

MAPPING SECURITY: WRITING THE TRACE OF NATION

by Bruce Erickson

*Just before our love got lost you said
"I am as constant as a northern star"
And I said, "Constant in the darkness
Where's that at?
If you want me I'll be in the bar"*

*On the back of a cartoon coaster
In the blue TV screen light
I drew a map of Canada
Oh Canada
And I sketched your face on it twice*

Joni Mitchell, "Case of You"

I'm sitting at home, resolved to write a small reflection on leisurely movements, mapping and the (knowledge) production of Canada, probably one that will start with an anecdote out of *Where is Here?* (Morantz, 2002), Rick Morantz's journalistic book about the maps that make Canada. CBC radio's Definitely Not The Opera (DNTO) is on the radio in the background, interrupting my attempts to read the highlighted sections from Homi Bhabha, Jacques Derrida, and Margaret Atwood's *Survival*. Typical in its Canadian content, DNTO is featuring a story on the Canadian accent (which Matthew Perry lost before becoming *Friends'* Chandler), and the DNTO competition to nominate the best introductory couplet in a Canadian song. "American Woman" starts it off, which I find rather pathetic for a starter. "American woman/ stay away from me" not really lyrical genius, but perhaps that is considered to be typically Canadian.

My favourite nomination was "Case of You" by Joni Mitchell. "Case of You" shocked me in its appropriateness for my reflection, as it signals the gap in mapping ability, a suggestion that transfers to the knowledge of the country, the gaps in understanding and representation that are held within the constant light of the northern star that shines only in the dark. Mitchell's song points to some provocative relationships between leisure, desire and the nation, junctions that I will try to examine in this reflection.

The anecdote from *Where is Here?* (Morantz, 2002) is from a canoeing guide who has spent his life developing the ability to make maps of canoe routes, in order to reduce the danger to the canoeist. In *Where is Here?*, Morantz interviews Hap Wilson about a map he made of a set of rapids on the Missinabi River in Northern Ontario. The impetus for the map was a series of

accidents on the river in the 1970s. As Morantz writes, "accidents happen, especially on wilderness rivers, but Wilson sensed a pattern, and suspected that a contributing factor was being overlooked – misleading topographical maps" (p. 116). The maps used by many paddlers showed a portage on the wrong side of the river. By the time the paddlers would figure out there was no portage where they were looking, they would be in danger of being swept into the four-meter falls below. After consulting provincial documents about deaths in the areas, "Wilson figured that seventeen of the drownings could have been prevented had the victims known what was around the corner, what was ahead, where was the portage, what were the peculiarities in flow patterns" (p. 116). While there have been no deaths in the area since the production of the map in 1977 (along with the wholesale correction of all provincial maps of the area), it is not out of the question that Wilson's map fails its readers, at least partially.

All Wilson can do as a river cartographer is make the variables known to the paddler; it is then up to the paddler to adjust to environmental conditions. It is a fact that he acknowledges in each of his map books. In his Missinabi book, Wilson dealt with the vagaries of charting a river from the inside out: "Rapids that round bends may be impeded by sweepers or strainers (fallen trees and log jams). Each spring freshet scours the shores and washes timber downriver, frequently to become lodged in the most inappropriate places. Rapid diagrams are for reference only and gauged at optimum running conditions with all safety procedures in place" (pp. 117-119).

Telling this story, Morantz (2002) starts by seeing the mistakes on the map as a misspoken set of instructions, highlighted in the possibility of change that Wilson found. Yet Wilson's inability to speak the instructions clearly, illustrated in his disclaimer, makes a point to disrupt the ability of the mapping process to communicate properly, a disruption hidden by the map, yet integral to its process of communication. If I may say so, what Wilson is running into here is the "dangerous supplement" that Derrida (1967/1974) documents in Rousseau's writing, and more specifically in any act of writing.

The "dangerous supplement" is the exterior of the signified brought into the representation: the artifice that augments a spoken presence. Derrida explains the logic of the supplement in *Of Grammatology* by way of Rousseau's theory on the origin of languages. The supplement, for Rousseau, was that exterior addition to language which produced the artificial process of writing, a technology that he opposes to the natural art of speech. Writing is a substitute to language, but one that is formed as a response to a situation of distress; writing is a needed addition to speech that gives it a material reality (and

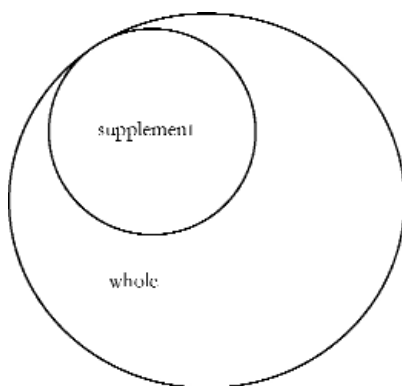


permanence). As a supplement to nature (language), writing signifies an attempt to add permanence to language when needed (as in Rousseau's need to convey his thought to history). Yet, as a supplement to language, it also serves to stand "in-the-place-of" (Derrida, 1967/1974, p. 145). Not only augmenting, but standing in for, the supplement changes the presence by signifying its lack. Writing stands in the place of speech, giving language when there is no speech present. The danger in the supplement, for Rousseau, comes with artifice standing in for nature: Since nature is the source of good, and artifice the source of evil, evil is always presented in the form of a supplement.

Wilson's map reciprocates this logic in some ways. One way to look at it suggests that the nature of the rapid is perhaps dangerous, but the pattern of death comes from the (incorrect) supplement of the map. Once that mistake is corrected, the supplement (the map itself) is still dangerous because it does not contain the vicissitudes of the river. Wilson, in his cautionary notes, is telling us that the map itself does not contain security.

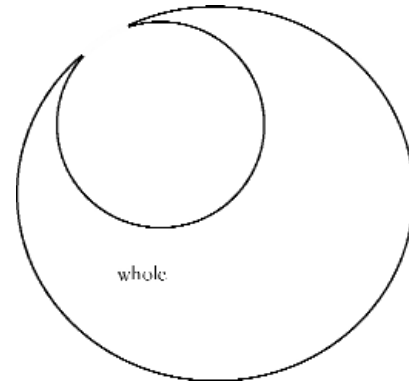
Derrida's reading of Rousseau can also point to a more complex reading of Wilson's Missinabi map. If nature is always good, then what is the need for the supplement, which by definition fills a void in the presence of the other? Contained within nature is the need for the supplement, a lack that incorporates artifice into the original good: The possibility of evil is contained within the good of nature. The logic of the supplement reduces the opposition between nature/artifice, good/evil, and for the case of the map, security/insecurity. Wilson's map, though dangerous, was created as an attempt to increase the security of the map readers, to avoid the pattern of death that Wilson noted at the rapids. Empirically his maps have done their job. Since the 1977 reprinting, there have been no deaths on those rapids, however the supplement may have reversed the security and produced a different reaction.

The supplement adds on to a whole picture; in this case, the maps produced are added on to by the natural workings of the river. A diagram of the supplement might look like this.



The map fills out and literally stands in for the river in the canoeist's mind, supplementing not only the knowledge of the

river, but also how the river is perceived. A proper map reader would be in constant consultation with the map and the exterior world in order to arrive safely at their desired destination. As Morantz (2002) explains, "Having a map does not lessen the need to look in the proverbial rear-view mirror every few minutes or so to stay oriented" (p. 120). Without the map, the rapids on the Missinabi would look empty and unrepresentable:



The empty space in the whole that is filled out by the supplement is described as the *trace* by Derrida. The trace signifies the absence that is structurally implicit with the presence of the sign. The trace documents a history to individual representations that constructs an origin for that representation. When the supplement covers the unrepresentable space, the trace lingers to remind us of the origin constructed. Derrida's trace should be understood to have the notions of track and imprint that are lost in translation from the original French (Spivak, 1974). For the map to be understood as an item promoting safety and security, the trace of the deaths of the previous pattern hides behind the presence of the mapping procedures and reminds the paddler that safety can only exist within a state of insecurity. The origin of the map is in the space of insecurity (represented by the pattern of death), and the science of cartography cancels out the artifice of the map (Harley, 1992) and tries to erase the insecurity produced by the map (the dangerous supplement), yet it merely incorporates the insecurity into the folds of the map.

Wilson's map signals a working of the trace that we might explore in the context of larger Canadian mapping and writing processes, because we always need to think of maps as a process of writing. Many have noted the use of maps as a tool of nation building (most significantly Benedict Anderson [1991] in his second edition of *Imagined Communities*) and that even applies to Canada (even Morantz picks up on this in *Where is Here*). Matthew Sparke's (1998) discussion of the use of mapping as nation building (and resistance) techniques in a British Columbia land claims trial and the publication of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* ranks in my books as one of the more interesting examinations of mapping in Canada. At stake in his article is the role of ambivalence in the mapping processes, ambivalences that are the result of the disjuncture between

writing and reading, the effect, we can say, of the trace in the map. In his reading of the court proceedings of *Delgamuukw v. The Queen*, Sparke illustrates the use of, and state response to, the First Nations' uses of non-European forms of mapping. The legal space of the court functions to limit the power of the First Nations mapping presence, however, the ambivalence of the European knowledge that supersedes it is exposed and the "roaring cartography of the trial could burst out of the courtroom" (p. 490). *The Historical Atlas of Canada* provides one example of such a break-out, where maps similar to those used in the court case were presented as part of the historical geography of Canada, and more importantly, as part of the present geography of the nation.

The supplemental insertion of the First Nations maps into the geographical understanding of Canada hides the trace of the production of the speaking/writing nation. Sparke's comments on the resistance provided by *The Historical Atlas of Canada* should be taken as celebratory, but limited. Indeed, the fact that "Canada's evolving geographical diversity...is the very diversity that is turned into the grounds of national distinction" (p. 487), warns us that heterogeneity caused by ambivalence can "sometimes serve hegemonic nation-state-building ends" (p. 488). Thus the supplementing of the map of Canada with Sparke's Map that Roared not only contains the possibility of resistance to traditional European knowledge, it also hides the trace of incorporation that defines the speaking subject behind the maps of the nation.

The production of "we" through mapping creates a heterogeneous position from which the hegemonic nation state can act. The courts and the *Atlas* were both concerned with the articulation of who is a part of this "we." The courts could only allow the roaring of the map once they figured out how to incorporate those maps into the narrative of the nation¹, an incorporation that the *Atlas* accomplished. At stake in the court case was the ability of the Gitksan to articulate their own nation; at stake in the *Atlas* was the ability for the Gitksan to be considered part of Canada. Haunting both of these case studies is the trace that tracks the production of nation throughout Canada, the impossibility of the "we" that binds the nation together.

The parallel to Wilson's maps becomes clear. In any effort to produce a secure nation, even one that rejoices in the heterogeneity that exists within its borders, the trace illustrates the impossibility of that dream and initiates insecurity in the national boundaries and definitions. The production of a multicultural policy has done little to decrease the amount of concern for diversity (or even the concern for lack of diversity). As Richard Day (2000) suggests, "while Canadian multiculturalism presents itself as a new solution to an ancient problem of diversity, it is better seen as the most recent mode of reproduction and proliferation of that problem" (p. 3). The concern for creating a heterogeneous unified identity, as a part of official state policy, has only increased the amount of difference manage-

ment needed. This is, as Day is careful to point out, not to say that multiculturalism will inevitably fracture the state, but rather that, as long as you are concerned about maintaining an unified identity, then the insecurity of difference will always require management. It is in the writing of nation as a unified heterogeneous "we" that we find the insecure trace of the map: the face that is constant only in the dark, because when put to the light, it magically disappears.

¹ The initial decision by provincial court Judge Alan McEachern was overturned in 1997. However, the appeal decision, while useful in terms of the specific land in question, relegates First Nations communities (and their use and understanding of the land) to "traditional" forms, allowing government interference if those traditions are broken or misused. The new maps are only accepted when understood as knowledge in the past tense. It would be interesting to examine if there is any relationship between the appeal and the *Historical Atlas of Canada*.

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