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Making a Mess of Everything: Excursions Through Communities, Musics, Academics, Longing, and Belonging

Kiera Galway and Deanna Yerichuk

Artists' Statement

This project—what we have termed a collaborative autoethnographic mapping project—grew out of conversations between two researchers who also work as choral conductors and teachers in community contexts. We found ourselves constantly struggling with the stubborn fact that we, as community musicians, engage in the very practices that we, as academics, critique. As we considered our roles as musicians and academics, we quickly realized that *who we are* is deeply entwined with *where we are* and *who we are with*. While we initially considered only the relationship between our professional roles as academics and musicians, we also began to realize that our other roles, such as mother, daughter, friend, citizen, were implicated in our professional identities, making a mess of the very idea that we could resolve the tensions between the many different aspects of our lives.

Out of those initial conversations, we launched a very personal research pro-

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ject that explored these tensions in ourselves and in relation to each other, not so much to sort out the tensions as to understand how place and social relationships shape who we think we are in any given moment. This video, with its “do-it-yourself” aesthetic, is the final iteration of a project that has explored the irresolvable tensions inherent in the messy, situated lived experience of two community music educators, traced through the physical and imagined journeys we navigate every day, which we have here conceptualized as desire lines, or the unmarked routes traversed between planned pathways.

Theoretical framework

‘Desire lines’ is a term most often used in urban planning to point to the ways in which people etch paths into the earth by taking shortcuts through grass and other non-paved pedestrian routes. While planners often approach desire lines as nuisances to be solved, we were inspired by the scholarship of Matthew Tiessen, who suggests that desire lines can act as metaphors about how we see both past and future, in that these lines “express the excess that premeditated constructions cannot foresee or contain” (Tiessen). While Tiessen’s central argument rests on the ways in which the earth invites people to traverse and explore, we take up his conceptual approach and use the idea of ‘desire lines’ to make sense of the real and imagined pathways we carve through the city (and beyond) to create our selves as musician and academics, a conceptual approach that was particularly useful in thinking through and mapping our movement between musical identities within particular places.

Music has a deeply recursive relationship not just with place, but with culture and history, and as such questions of musical identities are tied to space, place, and memory. Many researchers in sociology and ethnomusicology have argued not only that music and memory contribute to the production of identity for individuals, but also that music plays an important role in producing communities and articulating the connection between the individual and their community (Stokes; Smith; Leyshon; Kruse; Whitely, Bennett, and Hawkins). Yet, shared identities are a product of contested processes, constantly becoming and unbecoming. Our identities, or roles, as musicians and academics strongly inflect our relationships among place, people, and selves, which in turn shapes who we are as musicians and academics. In other words, who we are exists in a recursive relationship with where we are, when we are, and who we are with. As such, we began this project from the assumption that place, memory, and social relationships are inextricably bound up in the production of identities, particularly in musical contexts.

The emphasis on place, both in terms of destination and in terms of traveling between destinations, was particularly important for this project, based on the assumption that the places in which music and social relationships occur

shape those relationships irrevocably, and travelling between them is simultaneously a physical and an imagined excursion. The material geographies of buildings are always steeped in histories and currents of power, and the ways that people engage with spaces depend on the associations they ascribe to them and the experiences they have (or expect to have) in them—experiences that are always informed by issues of class, education and socioeconomic status. While our project was grounded in our own very intimate, very personal experiences, these experiences are woven into, and contribute to, larger collective shared experiences, and shared identities.

Methodology

The researchers used auto-ethnography as the methodology, which connects personal stories to cultural, social, and political dimensions (Ellis 2004). However, under the assumption that personal identity is not only inherently social, but also spatially located and geographically connected, the researchers developed a collaborative auto-ethnographic research methodology grounded in particular places. In this way there are two particular aspects to the methodology that set it apart from more traditional auto-ethnographic research: a collaborative approach to auto-ethnography, and a spatial exploration and mapping of particular places connected to the researchers' lives.

The collaborative nature of this autoethnography enabled the researchers to put our own experiences in conversation with each other, situating our personal stories and experiences in larger social discourses that located us each as subjects. This collaborative research process also aimed to call attention to the hierarchical researcher/researched relationship in qualitative inquiry by implicating the researchers in both sides of the power dynamic. We explored and interrogated our own and each other's beliefs and practices about our teaching practices and our personal, musical and academic experiences—simultaneously occupying the positions of observer and observed.

The mapping process was equally important, in which each researcher took the other on excursions through the places we inhabit on a regular basis. The conversations, the places, and the travels were documented through video and audio recording. Collaborative mapping method (inspired by Cohen) nuanced the auto-ethnographic approach by introducing questions of spatiality in the production of selves, from the assumption that identities are intimately bound up in particular places. Further, the idea of mapping took on a physical and embodied dimension as we traced not only the places, but the pathways we each take through our days to travel from space to space, and from role to role. The physical movement between places, we began to realize, had a complex relationship with the movement between our internalized roles, and documenting our travel was integral to the mapping process. We have in turn conceptualized these

pathways as ‘desire lines’ to capture the physical and imagined movement between places, as well as the cartographic nature of our paths, carving out identities by moving between multiple roles in multiple places.

Data collection was messy and joyful, adapting as the project developed. We video-recorded all excursions, and audio-recorded formal interviews. We also began recording conversations about the project and the themes therein. As data revealed the centrality of memory tied to identities and places, the researchers also began journaling as a form of personal storytelling. Each researcher also brought personal artefacts that were integrated into the research process, mostly in digital forms, such as pictures, sound recordings, and video recordings from our past. By using nonrepresentational data collection methods like video, pictures, and sound, these investigative techniques then became springboards to explore and interrogate each researcher’s values, beliefs, emotions and practices regarding music, community, academics, and personal lives.

Performance

The final product was originally conceived as a live performance that integrated video and sound. The researchers performed the piece at two separate academic forums, in which video complemented our live interactions. For this particular iteration, we have rendered the script into a 22-minute video and have changed significant portions of the performance to adapt to an entirely online aesthetic form. The video resembles a collage, with a ‘DIY’ (do-it-yourself) aesthetic marked by uneven audio and amateur-like videography. This contributes to the overall themes of the project in which multiple selves are “knit” together in uneven and pastiche-like ways. We integrate film, online video chats, music, and ambient noise in non-linear sequences to foreground, rather than to hide, the messiness of our lives and our materials. The video, like the performance, eschews thematic analysis or a single narrative in an attempt to bring the affective, the messy, and the disorderly to live — even thrive — in an academic space.

Script

On screen: This film is the final iteration of a project undertaken by Kiera Galway and Deanna Yerichuk, which explored the irresolvable tensions inherent in the messy, situated lived experience of two community music educators, traced through the physical and imagined journeys we navigate every day.

We mapped our movement between spaces and roles, based on the premise that who we are exists in a recursive relationship with where we are, when we are, and who we are with.

Act I

Scene 1: Traversing Our Multiple Roles in Multiple Spaces

[image of creating maps and traversing maps through naming of roles]

Both: We move through multiple roles in multiple spaces.

A1: Choral conductor

A2: Singer

A1: Church musician

A2: Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Toronto

A1: Me too

A2: Guest conductor of a community choir

A1: Newfoundlander

A2: Mother

A1: Friend

A2: Former actor. Or failed actor, not sure which

A1: Bassoonist

A2: Voice teacher

A1: Aspiring academic

A2: In navigating through the city to perform these roles, we navigate ourselves, a physical crisscrossing of places tied to social spaces and relations. We map our multiple selves through these places, fractured, competing, colluding, transforming.

A1: We are cartographers forging desire lines between places, professions, and roles, we struggle to become without a formal path or map. We produce ourselves through our real and imagined pathways.

A2: We use the concept of desire lines as a metaphor for the paths we trace through our musical, personal and academic lives. Desire lines are unmapped except through lived experience and personal history.

[on screen] “To trace a desire line, then, is to respond to an invitation, to accept that a particular trajectory has been revealed.” (Theissen 2007, paragraph 1)

Scene 2: Singing Within the Space, Singing Through the Space Within

Clip of A2 rehearsing *Echo*. Sound fades but visual remains playing behind her words.

A2: It’s a warm Sunday afternoon in 2010. Eighty of us are in Echo Women’s Choir; we’re gathering for our spring concert at Holy Trinity Church in downtown Toronto. I have walked into this old church every Tuesday night for the last 6 years, but always as a singer, joining voices with the women around me as we sing secular songs from many world traditions. This time, however, for this performance, I am the guest conductor. A new role to inhabit, in a familiar space filled with people I know well. The physical pathway is the same; my imagined pathways are leading me somewhere new.

I’m leading the warm-up. “Look up,” I say, “the ceilings are so high, there are birds.” The women look up to see doves painted on the high-vaulted ceilings of the old Anglican church that we are not affiliated with but that shapes our sound with its stone walls and its progressive politics. “Look at the high ceilings,” I say, “Imagine your mouth is as spacious as this sanctuary. Your soft palate is so high, there are birds flying up high!” The singers unleash a sound that washes over me. I begin my rehearsal. My cues are confident, clearer. I try to take it as the compliment it’s intended to be when a chorister later tells me how much my conducting has improved. I finish and join the second sopranos as the other conductor leads us through the first verse of *Bread and Roses*. We all begin in unison:

*As we go marching, marching through the beauty of the day
A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray
Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses
For the people hear us singing: Bread and roses! Bread and roses!*

Act II: Personal Spaces

Scene 1: A1 at Home

Black screen with title 'Kiera's home'. Audio of kitchen sounds, fades into video of A1 making coffee. Sound fades while visuals continue.

A1: This space is a sanctuary in the life I've chosen, split between my hometown of St. John's and my adopted city of Toronto. Here is where I taught my first voice lessons, learning how to teach while my students learned to sing. The kitchen table bears traces of the many scores I've learned there, and holds happy memories of dinner parties and quiet coffees. This couch is where I would curl up after a late rehearsal to finish readings in time for the next day's class. Choral octavos pile up under the bed. These shelves bulge with academic books, hymnals, and old Newfoundland folksongs—artifacts of my musical and professional roles—but they also hold novels, photo albums and journals. Here I am not only musician, teacher and student; I am also friend, daughter, sister. This is a musical place but also a personal place—a nexus of the places I inhabit, the paths I track through the city, the skins I wear, the identities I do.

Scene 2: Deanna at Home

Screen with title 'Deanna's home'. video morning breakfast clip. A/V continues throughout.

A2: [talking over sounds of kids] This is my home. This is my life. I write, I teach singing, I perform, I raise a family. I am fond of this space. There's a lot of love. There's a lot of disorder, a lot of mess. I've come to call this the house of loving chaos. I used to be uncomfortable practicing singing within earshot of anyone, I didn't want anyone to hear me at less than my best. But since having children I've had let go of that. I make music in the midst of this, because, well, it's not gonna happen otherwise.

Screen fades to black. The following quote appears on screen: "Leyshon highlights the reciprocal and processual nature of musical and spatial practice. Material spaces—our homes, schools, churches and concert halls—are just as much a part of the music as notes and rhythms (Wood, Duffy and Smith 872)."

A2: My academic life, however, demands order, demands rationality, demands tight boundaries with no intrusions. Yet my academic self takes as much space as it can, spilling over everywhere: journals on the piano bench, Foucault books stacked on sheet music. My academic insists on

all of my time, makes me feel guilty if I'm not paying attention. I've sweated hours over this tiny desk, slumping posture, eyes fixed on a screen.

But in the very same space I've also spent hours guiding students through vocalises; I've arranged pieces for choirs. I've sat next to my son while he practices his piano, bargaining a minute of video games for every minute of practice. I've even performed here. This space is where it all comes together. This space is where it all falls apart.

Act III: Professional Spaces

Scene 1: Entering the Faculty of Music Building

Video of Edward Johnson Building (Faculty of Music, University of Toronto), walking up stairs to room 350

- A1: My relationship to this building is complex: I am a student, and also a teacher, and a musician without actually performing music here. My arrival at U of T was a bit of a shift—coming from a smaller community like St. John's, I was used to being involved in everything—playing bassoon in the orchestras and saxophone in the jazz band, singing in a million choirs...since starting the ph.d. I've had to focus on academic work.
- A2: My relationship to this building is weird because I come primarily as an academic, not as a musician, and certainly not as a mother. Here, my academic task is to critique, to engage the world and its music practices with social theory. While I have studied and taught choral and vocal pedagogy, this place is primarily where I cultivate my analytical eye, nurturing the internal voice that in turn critiques my practice. And that sparks a fierce internal debate.
- A1: I have enjoyed so many fruitful, impassioned and challenging discussions in these rooms. I have been excited, frustrated and moved by the students I work with. Despite the challenges and insecurities of academic and pedagogical work, in this building I find continual joy in thinking differently.
- A2: While my practitioner feels proud of small strides I take to create a measure of equity in singing spaces, my academic voice incessantly nags me, pointing out all of the flaws in every decision I make as a teacher. Who's being excluded? How might I be hurting someone?

I'm always caught no matter what.

Scene 2: Massey College (The Roles Get Messier)

Footage of Ondaatje Hall with following quotation inscribed on walls: "Happiness is impossible, and even inconceivable, to a mind without scope and without pause, a mind driven by craving, pleasure or fear. To be happy, you must be reasonable or you must be tamed. You must have taken the measure of your powers, tasted the fruits of your passion, and learned your place in the world and what things in it can really serve you. To be happy, you must be wise." (George Santayana)

A1: I have eaten a hundred meals in this hall and taught a hundred rehearsals. As I sip my wine and bang out bass parts, my eye catches snippets of this George Santayana quote. How can I reconcile these sentiments with a full and happy creative life? As one of my choir members once said "this is a place of reason, this is a masculine space"—how can my personal, musical, and academic lives co-exist in this space?

Massey College is a graduate residence built on the Oxbridge model. This college nurtures a group of graduate students "limited in number but high in academic promise". In other words, this is an elite place, one premised on scholarship and community in equal measure.

To an outsider, Massey's rituals seem arcane, exclusive, elitist and outmoded. But once on the "inside," it's easy to get caught up in college life. Once I became a Junior Fellow, I organized charity auctions, flipped burgers, decorated pumpkins: things I hoped would foster community in the College.

Now, in my fifth year of fellowship, I'm known as the "choir lady" at Massey. I am the resident musician in the college, and I take pride in contributing to the community in this way. This place is both rational and passionate, restrained and excessive, isolating and connective, familiar and uncomfortable, steeped in history and forward-looking: it is a good place. All this, yet I still feel I am split. While part of me wants to, I can never give my whole self to this place. I sip at the kool-aid but stop short of quaffing it.

Scene 3: Fides' Studio

Footage of A2 biking to Fides' studio; footage walking in. Video tour of the studio.

A2: The voice studio of opera singer Fides Krucker. My teacher. She has created a unique pedagogy that integrates the precision of bel canto with the emotional and physical rawness of extended voice technique, knitting together a paradox of precisely bound and wildly unbound. In this studio, I am really messy. Things are always falling apart for me. I just can't keep it together. And I kind of like it. Of course, in this space I am not in charge, I don't have the kinds of responsibilities that I have elsewhere. I attend to my body; I attend to my emotions. But my attention is specific, precise. Here, I love the dialectical process of unravelling and building anew. Don't get me wrong, I still struggle in this space, but the struggle is a visceral one. How can I be messy AND contained at the same time? How can I hold it all together AND let it all fall apart? It is in this space that I realize these opposites aren't so much false but that the tension between them is the very thing that moves me forward.

Act IV: Breaking desire lines, what's at stake when it goes wrong

Scene 1: Danish Lutheran Church

Black screen with Matthew Theissen quote: "Lines of desire, then, can be both visible and invisible, material and immaterial, semipermanent and intransitory. They are trajectories." (Theissen 2007, paragraph 3).

Fade to black.

Footage approaching DLC; inside church.

A1: *Vi Skal Ses Igen, Vi skal ses min ven, Vi skal aldrig skilles ad. For den tid der gik, og de knus vifik, Gjorde mig så varm og glad.*

I arrive at the Danish Lutheran Church in March of 2009 - my first job as church music director, with little idea what to expect. Would bridging the gap between our English and Danish backgrounds be an issue? For a while, I skirt the line between employee and community member, but soon I am singing at Thanksgiving Dinners, making costumes for Fastelavn celebrations and cooking Ableskiver. I am not only an employee—I am fully invested in community life at the church.

Black screen with Gilles Deleuze quote: "Desiring consists in interruptions, letting certain flows through, making withdrawals from those flows, cutting the chains that become attached to the flows. ... Desire does not depend on lack, it's not a lack of something, and it doesn't refer to any Law. Desire produces." (Deleuze 232)

It's November 2013. Advent is nearly here but I can't bring myself to enjoy it. After the church board pushed Pastor Elizabeth out, the community is split in two and tensions are high. The congregation is completely decimated. The board and the choir are on opposing sides and I am in the middle, pulled in two directions, managing expectations and egos on both sides. Every Sunday fills me with dread. The church board casts doubt on my musical leadership and questions whether it's "worth it" to even have a choir. Less than half of the choir shows up to rehearsal, and when they do, it's because they know it's the only place to sing music from their native Denmark.

Pause while video shows AI driving away.

I know that my leaving will dissolve what's left of the choir, but I have to get out. There are problems with my new church. But it's better than feeling terrible about going to work all the time. It still hurts my heart to know the rift hasn't mended.

*Vi Skal Ses Igen, Vi skal ses min ven, Vi skal aldrig skilles ad.
For den tid der gik, og de knus vi fik, Gjorde mig så varm og glad.*

Scene 2: Where It All Comes Together and Where it All Falls Apart

A2: In my mid-twenties, after working as an actor, a singer, a youth worker, and an employment policy analyst, I decided to commit myself to a musical life. I began singing, and teaching voice. But those other experiences have always made me conscious about who is and is not participating, and who creates the terms for participation. My recent academic work has deepened these concerns, to the point that there seems no end to the question how problematic can my practice be?

Then again, conducting Echo, and singing in Fides' studio, teaching my own singing students, I can't help but feel that people singing together, it's a good thing. As one of my choristers observed, you can't sing and be cynical at the same time.

A1: As a musician and a teacher, I am fundamentally oriented around space and place. I can't talk about my practice in either Newfoundland or Toronto without talking about what home means. I struggle with bridging the physical—conceptual—and emotional—distance between these places every day. What does it mean to feel at home, to inhabit particular places, and what is the relationship between identity, belonging and home? Sara Ahmed talks about the lived experience of "home" as the lo-

cality intruding into the senses: defining what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers. The boundaries between home and self are permeable—there is something of “home” that is seeped into my very skin.

A2: The academic must question and the singer must believe. The academic who believes is naive and the singer who doubts is a sham. I'm not sure the singer and the academic can get along: when they interact, it gets messy. And uncomfortable. And what about my role as a mom? Kids make a mess of everything, literally and figuratively.

A1: I am coming to realize that my Newfoundland background makes me feel responsible in some way for those around me. Around my students, I feel responsible for their education, their musical experience, even their well-being. And anytime relationships become personal, things are bound to get messy.

A2: The thing about the mess is that it stumbles over boundaries, makes me realize where the boundaries are and question whether those boundaries should be there. In singing and in parenting there can be both precision and mess at the same time. Is it possible that my academic work can hold both mess and precision? That this paradox can not only exist but become a creative path?

A1: There's a certain danger, a certain risk in investing in community. I walk a fine line between my roles as music professional or teacher and as friend or caretaker. My sense of responsibility means that I am vulnerable. It also means that I am partially to blame if the community dissolves. The stakes are high for me—that's not something that feels comfortable to admit.

A2: So you're uncomfortable and I'm a mess.

A1: Great spot to leave it here, eh?

A2 [uncomfortable pause] how DO we end this?

A1: Starts singing Danish song.

A2: Sings Bread and Roses.

Black.

FIN

CREDITS:

Researched, written, and performed by
Kiera Galway and Deanna Yerichuk

Places Visited

Church of the Holy Trinity (Toronto)
Kiera's home (Toronto)
Deanna's home (Toronto)
Edward Johnson Building (Faculty of Music, University of Toronto)
Massey College (Toronto)
Fides Krucker's voice studio (Toronto)
Danish Lutheran Church (Toronto)

Song Credits

"Bread and Roses." Lyrics by James Oppenheim. Music by Mimi Fariña. Choral arrangement by Becca Whitla. Performed by Deanna Yerichuk.
"My Life Flows On." Written by Robert Wadsworth Lowry. Arranged by Alan Gasser. Performed by Echo Women's Choir.
"Vi Skal Ses Igen" (We Will Meet Again). Danish Folksong. Performed by Kiera Galway.
"Blood on the Saddle." Alberta Folksong (arr. Trent Worthington). Performed by the Massey College Choir.

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