcripts, as well as literary or theoretical texts. Whenever possible, it included an engagement with current art exhibitions or contemporary artists and their works. It also meant a collaborative interdependent engagement around the development of ideas for in this project, art had a social purpose and education was about social understanding. A/r/tography is based in relational aesthetics, relational learning, and relational inquiring. Relationships are not free of tension. Together we planned, changed plans, learned and relearned. It was often in these dialogical collaborative spaces that surprisingly rich connections and ruptures happened.

When we first conceptualized this project, we envisioned a community of families very engaged in our collective efforts. Yet as the project evolved, it became apparent that most of the families wanted some involvement while others preferred less. Typically one member of the family had more energy for the project than others. Where we once envisioned a community-engaged project we realized the project evolved into a 'working with a community' project. While we were determined to establish rapport with the families we also needed to recognize our own illusions. We questioned our complicity, that is, how our assumptions, actions, beliefs, and practices could have created this

different orientation (see also David & Rogoff, 2004; Doherty, 2004). We also began to realize the significance of situations to the rhizomatic relationality of a/r/tography. In a ‘working with a community’ project, when is a person an artist, researcher and/or educator? In other words, how can a/r/tographers work with others who are not a/r/tographers as they pursue their inquiries? These questions brought us to the work of Kwon (2002, p. 154) who talks about the impossibility of community, that is, the impossibility of total coherence within a social grouping or institution. Many community-based art projects are “understood as a *descriptive* practice in which the community functions as a referential social entity.... In contrast, collective artistic praxis... is a *projective* enterprise” (italics in original; p. 154). A collective artistic praxis resonates with our work for it begins in special circumstances created by a group of artist-educators aware of the social conditions and allowing for the “coming together and coming apart as a necessarily incomplete modeling or working-out of a collective social process. Here, a coherent representation of the group’s identity is always out of grasp” (p. 154). We could only be a community if we questioned our legitimacy as a community. For Kwon this necessitates a “redefining [of] community-based art as collective artistic praxis” (p. 155). Working with the families, we were working with an invented community through a collective artistic and educational praxis known as a/r/tography. Our coming together and coming apart marked situational turning points in our methodology and lead us to seeing a/r/tography as a methodology of situations.

An Interlude about A/r/tography as a Methodology of Situations

A/r/tography is a living inquiry of unfolding artforms⁸ and text that intentionally unsettles perception and complicates understandings through its rhizomatic relationality. In so doing, space and time are understood in different ways. In the visual arts, rhizomatic relations can be seen in shifting relations between artists, art productions and their locations, and audience involvement. For several decades many artists have been interested in site-specific work and more recently have become concerned with adaptations to this idea through site-determined, site-oriented, site-referenced, site-responsive, and site related works (Kwon, 2002). Each of these conceptualizations is concerned with a relationship between the artwork and its site, that is, how the creation, presentation, and reception of an artwork is situated in the physical conditions of a particular location. Yet, as Miwon Kwon (2002) argues, the term “site” needs to be re/imagined beyond a particular location if we are to understand the complexity of the unstable relationship between location and identity. In this sense, “sites” are not geographically bound, but informed by context, where “context [is] an impetus, hindrance, inspiration and research subject for the process of making art” (Doherty, 2004, p. 8). This relational understanding is constituted through social, economic, cultural and political processes in what Nicholas Bourriaud (2001, 2002, 2004) calls *relational aesthetics*. Like Kwon and Bourriaud, Clare Doherty (2004) contends that “site-specific” art or “situations” encourage processes and outcomes marked by social engagements that effectively change conventional relationships between artists, artworks, and audiences. As Bourriaud states: “The forms that [the artist] presents to the public [does] not constitute an artwork until they are actually used and occupied by people” (2004, p. 46).

⁸ Though any artform may be performed or produced in a/r/tography, for the purpose of this paper, visual forms are emphasized.

Rather than simply interpreting art, audience members become analyzers or interlocutors. In many instances audiences are actually called to a specific time and place where they become active participants in the artwork and thus argues Bourriaud (2004) alternative modes of sociality are created.

The City of Richgate installation was exhibited at two universities in China: Southwest Normal University (SNU in Chongqing)⁹ and Beijing Normal University (BNU)¹⁰. Though all of the gates were exhibited at each site, they were not designed for either site nor were they exhibited in similar ways. We were aware of the circular format for the first gallery but unaware of what was possible in the latter site. As each exhibition was installed, decisions were made based upon aesthetics, institutional concerns, and professional relationships. Fortunately, extended family members of two families represented by our gates visited the exhibition.

At Southwest Normal University (see Figure 1 and Figure 2) hundreds of people attended the exhibit and asked questions related to Canadian lifestyles, economics, and cultural representation. Those in the arts were interested in the use of photography, our interest in the everyday lives of family members, and the format of the gates. People passed through, around, between, and by the gates. People lingered with each pondering their meanings. The reverse side of each gate, softened by the whitened veils of the transparent images, evoked other reactions to the strong photographic images on the other side.

⁹ Southwest Normal University has been renamed since our exhibition. It is now Chongqing Normal University.

¹⁰ Both exhibitions took place in June 2005.

[Place Figures 1 and 2 about here (see appendix for the images)]

What was taken for granted at Southwest Normal University was tested at Beijing Normal University. With our first location being inadequate at BNU we set out to find another location. We found another site in the senior administrative building which allowed us to suspend the gates from a fourth floor walkway into a large open concourse (see Figure 3). The result was an exhibition structure that gave the illusion of an even larger gate like structure. This was further exemplified in the architecture of the building itself being reminiscent of an imposing gate. Individuals witnessing the exhibit passed under the gates while looking up through the gates, around the gates and past the gates. Those in attendance asked about our families, Canada as a country, and our standard of living in Canada, immigration, and perhaps most importantly, they wanted to practice their English language.

[Place Figure 3 about here (see appendix for the image)]

The circumstances around the BNU exhibition were politically fraught with administrative concern while the SNU exhibition, in a university gallery, was free of such concerns. At BNU every level of university governance was called upon to secure permission for the exhibition and in the end, we were allowed to exhibit the show for three days over a weekend when few people could see the show¹¹. At SNU the exhibit was up for a week, with hundreds of visitors, and could have stayed much longer had our

¹¹ Gu Xiong and a Chinese administrator on site explained this situation to us.

schedule permitted. Alternative modes of sociality were created at each site and each site created its own complex situation. As a/r/tographers we came to understand these complexities as situations for inquiry. One art exhibition taken to two places in one country brought about completely different engagements and reactions. Other questions in our inquiry emerged: Was the result an art/education exhibition, a political statement about immigrating to Canada, and/or an invitation to consider the lives of extended families in two countries? How did the exhibition influence the thinking of those in attendance?

To some our work at BNU was seen as politically charged. For others, it was an opportunity to meet English-speaking individuals with whom one could practice their English. At SNU, many people were engaged with the images in thoughtful and often pedagogical ways while others questioned the installation as art. And almost certainly, these dichotomous descriptions are overly simplified for there were some similar reactions at each site. As a/r/tographers, we realized the exhibitions created methodological situations for inquiry.

Upon our return to Canada, we attempted to map out our a/r/tographic journey. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, maps are a good metaphor for rhizomes for they only have middles with no beginnings or endings. In mapping our process we could see how relational inquiry was important to the project whether it was represented in the chronological history of the project, the networking of individuals within and outside the project, the story telling of times past, present or envisioned for the future, and the sharing of images as a way of understanding experience. As we traced some of these pathways, we came upon visible and invisible ruptures and connections. The

interruptions formed important situational turning points. For instance, one situational turning point occurred in the conversational interviews. Each immigrant family came to Canada for different reasons: education for their children or themselves; economics; a better quality of life; the clean air and beautiful country; political reasons; the western culture. Common themes did not emerge¹² with the exception that the political affects the personal and both the personal and political are important. This was a situational turning point because many of the reasons surprised us. We needed to shift our understandings of individual immigrants. We had to face our stereotypical views. It was also a turning point because we began to recognize the transnational identities some of the Chinese immigrants held. Several lived in Richmond and Beijing, and although several others lived in both countries they belonged to neither for they were transnationals. They belonged to a new identity that surpassed borders: “a sense of belonging that is not bound to any specific location but to a ‘system of movement’ ” (Kwon, 2004, p. 38).

Furthermore, we had to recognize that families were reticent to share some experiences or difficult issues. Because project members were not anonymous, some difficult issues could not be broached. Yet, in spite of this, much was shared. This was especially evident when we shared our experiences in China upon our return to Canada. The families were curious as to the reactions of their extended families and the general public, as well as the institutions and didn't question our interpretation of the events.

While our Chinese families were proud to have their gates on display in their country of birth they were also proud to be represented as both Canadians and Chinese. They interpreted the gates to metaphorically represent openings and closings, transitions

¹² The constant comparative method was used for analysis.

and transformations. Members of their extended families were less interested in the gates as objects and more interested in their visual stories. The gates became invitations to witness their relative's new lives, their standard of living, their prosperity and their accomplishments. The gates represented storied lives lived elsewhere. Yet not all family members were interested in the image or idea of gates. Those adults who immigrated to Canada appreciated the metaphor of the gate but their children (adolescents and early twenties) envisioned different metaphors such as virtual spaces (the web or the internet). We hope to pursue the children's perspectives in future inquiries for recognizing the intergenerational differences have caused another situational turning point, another rhizome.

Working through a collective artistic and educational praxis, we have come to appreciate the interruptions and surprises that have lead to situational turning points. A/r/tography as a methodology of situations is steeped in divergent rhizomatic relationalities that questions assumptions and invites new understandings of collaboration. The City of Richgate project continues. We have moved into the next phase. We've added families of different ethnicities and are finalizing their gates. We have also collected stories and images of significant sites in Richmond for each family and we are planning several collective artistic and educational praxis events that could occur a year from now. The situations derived from the rhizomatic relationalities discussed in this article have caused us to challenge our assumptions and directions, and each time emergent understandings have taken us to another level of awareness.

A Tentative Postlude within an Ongoing Inquiry

For educators Terrance Carson and Dennis Sumara (1997) the meaning of images and texts is contingent upon the relationships between and among artist, art work, text, and audience as well as the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts, and the ways these relations are altered by what Derrida (1978) calls the “as yet unnamable which begins to proclaim itself” (p. 293). Thus, relationality is more than the contexts in which situations occur but rather the potentialities that constantly evolve and provoke meaning [insert author name here].

By pausing for a tentative postlude within our ongoing a/r/tographic project, we are recognizing the rhizomatic nature of our inquiry. With rhizomatic form, this article becomes another situation in the journey. It is an event or an encounter with multiplicities that dislodges fixed ways of perceiving the world and offers us emergent ideas and perceptions that re/creates multiplicities (see Roy, 2003). Though a preferred rhizomatic composition would have offered simultaneous admittance to the prelude, interlude and each situation, what remains possible now is a re/visiting in rhizomatic fashion. A re/consideration of this article may then echo the kinds of dialogic and rhizomatic connections or ruptures found among those involved in the project as well as the ideas that have emerged. Instead of preconceived coherence the emphasis becomes a methodology of situations.

What does this teach us about a/r/tography? While much has been written in a/r/tography about the need for autobiographical inquiry (Irwin, 2003; 2004a; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) more needs to be written about the challenges and insights gained through collective artistic and educational praxis. The City of Richgate project has underscored the political nature of a/r/tography as a methodology of situations created through

rhizomatic relations. These situations are challenges to the power relations between and among a/r/tographers, all those involved in the project and the contexts in which the projects are shared. These situations acknowledge the difficulties in sharing that which has not been revealed before. And, these situations enable the political to occur. For without a/r/tographical inquiry, some of these situations may never have occurred. A/r/tography is, after all, a methodology that inspires situational inquiry through rhizomatic relations.

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