

The Graduate School of Education
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SPECIAL ISSUE

A/r/tography and the Visual Arts

Volume 3 | Issue 1 | 2013

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Guest Editors *Rita L. Irwin*
Anita Sinner

Editor
Associate Editor
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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner

THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

Becoming a Crossroads: An a/r/tographic journey in the borderlands

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ABSTRACT

A/r/tographical writings frequently focus on research, methods and art making. This article considers the nature of the in-between spaces in a/r/tography, as represented by the /, and how borderland theories and pedagogies inform this understanding. Since dwelling betwixt and between the identities of the artist, teacher, researcher and a/r/tographer can be ambiguous, attention is brought to this journey through dialogue. These dialogues are interruptions to the thoughts being expressed in the other parts of this article and as a result may force the reader to feel slightly confused or alienated. This alienation is intended and in a similar spirit to Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre "A effect" in which he purposely uses techniques in his work to keep his audience from passively engaging in his theatrical productions. Thus, the transitions between dialogue and other text in this paper may be choppy or uncomfortable for the reader. However, just as this paper explores the tensions of learning to dwell in the in-between, the function of these transitions are to remind the reader that most journeys are indeed full of disruptions, bumps and roadblocks. In this sense, the objective of this paper is not only to describe the in between spaces in a/r/tography, it is also to help the reader to experience the sometimes frustrating realities of a journey in the in-between. Becoming a crossroads, is the metaphor devised by the author to remind herself and the reader that by trying to sit with the unknown or uncomfortable, illumination might occur.

KEYWORDS

Borderlands, A/r/tography, Crossroads, Becoming, Arts Based Research

CONSIDERING THE TERRAIN

In William Pinar's foreword to the first a/r/tography book called *A/r/tography: Rendering Self through Arts-based Living Inquiry* (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) there is a discussion about the way(s) that the artist-researcher-teacher is given the space to dwell within in-between spaces that "...are neither this nor that, but this and that" (Pinar, 2004, p.9). These dwelling places are described throughout this text as: traversable spaces and boundaries; moments of praxis where making and thinking merge; and as movements within margins of intelligence and theory. These dwelling places are also connected and integrated to and with the artist-teacher-researcher identities as places that link one identity to another. This understanding seems to necessitate spending time with the nuances of the artist, teacher, researcher and their related in-between's in order to understand the emotional, spiritual, intellectual and physical relationships that exist within and beside such relations.

Rita Irwin explains this perspective as dialectical where "...categories of thought (are viewed) as being in equal relationship to one another, thereby allowing the inherent concepts to vibrate constantly with active energy" (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004, p.28). When one understands the relationship of the artist-teacher-researcher and the connections between as dialectical, the sense of living multiple identities through borderland spaces that connote liberating the individual from a certain fixed identity that might potentially stigmatize or oppresses seems attractive. It might also suggest that one has an understanding of what it means to be an a/r/tographer.

However, when one is first confronted with what it means to be an a/r/tographer or to work a/r/tographically I feel that there is a process of understanding, questioning and inquiring that takes place in order to fully comprehend and embrace this way of being. In this article, I seek to articulate the process of understanding that takes place within the liminal spaces between the identities of the artist, teacher and researcher in order to represent my own understanding of what it means to be an a/r/tographer or to work a/r/tographically. In order to represent this ongoing internal conversation as a journey of understanding, the conversations between my artist, teacher and researcher-selves are represented in the body of this paper and are bookended by information that helps to explain the purpose of this approach. The related tensions that result from these ongoing dialogues and the more traditionally academic text

are a part of the learning that is being explored when trying to develop an academic and a/r/tographic voice.

These explorations are differentiations that exist between what it means to become an a/r/tographer and to work in the in-between spaces; and are underrepresented areas of research in my readings and writings on a/r/tography (Bickel, 2004; Bickel, 2005; Carter, 2010; Carter, Beare, Belliveau & Irwin, 2011; Carter, 2012; Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Leavy, 2009; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo & Gouzouasis, 2008; Winters, Belliveau, Sheritt, 2009). Typically, in theoretical writings on a/r/tography there is a focus on articulating what it means to be an artist, a teacher and a researcher dwelling in an in between space, but not on the synthesis of these parts into a reconstituted whole. *Thus in order to extend the theoretical underpinnings of the a/r/tographic in between and the merging of the artist-teacher-researcher into a/r/tographer, I will investigate how border theorists (Anzaldúa, 1987; Carter, 2012; Dias, 2006; Elenes, 1997; Giroux, 2005; Mignolo, 2000; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006; Naples, 2009; Orzoco-Mendoza, 2008; Urch, Dorn & Abraham, 1995; Vila, 2003) understand identity construction in order to understand their articulation of being a crossroads and the implications of this understanding for a/r/tography.* The reason for turning to the inter and multi-disciplinary border theories to understand the a/r/tographic in between is that these theories are focused on an individual's shift in identity in relationship with an academic community and oftentimes artist-teachers who are interested in a/r/tographic explorations experience a similar shift in identity (Bickel, 2004; Bickel, 2005; Carter, 2012).

INTER-TEXTUAL DIALOGUE

In *Collective Playbuilding: Using Arts-based Research to Understand a Social Justice Drama Process in Teacher Education*, George Belliveau (2006) uses a play within a paper format to present his data findings as a methodology to investigate the learning process within a teaching practicum. I have also previously employed a similar method in *The Teacher Monologues: An A/r/t/ographical Exploration* (2010) as a way to represent “the meaning making that happens either within the moment of action, within an artistic activity, or upon reflection and sharing with others” (Belliveau, 2006, p.11). Thus, using inter-textual dialogue is not about creating a stand-alone aesthetically pleasing piece of art within an academic paper. Rather, as the above Belliveau quote articulates, this form of representation focuses on using conversations between characters within a piece of academic writing to express the journey of coming to know.

Consequently, as a way to understand and represent both artistic and educational contexts I have chosen to describe my research intentions and approach at the beginning and end of this paper and then to use inter-textual dialogue to highlight the importance of process and inquiry in meaning making as it relates to the theoretical understandings of the in between in the body. By including inter-textual dialogues beside expository writings, I am attempting to live the a/r/tographic resonances or dialectic vibrations (Irwin, 2004) that I am seeking to articulate and understand. The “characters” in the inter-textual conversations include:

A/R/TOGRAPHER:

The individual who seeks to bridge rather than divide the work of the artist, researcher and teacher by using a/r/tography (a form of arts-based research within educational research) to integrate and define simultaneously the distinctions of these three identities by dwelling in /'d or liminal spaces. A/r/tographers do not strictly adhere to traditional qualitative methodologies that state research questions and then seek to answer them explicitly. Rather, a/r/tographers use all aspects of qualitative research to allow them to theorize and learn as they go. This means that research is viewed as a continual evolving situated and active process that leads to deep learning. (Irwin, 2010 in Kridel Ed.)

ARTIST:

The artist is the a/r/tographer but is represented as a different character in this study. This choice is made in order to deepen the understanding of the data in the study and as a means of focusing on particular creative and artistic conversations that arise.

TEACHER:

Like the artist, the teacher is also the a/r/tographer but represented separately in order to consider specifically the point of view of the educator in this work.

RESEARCHER:

The researcher represents the a/r/tographer’s “research self” and is also represented by a separate character.

Border epistemologies

The primacy of identity, however conceived, defines the world of representation. But modern thought is born of the failure of representation, of the loss of identities, and of the discovery that...all identities are only simulated, produced as an optical effect by the more profound game of difference and repetition. We propose to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation that reduce it to the Same, and the relation of different to different.

(Deleuze, 1994, p. xix)

(F)or scholars doing border studies from the Mexican side of the line, it is difficult to see the border as mere metaphor, as the epitomized possibility of crossings, hybrids, and the like.

(Vila, 2003, p. 312-3)

When referring to the borderlands' scholarship there are several differentiations and specifications that need to be stated in order to define the exact way in which this reference is and will continue to be used. For example, since borderland studies are inter and multi-disciplinary, contemporary trends in borderlands studies and border theory (Anzaldúa, 1987; Carter, 2012; Dias, 2006; Elenes, 1997; Giroux, 2005; Mignolo, 2000; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006; Naples, 2009; Orzoco-Mendoza, 2008; Urch, Dorn & Abraham, 1995; Vila, 2003) have influences from areas such as geography, art, political science, sociology, anthropology, economics and feminism. Benefits of multiple disciplines engaging with borderland theory and scholarship include creating bridges across disciplines that allow collaborative problem-solving to occur in relation to the social and political issues that often permeate this work. However, there are also significant problems with using this theory in such diverse ways. Pablo Vila (2003) has argued that it is precisely because "border theory now takes as its object of inquiry any physical or psychic space about which it is possible to address problems of boundaries: borders among different countries, borders among ethnicities within the United States, borders between genders, borders among disciplines, and the like" (308) that this approach has become homogenizing.

This statement does not necessarily mean that scholars should not use border theory in border studies (or any other area), but it does require that one conscientiously and considerately do so since there are also challenges to prevailing assumptions that border studies can only occur where Mexico and the United States meet. My gaze first turned to the borderlands from the perspective of critical pedagogy where, according to C. Alejandra Elenes (1997 in Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003), the borderlands were a way to advance the construction of progressive educational discourses by deconstructing notions of identity, culture and difference (p.206). In this text, the borderlands were described as "the discourse of people who live between different worlds. It speaks against dualism, oversimplification, and essentialism. It is a discourse, a language, that explains the social conditions of subjects with hybrid identities" (Elenes, 1997 in Darder et al., 2003, p. 191). This institutionalization of border theory in the academy, where scholars influenced by Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) work view borderlands as sites that can enable those dwelling there to negotiate the contradictions found in diverse settings (Naples, 2009), seemed logical to apply to my own thinking. Gloria Anzaldúa added her voice to the writings of the borderlands

(artistic, geographical and conceptual) when she published *Borderlands* (1987). In order to represent her multiple and sometimes competing identities, she did not present her work in a linear form and instead constructed meaning in a hybrid way using narrative, poetry, storytelling, theory and music as a way to speak about in-between spaces, contradictions etc.

Artist: Hey, this sounds a lot like working a/r/tographically. How come a/r/tographers never talk about this uncanny connection?

A/r/tographer: That's what I was thinking earlier...I don't know why exactly though... maybe because it is such a new method of research. But, you're right to point out that while there are references to the borderlands in order to understand the a/r/tographic in between, there isn't much a/r/tographical literature that acknowledges and discusses how borderland theory and border pedagogy inform this work.

Researcher: Hey...who started writing me into here? Whoah---and stop writing down what I'm saying. What's going on?

A/r/tographer: We're representing our process of understanding some work about the borderlands in order to understand a/r/tography. Remember?

Researcher: Of course I remember but...(she whispers)...I didn't think it meant I would be....c'mon---erase that...and this... and...I don't want everything I say written down... stop that I said!

Artist: (Laughs). We all agreed on this approach and this is what it means so we all have to participate...

Researcher: (Goes to speak but then decides against it and rolls her eyes at artist instead).

Artist: So anyway. I thought I could start our conversation off with a quotation from Anzaldua's work. Here goes. (She reads from Anzaldua, 1987 with gusto): The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the southwest. In fact, the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where the lower, middle and upper classes touch (Preface).

(Researcher and Artist stare at one another almost face-to-face...it appears that there will be an extended period of silence until Teacher jumps in:)

Teacher: Come on you two...this is supposed to be fun. Now listen, since we're talking about the borderlands and a/r/tography I thought I would mention that Belidson Dias (2006) talks about Walter Mignolo's (2000) notions of border epistemology in his PhD dissertation (which is a/r/tographic). In this work he develops border epistemologies as an act of decolonization of knowledge as developing an "other" thinking that displaces binary notions of self in relation to queer theories and film studies. I think that this whole idea of binary categories is applicable for us and...

Researcher: (Interrupting) O.K...So, obviously you are trying to say that the very notion of a border implies that people construct binary categories in which one notion of the self gets privileged over another...we get it.

Artist: Hey—if you have a problem with me don't take it out on her.

Researcher: What are you talking about? Seriously---can this be off the record?

(They continue despite this request)

Artist: Well, it just seems like you like the boundary between us and when I try and co-create meaning with you either reject what I represent or try and make me feel uncomfortable.

Researcher: I'm sorry YOU feel that way. I assure YOU that I am simply trying to reverse the colonization that has been passed onto me. (She exits)

Artist: (Under her breath) By trying to reassert yourself to me as an oppressor.

Researcher: (Realizing there is no where to exit, she returns) It seems like representing this process or border thinking (conocimiento fornterizo) (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006) is going to be harder to implement than I thought...or maybe it's just me having trouble with it. If everyone else agrees, maybe I am wrong. I mean, how can aspects of me hold such prejudices and values about other parts of myself? But, how can I defend an a/r/togographical positioning if I am at odds with it myself? How can I resist particular kinds of control and power and change if I am also prescribing to them at least a little? Hhhmmm...I've heard that the borderlands are also considered a state of mind that can be interrogated through language (Urch, Dorn & Abraham 1995, p. 76-7)...maybe I can...

Artist: Excuse me.

Researcher: Yes.

Artist: I've been thinking and just need to acknowledge that I am aware that in part my identity and state of mind is contingent upon you. I get the sense that perhaps the academy that you in part represent may hold more power and dominance than my positioning but I don't deserve to be belittled or taken advantage of. I am an artist and in a process of transition from artistic to artist and from artist to researcher. I am and will continually navigate this relation and I need this to be valued and acknowledged.

A/r/tographer: Did that feel good?

Artist: You know it kind of did.

A/r/tographer: You know you just went through Anzaldua's first step of nepantla?

Artist: I guess I did in some small way since that process is about exposing several identities to oneself in the in-between...but, how could I have such an experience without teacher or researcher being affected?

A/r/tographer: How do you know they weren't?

Researcher: Hey-artsy...thanks for sharing—I mean it...that was a brave thing to do and you're not the only one struggling with these steps that have to be practiced over and over again:

- *coaticue (a position of hiding in which the female goddess is at the center of theory potentially enabling an individual to kill the colonized parts of themselves)*
- *the coyolxauhqui (a process of putting the pieces that were taken apart in the napanltla (a personal journey of self-discovery) and coaticue states back together... i.e., reconciling with the self and having self-acceptance/appreciation in relation to social, political and economic contexts)*
- *la conciencia de la mestiza (or the one who crosses borders/the borderland consciousness)*

...and well...for me learning about the coaticue step has been important as a female researcher because I have always felt as though I am “putting on a masculine persona” in this role. This goes back to my childhood when I was a tomboy who always wore hats and played sports at recess, rather than other games with the girls. My best-friend Caitlin and I were actually the only two girls who were allowed to play hockey, football and baseball in elementary school because we were “good”. But, playing with the guys meant that to be taken seriously I felt like I had to do some things “like a guy”. I guess I still feel that to be taken seriously as a researcher, I need to embrace some kind of masculinity that is equated with acceptance and success because some part of me feels like this is a role that I play that I want to be taken seriously at.

Teacher: So it is about learning to continually place oneself in a space of marginalization and resistance where one must constantly redefine everything around them. (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008, 54)

Researcher: Precisely...and artsy, I can see that because as an actor you really need to try things out in order to understand them, it was important for you to sort of work through those ideas yourself instead of just stating them.

Artist: Hhhmmmm. Thanks. But...

Researcher: No buts. Thank you for teaching me how to engage in research a little differently...even though it is still a little “new”.

A/r/tographer: Multiple paths. This is why we have chosen to talk about being a crossroads rather than a border crosser. Crossroads can connect borders that are continually changing as a way to allow for an interchange of ideas, identities, cultures. Crossroads connote multiplicity, destruction, building and rebuilding between the various roads that merge and emerge from and to them. Crossroads also allow teachers to take breaks from being border crossers (who in Giroux’s (1992, 1994) border pedagogy are situated as continually asserting political and personal investments as oftentimes something other than they are in order to create for their own students the opportunities to be border crossers). Crossroads allow for rests and a sense of authenticity after a long journey.

Teacher: I like that.

Researcher: What?

Teacher: I like being seen as an individual who is authentic and not just as someone who has to get or give something to my students. I like that being a crossroads acknowledges that there are a lot of things going on in my day that affect me as a teacher and that

sometimes I need a rest.

Researcher: And that change come from within an individual and not by changing external paradigms, institutions or rules.

A/r/tographer: Alright, so...o.k... if we are saying that the a/r/tographer is a crossroads and that this is a rhizomatic unfolding process that deterritorializes while strengthening the personal connections that are at its heart, than what are the borders for? I still don't understand how a crossroads just isn't an intersection of two roads...

Teacher: According to Gloria Anzaldua (1987), borders are created to:

(D)efine the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place...It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (Anzaldua, 1987, p.3)

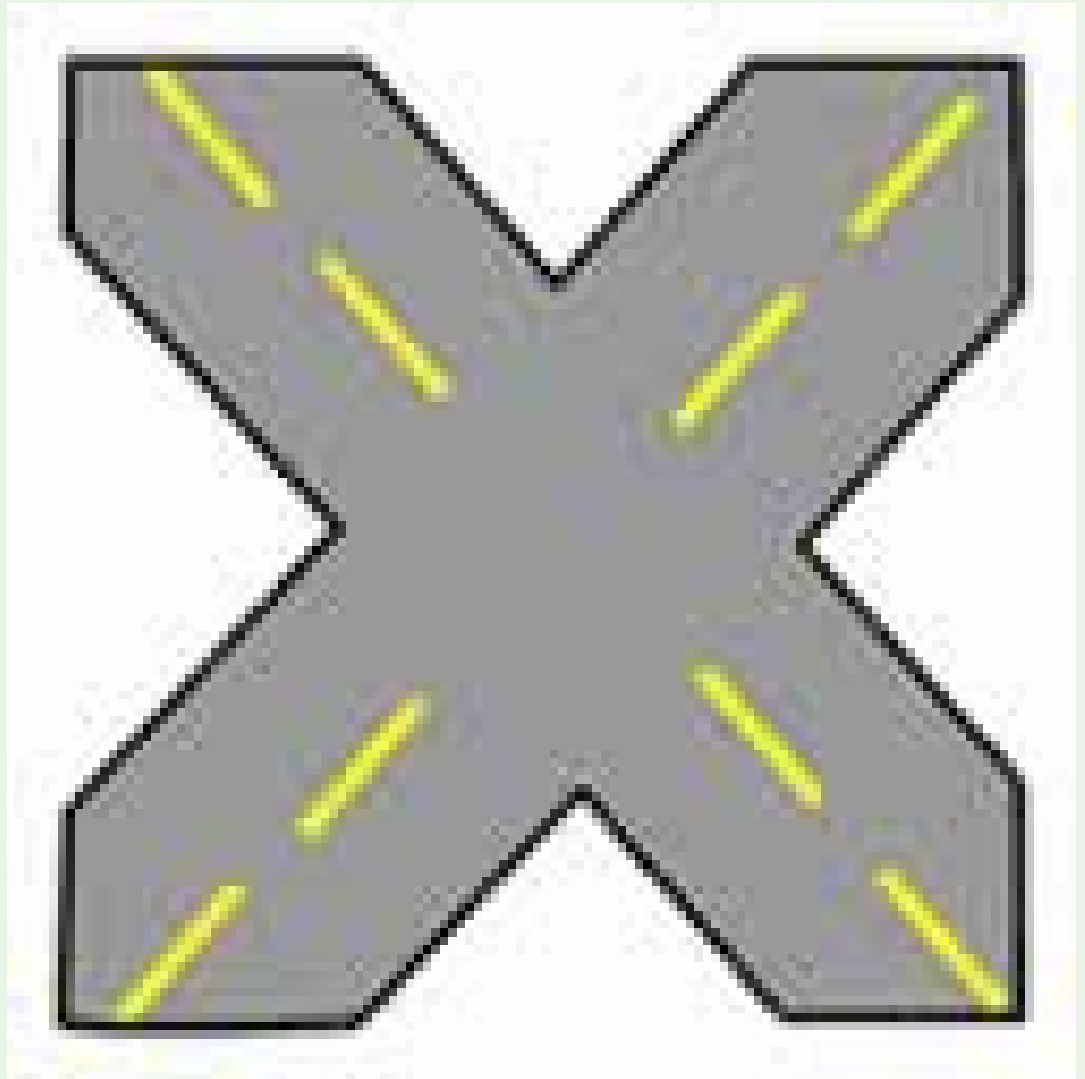
A borderland is not an easy place to be. It connotes silence, darkness, danger and a sense of homelessness. This intimates that the border crossing from artist to teacher or teacher to researcher can be a transition fraught with uncertainty, division, transition. For Anzaldua (1987) being a border crosser means that one is living sin fronteras, as a crossroads.

Artist: So wait a minute than...if Anzaldua is talking about the borders (geographical, cultural, sexual etc.) as places that we need to cross than why does it seems like a/r/tographer is always trying to get us to dwell in this border space instead of just crossing through it (like you would a crossroads)?

Researcher: O.K here they are---my notes on fronteras and crossroads. Hheh-hhem...So, in Spanish fronteras means borders and the word crossroads is called an encrucijada. So, I think that we have conceived of the border crosser as someone who moves between the spaces in between the artist-teacher-researcher identities and that dwelling in the borderlands is a result of these crossings. Now, an encrucijada or crossroads is not the same as a border crossing although it is being intimated that continually crossing different borders (or identities in our discussion) is the same as being a crossroads. But, when most people think of a crossroads they think of two roads literally crossing as the first image indicates. In this instance there is an assumption that one is going from one direction to another and that they are probably in a car driving straight through the middle in order to get from "here to there".

Image 1
A crossroads

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/crossroad>



Researcher continues: However, the actual definition of a crossroads is “a place (or crucial point) where two or more roads meet” which suggests that the next image is also considered to be a crossroads.

Image 2
Crossroads

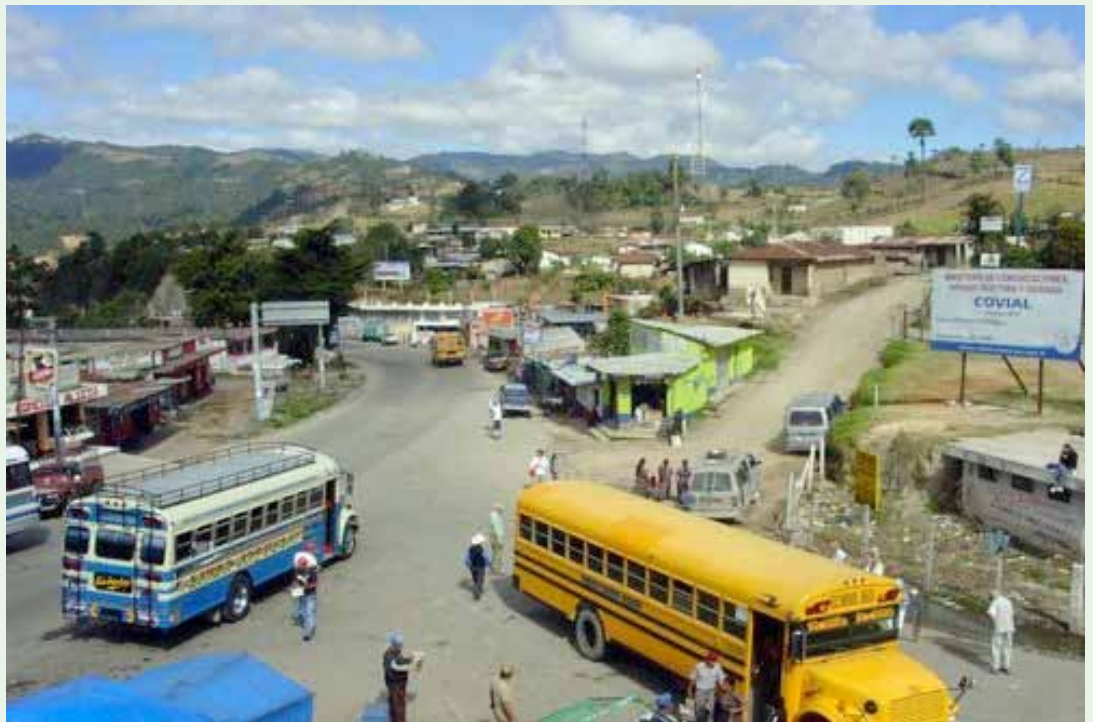
<http://www.google.com/imgres?q=crossroads&hl=en&biw=1200&bih=895&gbv=2&tbm=isch&tbnid=3pIN6KinXcUnGM:&imgrefurl=https://dragonartz.wordpress.com/tag/crossroads>



Researcher continues: These images show a very different but consistently plausible image of crossroads that may change ones understanding of this seemingly uncomplex word. For example, in the first image while a crossroads indicates that a decision in direction needs to be made it still seems fairly clear as to what the options are and how the road that is chosen is going to be relatively the same as the one that was arrived on. However, in the second image there are overlapping roads that cross, intersect, merge, converge, jam etc. It is difficult to see where one road begins and another ends. It is unclear as to whether or not crossing the spaces or borders between these roads is happening above, below, beside where one thinks they are or where they perceive that they need to go. This second image shows the complexity and multiplicity of what being a crossroads might mean over a lifetime of committing to becoming through and as multiple identities in multiple places in multiple ways.

The crossroads have been conceived of as an intersection between various identities that meet in “in between” and “conventional” spaces. In order to understand how the artist-teacher-researcher are border dwellers (in the in between spaces) I turn to a third image of a crossroads that reminds me as an actor/teacher/researcher and a/r/tographer that I am continually navigating.

Image 3
Los Encuentros
(Quetzaltenango,
Guatemala) [http://
static.panoramio.
com/photos/
original/21425723.jpg](http://static.panoramio.com/photos/original/21425723.jpg)



The crossroads that performs my own a/r/tographical inquiry is not a highway rest-stop with full amenities and snack bar. Rather, the image that is conjured up in my mind is that of Los Encuentros near Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. It is an intersection where main road in and out of the mountainous city meets dirt roads converging from a variety of directions. It is a busy intersection where numerous Mayan languages are spoken in addition to Spanish and occasionally English. It is a place for ending or beginning journeys as well as an area to navigate through on one's way to another destination.

There are no comfortable waiting places at this crossroads and no protection from the constant sun or downpours during the rainy season. Souped-up school buses called "chicken buses" pack in riders past capacity so that when dangling from the outside of the bus is the only "seat" left, stragglers appreciate the opportunity to stand in the back of a pick up truck for their travel. When I first arrived in Guatemala and didn't speak a word of Spanish, this crossroads terrified me as there seemed no rhyme or reason for selecting a bus to get on as luggage was ripped from one's hands and tossed about with speed. However, after a few months in this country, Los Encuentros became a place that represented adventure, excitement and freedom to me because I realized that each road represented the possibility of a new place and experience that I hadn't yet had. A place I could go to perform my own un/doing as "teacher" and be/coming as "adventurer, risk taker and traveller" while I selected a new destination in between my regular weekly schedule as a volunteer teacher.

In the beginning, this crossroads emphasized chaotic and disconnected schedules, poor organization and constant waiting times (due to the break down of buses or other delays) to me. But as I spent more time in this space, provocative and inventive ways to travel, think and exist emerged which required me to embrace resilience, novelty and surprise rather than conformity, rationality and standardization.

Artist: I remember Los Encuentros and that time of life...I had just finished acting school and was volunteer teaching in a completely foreign country after selling everything I

owned to buy a plane ticket to volunteer as a teacher for a year. You know, it reminds me of walking the El Camino de Santiago pilgrimage for my honeymoon five years after being in Guatemala in that those were both “crossroads experiences” forcing me to give up a lot in order to learn/gain something new. It seems so contradictory to Canadian culture to think that the more we give up or lose, the more we gain...but it was definitely true for me on El Camino as I gave up time to go there, a relaxing honeymoon, a lot of the things I brought with me then didn't want to carry on the route...and when I gave up thinking that I could finish the walk because I was in so much physical pain, my ego kind of died leading me to gain a deeper experience and understanding about what it means to live as a human being who is connected and interconnected to the physical and immaterial world...a living crossroads.

THE CROSSROADS & A/R/TOGRAPHY

A crossroads can represent the simultaneous convergence of multiple ideas, concepts or experiences that are on their way to passing between given points from/to a variety of directions. In this way, even opposing and contradictory ideas and experiences have the opportunity to modify and reclassify along route. To be a crossroads means to continually be/coming by: seeking to recognize and allow for the shifting of directions, taking the time for deep moments of reflection, being attentive to surroundings and being open to new considerations or versions of oneself. For the artist/teacher being a crossroads requires that traditional notions of education, art and knowledge may need to be subverted as a means of rupturing the boundaries of educational discourse and normative axiologies in deliberate and considerate ways.

To be a crossroads means to be a representation of various experiences, values, ideas and perceptions that exist simultaneously and in contradiction. In this sense, one's work, self and life are constantly evolving and unfolding in and through time. I feel that being an a/r/tographer is being a crossroads when the artist, teacher and researcher come together in moments of recognition for the way that the separate identities of artist-teacher-researcher and the spaces in between them connect and allow the whole to become greater than the sum of the parts. In this sense, one can continually work a/r/tographically but is living as an a/r/tographer when this sense of completeness is consciously understood by the individual.

Researcher: So I'm not an a/r/tographer right now?

A/r/tographer: No, you're a researcher right now...but...since I'm talking with you I guess it can be possible to be an us and an I..

Artist: Is that also how the whole "a/r/tographer" as a crossroads notion comes into play?

A/r/tographer: Absolutely. I mean, when I think of how a/r/tography borrows from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) who describe how 'rhizomes' metaphorically relate to a network of connected identities, ideas, and concepts, I think of how rhizomes are horizontal stems of plants that grow longer roots underground while sending out shoots for new plants to grow above ground. The roots grow in all directions, with one point connecting to any other point. Like a mesh of lines on a road map, there are no beginnings or middles, merely in-between connections. In this sense if one visualizes a series of strong roots connecting the artist's work to that of the writer, teacher and researcher the spaces in between these seemingly separate identities disappear. Instead each identity is strengthened by another allowing for new directions/approaches/ideas to emerge—unrealizable when one chooses to "plant" themselves in a particular epistemology/subject/way of thinking or being.

Artist: Than why are we talking about a/r/tographers being crossroads if we already have the rhizome metaphor to understand the intersecting roots that strengthen and overlap?

Researcher: I think the difference and necessity of considering the crossroads is that you can't begin to separate the roots of a rhizomatic plant if you want or need to because they are so delicate and intertwined/interdependent. While the roots do strengthen the larger growth they are not independently strong. I think that each "road" related to the larger

crossroads represents the individual artist, teacher or researcher and the individual journeys taken on each of these roads. These journeys can be rhizomatic but do not need to be and they exist as moments that depict the in-between. If you want to look at one journey on one road on its own and see it for its own significance separate from the whole you can also do this to strengthen the overall “journey”. Since there is also a nexus point in the overlapping crossroads (like in the second image) moments when the a/r/tographer synthesizes, reflects, releases individual notions of consciousness and connects to the wider a/r/tographic community in which ideas of being-singular-plural gain significance can be represented and taken as resting points or moments of deep conscious reflection that acknowledge the past and prepare one for the future.

REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

Being itself is given to us as meaning. Being does not have being. Being itself, the phenomenon of Being, is meaning that is, in turn, its own circulation---and we are this circulation. There is no meaning if meaning is not shared, and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because meaning is itself the sharing of Being.

(Nancy, 2000, p.2)

In dividing the characters of artist, teacher, researcher and a/r/tographer to represent individual perspectives as a form of inquiry through dialogue, I am not as Nancy would suggest making meaning; rather I am attempting to share being. I think that this is an important differentiation to make as I grapple(d) with the meaning of borderlands, border crossings and crossroads as they relate to a/r/tographic understandings. Sharing being rather than making meaning suggests a shift from the place of uncertainty and personal insecurity that the researcher exhibited at the start of the first interlude to a sense of confidence of self while being with the others as the dialogues continued on. When I first began considering what a/r/tography was and how it related to my own inquiries about the world, myself and what I do, I couldn't grasp how one could be separate and together. I could understand the idea of the a/r/tographer on its own and the identities of the artist, researcher, teacher and the relative liminal space(s) but just couldn't synthesize this theoretical understanding into a living practice that meets in me until I thought about becoming a crossroads. Becoming a crossroads made being an a/r/tographer "click" for me because I could picture my body/heart/mind as the meeting place for all of the things I do, see, hear, think, experience, learn, remember etc. and how that move in and out of relational space while continuing on through energetic extensions into others and the world as a connection and extension of my being can be singularly plural.

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