



Witnessing Dance in the Streets: *Go! Taste the City*

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According to my analysis of the astrological omens, Pisces, the week ahead will be overflowing with paradox. Lucky danger may be headed your way, or a risky opportunity that will feel like an ordeal even as it brings out the best in you. I also wouldn't be surprised if you had encounters with benevolent trouble, exacting love, and weighty silliness. To thrive in the midst of these rich anomalies, you should suspend any prejudices you might have against puzzling evidence. Don't just tolerate the contradictions--love them.

Olive Bieringa's horoscope the week of
August 12, 2005 (Brezny, 2005a)

There are contradictions in writing about street performances for the academic. How do you write (a representation) about actions and affects that are inherently unable to be represented? Is it possible to use non-representational theory (NRT) to understand a body as both individually performed and transpersonal? Methodologically, is it even possible to *present* events to the reader rather than *represent* them (Dewsbury, 2003)? In this article I will revel in these contradictions. I will use autoethnography to witness a performance where the artist, Olive Bieringa of the BodyCartography Project walked/danced/drifted down 7 blocks of downtown Minneapolis, MN. This performance will allow me to argue that Bieringa exposed her audience to a glimpse of the affect, the psychogeography, of an urban street by transgressing the assumptions about how we move in city spaces.



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Dancing in the Streets

I came to understand geography through my body. I learned about boundaries, and space, and movement in modern dance classes. It was only in graduate school that this visceral knowledge found an intellectual home in the discipline of geography. And still more years before my academic training in geography really changed my relationship to dance. It began when I responded to an unusual call for performers sent out over the BodyCartography Project's list serv. I had been writing about this group from afar for my dissertation and this was a chance to meet them and perform with them.

What I knew about them was that the BodyCartography Project began in 1997 in New Zealand as an explicitly political and geographic dance endeavor. The Project has co-directors Olive Bieringa and Otto Ramstad. I knew that Bieringa was a classically trained dancer, while Ramstad's dance background was informed by a diverse set of physical practices, including Butoh and skateboarding. I had been drawn to them because of their stated commitment to use movement practices as a means to investigate and relate to their chosen performance environments. I loved how they spoke of transforming their own bodily spatial knowledge into observable actions for their audiences to reflect upon. I wrote (and published) a collage piece on their ability to actively engage with the sites where they perform and interpret those sites for their audience (Somdahl-Sands, 2003). I quoted Bieringa who said that, "as an artist my role is not to preach dogma, one opinion, but to offer people the choice to be free in how they think and act. As public artists we can offer an alternative range of choices to mainstream culture. Alternative ways of perceiving, responding and existing in the world, in public and with one another" (Bieringa and Ramstad, 2009) but I had little understanding what that really meant.

And so I return to the story of the 'unusual call for performers'. The call was to join the BodyCartography Project in a public performance to promote a new tradition 'Buy Nothing Day' on the busiest retail day of the year in the United States, the day after Thanksgiving. This was Nov of 2004. The plan involved meeting at a downtown studio to get warmed up and learn some basic choreography, then setting out to dance in the city streets of Minneapolis, MN. After a very brief 40 minutes, we headed out into the stores, skyways and streets of downtown Minneapolis to dance and hand out flyers with information on the unorthodox "holiday" (Fig. 1).

It quickly became clear that the movement call and response with shopping carts in the aisles of the retailer Target was not particularly subversive. Nor was a slow motion walk through the skyways, or putting on the clothes for sale and then dancing in the department stores. As we performed I repeatedly stopped dancing to



Figure 1: Dancing in the Minneapolis skyway system. Photo by author.

approach customers, many of whom believed we had been hired by the stores to entertain the shoppers, ‘you guys look just like those GAP ads you see on TV!’ Despite the seemingly positive response to our antics by their patrons, security guards asked us to leave the various skyways and stores we attempted to use as performance sites. The only place we were left alone to dance and hand out our flyers was on the sidewalks of Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis (Fig. 2).

Prior to this performance I had interacted with dance in ‘appropriate’ sites—studios, stages, and while clubbing. This two and a half hour encounter with the dance practice of the BodyCartography Project was radically different from the studio, stage or club experiences of my past. It was overwhelming. The sites and sounds of the city that I generally barely notice were ever-present as potential inspiration. Prior to this performance I had engaged with the city as a pedestrian, or driver, or most prominently at that point in my life as an academic. What I found was that I experienced the city in an entirely new way when dancing. The material and immaterial surfaces of the city exposed their textures to me; my encounters with others were fluid yet sharp as the disciplining of city spaces was felt on my body as we were forced out into the November cold.

For the first time my intellectual understanding of “[a]lternative ways of perceiving, responding and existing in the world, in public and with one another” became embodied. I actually have few conscious memories of my dancing that day.

I was so ‘in the moment’ that it didn’t lay down traditional long-term memory. It entered my muscle memory, what Casey would call a somatic memory of place (2001) that fundamentally changed the way I witnessed bodies interacting with cityscapes.



Figure 2: On the street during the *Buy Nothing* performance. Photo by author.

Movement as Encounter

Since that time I have been looking for a way to describe that experience and incorporate it into my academic practice. I may have found it in the writings of NRT. NRT is trying to find a way to discuss “the unsettled relationship between what we see and what we know” (Gordon quoted by Dewsbury, 2003, 1909). NRT is a response to the ‘cultural turn’ in human geography. Since the early 1990s much of the writing in cultural geography has focused on representation (Duncan and Ley, 1993; Jones III et. al., 1997), yet not everything that is important is an “it” to be represented. Thrift used the idea of NRT to note all the things that elude representation. Senses, affect, and intuition are all present in our everyday lives and spaces, yet are very difficult to capture and represent. “The question ... is ‘how do we witness ... the actualization of life as it happens in all its complexity?’” (Dewsbury, 2003, 1913). Latham argued that non-representational research needed

to be reframed as a “creative, performative practice” (2003, 1994), while Dewsbury felt that trying to answer this question was “more an alternative research ethos that touches upon the small intricacies of life” (2003, 1913). In either interpretation, NRT views “the world as an endless set of contingent, practical, incomplete encounters between multiple corporeal and inorganic entities” (Castree and MacMillan, 2004, 473).

Dance is an exciting venue for exploring NRT because, “dance eludes rather than simply confronts or subverts power through its ‘capacity to hint at different experiential frames,’ different ways of being that cannot be written or spoken” (Nast quoted by Revill, 2004, 201). Within dance “the volume of the body careening through space is a primary source of knowledge” (Somdahl-Sands, 2006, 612). Dance uses the physicality of the body to articulate complex thought and feelings that cannot be easily put into words (represented). This idea was encapsulated by the modern dance icon, Isadora Duncan, when she stated, ‘If I could tell you what it means I wouldn’t have to dance it’ (Lewis, 2010).

Dance creates a kinesthetic response, producing physical consciousness of the liberating potential of bodies in space (Tuan, 2004). Understanding the political implications of bodies in space has been the subject of much geographic writing (Nast and Pile, 1998; Nelson and Seager, 2005). The political possibilities of bodies dancing have been studied by geographers looking at events as varied as American social dance (Nash, 2000), nationalist dances in Northern Ireland (Morrison, 2003), and stripping as a mode of resistance by Filipina women (Law, 1997). Bodies put meanings into motion (Desmond, 1997) and dance is particularly well suited to use the body in motion to convey and disrupt societal norms of the body in space (Cresswell 2006).

Thrift’s NRT focused on bodily practices rather than interpretation (1997; 1996). “The body is not used to solicit telling testimony about people’s lives, instead it becomes a device that enables the researcher to reveal the trans-human, the non-cognitive, the inexpressible, that underlies and constitutes social life...” (Pile, 2010, 11). This view of the body is about flows of affect, with bodies being multi-nodal and not passively placed in a single space/time. Nevertheless a NRT of the body should not be *anti* representation because the corporeal body is always mediated through social contexts, including place (Moss and Al-Hindi, 2008; Johnston and Longhurst, 2009).

The city is a crucial milieu for the social production and ordering of corporeality. The built environment conditions our access to points in space. It automatically links otherwise unrelated bodies making “possible different kinds of relations but in turn is transformed according to the subject’s affective and instrumental relations with it” (Grosz, 1995, 92). The most common way of being aware of our bodies moving through city spaces is as a pedestrian. The unreflexive and habitual practice of walking unintentionally conveys societal conventions regarding the “appropriateness” of certain bodily actions. This is true to the point

that the way one walks can reinforce (or disrupt) cultural practices of racial, ethnic, class, and gender differentiation (Domosh, 1998). The act of walking becomes a kind of performance. While walking is usually an unconscious act, dancing (particularly in the manner undertaken by the BodyCartography Project) actively and consciously manipulates the aspects that make walking an interesting and powerful point of study.

Methodologically, conveying an “event,” like an ephemeral dance performance, is very difficult because it is a part of the world “that have little tangible presence in that they are not immediately shared and therefore have to be re-presented to be communicated” (Dewsbury, 2003, 1907). How to do this is something I have struggled with, especially in the context of NRT, which is consciously “anti-biographical and pre-individual” (Thrift, 2008, 7). In the end, I decided that the only way to be true to the spirit of NRT was to go against some of its established precepts: This re-presentation of the BodyCartography Project’s performance is an autoethnography. It is what I saw, what I thought, and what I want to share. Although autobiography and autoethnography are not standard methodologies within geography, reflexive practices have gained acceptance and I wanted to use “myself as a source of information...I wanted to use my experiences the way I used [others] –to elaborate empirical links with concepts...” (Moss, 2001, 3). “Good autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale... it is a provocative weave of story and theory.... The researcher and text must make a persuasive argument, tell a good story, be a convincing “I-witness” (Spry, 2001, 713). I am using performance (as what I witness and as a process of exposure) to “turn the internally *somatic* into the externally *semantic*” (Spry, 2001, 721, italics in original).

Go! Taste the City

The performance of *Go! Taste the City* was “60 minutes of live improvised action, interaction and response to several blocks of real estate and real people in downtown Minneapolis” (Bieringa and Ramstad 2009). The performance took place along a 7 block span of Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis, MN that connects the downtown portion of the street to a section of Nicollet Ave. known as ‘Eat Street’ because of its concentration of ethnic restaurants (Fig. 3). Over the seven blocks ‘walked’ during *Go! Taste the City*, the streetscape goes from ‘so clean, with corporate types in their suits’ to ‘completely different populations and activities’ as you get closer to the I-94 freeway overpass and then cross over it (Bieringa and Beverlin, 2006).

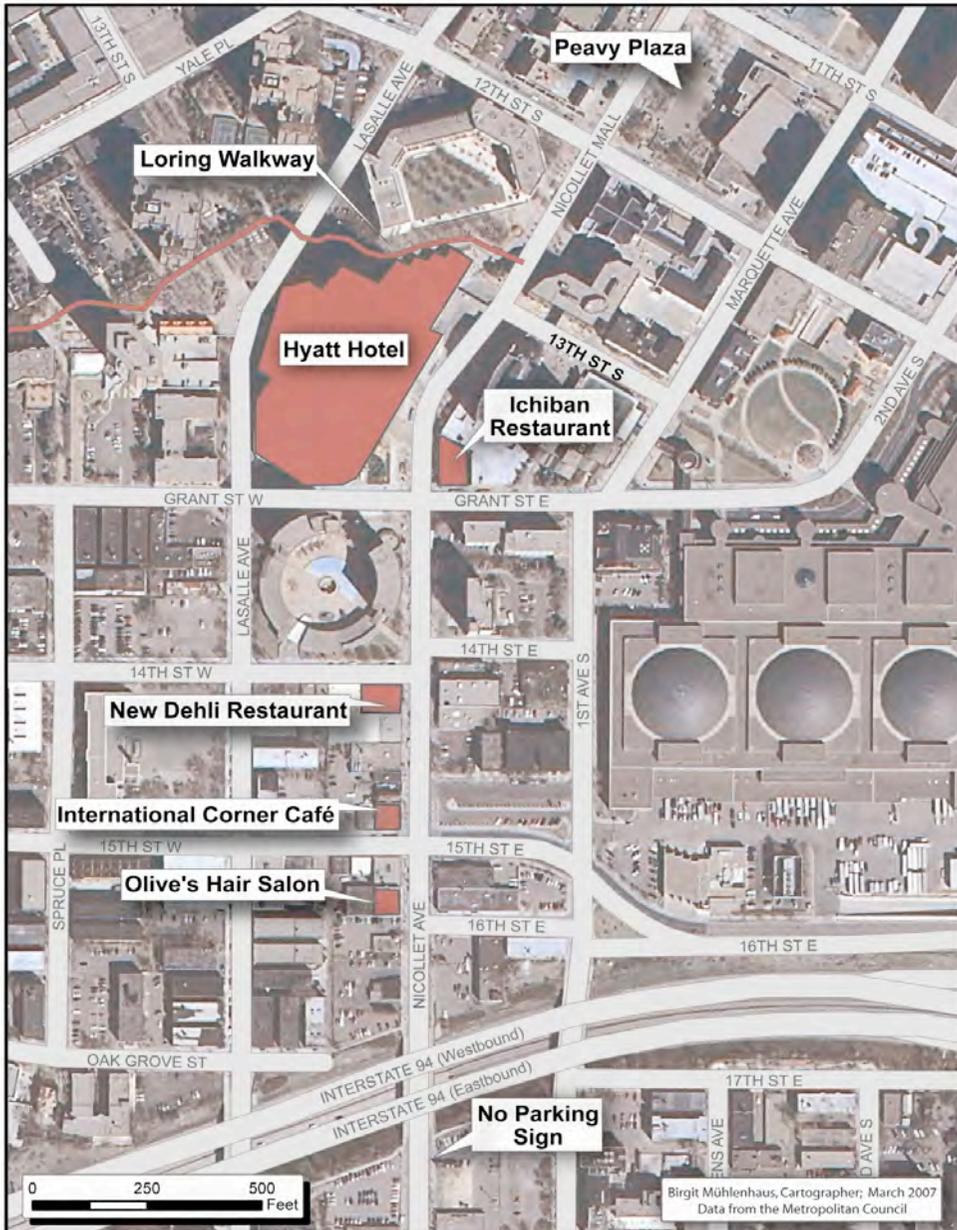


Figure 3: Map of Nicollet Ave from Peavey Plaza to I-94 overpass. Map by Birgit Muehlenhaus

The performance began a few minutes after 5pm on 11 August 2006. There were approximately ten audience members standing near the clock tower at one end of Peavey Plaza on Nicollet Ave. waiting for the performance to begin. Of the many individuals who hang out, pass through or live in this Plaza of downtown Minneapolis, it was obvious who was here for the performance: we were predominantly young (mid 30s or below) and artsy looking, with fashionably scruffy clothes and hair, but the most telling feature was the cameras, not to

mention our repeated looks at the clock to see if it was time for the performance to begin. After approximately five minutes, the woman handing out programs came over and let us know the performance had begun, none of us had noticed—we were looking at the clock, not into the plaza. When I first saw Olive Bieringa, she was lying face down in one of the few plots of grass in the plaza about 50 yards from where the audience had gathered (Fig. 4). Bieringa was wearing a light blue pinstripe suit, running shoes, and had short spiky auburn hair. As she began to move forward with inch-worm-like movements I was able to see the bright orange t-shirt worn under the blue suit coat. Once she came to the edge of the platform she laid her body down and hung over the edge before stretching out to “fly” in the space above the sidewalk below.



Figure 4: Olive Bieringa inching her way through Peavey Plaza, notice the men hanging out in the background. Photo by author.

During the performance of *Go! Taste the City* I was repeatedly struck by the attention Bieringa paid to the texture of the materials on urban streets. At various points in the dance she swayed in the wind produced by automobiles passing below a freeway overpass, darted in and out of the dappled sunlight produced by the trees that lined the streets, shifted effortlessly between the moments of quiet and bustle of the street, laid in the street until the approach of a bus forced her back to the sidewalk, rolled and slid up and down brick embankments, and danced on the mounds of dirt produced by construction projects (Figs. 5 & 6). At one point in the

performance Bieringa entered a waterfall located in the corner of Peavey Plaza. As she stood at the edge of the waterfall, she tilted her face up and stood silently as the water's spray misted her. Appearing to revel in the sensation of the water, her arms slowly rose until they were in the position I have come to associate with evangelical prayer (Fig. 7). Up until this point, the dozen or so people who were following Bieringa's progress through the plaza had done so from a comfortable distance, not coming too close. Yet after she entered the water, the audience began to tentatively enter the water too. Then, without any warning, Bieringa turned, ran, and left the sunken plaza area. After she left the waterfall one man went to the spot where Bieringa got misted and stood there getting wet. It was as if he wanted to experience for himself the sensation Bieringa had just shown us. At least half of the audience who had been following Bieringa either joined in or stopped and watched this man playing in the water. After he left the water, I along with the other audience members dawdling by waterfall followed Bieringa out of the Plaza and onto the street.



Figure 5: Olive Bieringa sliding down a brick incline near the Loring Park pedestrian pathway. Photo by author.



Figure 6: Olive Bieringa lying in Nicollet Avenue as a local city bus approaches. Photo by author.



Figure 7: Olive Bieringa getting misted by the waterfall in Peavey Plaza. Photo by author.

Over the course of the performance Bieringa had many encounters with other pedestrians moving along Nicollet Ave. At the very beginning of the performance she interacted with three men sitting on a wall, hanging out inside Peavy Plaza. Bieringa played a kind of ‘shell game’ as she took a baseball hat off one of the men and tried it on the others in turn before returning the hat to its original owner. All the while, the three men were laughing and teasing Bieringa as a ‘crazy white chick.’ Further on in the dance, she went into a fashionable hair salon. Megan, a stylist at Olive’s Salon told me that it is ‘fun when Olive [Bieringa] comes into the salon.... It scares the clients,’ but it is ‘funny and bizarre....it breaks up the day’ (Fig. 8).



Figure 8: Olive Bieringa dancing inside the Olive Salon. Photo by author.

Moreover, during the performance she also had an impromptu duet with a patron at the New Delhi restaurant. After being evicted from the premises, a man who was seated at an outdoor table near the door, and who was obviously intoxicated, asked Bieringa what she was doing. She looked at him and said, 'I am dancing down the street.' The man responded by saying that he loves to dance, and got up out of his seat and began to move. His friends were laughing, the New Delhi employee who had just told Bieringa to leave looked less than happy, and our newest performer flailed around a bit. He was not quite steady on his feet so he kept his stance wide and most of his movements were isolated to his arms. As he moved them up and down at his sides I was painfully reminded of a child playing sea monster. Bieringa

also took a wide stance and moved her arms creating arcs away from and then towards her own body. The two of them continued this arm duet until they made contact. While continuing to stand they began to turn like two cogs using each other for balance. After two or three rotations, and almost knocking over a parked motorcycle, Bieringa stopped the man by gently holding his shoulders from behind and directing him back to his friends who by then had out their cell phones and were snapping pictures.

However, the instances where members of the public chose to ignore Bieringa were as intriguing to me as when her audience chose to engage and 'play with' her. There were three moments when the lack of interaction by her audience was particularly striking. The first was a moment when, while still in the 'business-focused' area of Nicollet, Bieringa rolled onto her back and then lifted her feet into a shoulder-stand at a corner where people gather to wait before crossing the street. The passers by at the corner consistently pretended not to see Bieringa. At one point there were three office workers dressed in business casual who stood right next to Bieringa's feet (which were at chest level) and blithely continued their conversation without ever acknowledging her presence by look or action. I briefly followed these three office workers to see if their conversation might shift to what they had just seen once they were farther away from Bieringa. I cannot say that that did not happen eventually, but the conversation did not shift within the quarter block I followed them. Another moment of 'invisibility' happened near the abandoned Marker Liquor store when another pedestrian walking towards downtown crossed paths with Bieringa as she tipped her body creating arcs as she walked. He was a tall (over 2 meters tall) man who looked like he might be Hispanic. He was wearing large dark glasses, a two-day-old beard, and wore the jersey of the local football team who had a game that night, the Vikings. He had a cigarette hanging out of his mouth at an improbable angle, but most notably he was wearing a horned helmet complete with long blond braids. As he walked by he avoided even looking towards Bieringa. Perhaps she was too weird. The express lack of attention paid to Bieringa in these two instances was particularly conspicuous in contrast to the dozen or so individuals looking at nothing but Bieringa. As we the 'intentional' audience watched, filmed, took pictures and notes, the 'accidental' onlookers ignored her.

In contrast to the above, the form of social 'invisibility' was very different when Bieringa entered the International Corner Café primarily patronized by Somali immigrants, many of whom own and operate cabs in the area. As she danced in the front window, the men playing pool or checkers and drinking coffee in the shop completely ignored her. What struck me about this moment in the performance was not Bieringa's movements per se, but their context. The gender and ethnic balance of the café was only noticeable to me once it was broken. I had never taken the time to look inside this particular café any of the times I had driven down Nicollet Ave. Furthermore, despite being ignored by the patrons of the International Corner Café, the dozen or so other audience members who stood

outside watching the action through the glass were being watched. A police cruiser with two male officers went by, went around the block and then stopped across the street. They just waited, probably trying to see if we were up to some kind of mischief. After Bieringa emerged from the café and went leaping and turning through the intersection the policemen continued on their way.

We were of interest to the policemen because as a group we were breaking the rules of walking down the street. We were not just walking; we were in fact watching something intently as a group. Olive Bieringa's performance of *Go! Taste the City* transgressed 'normal' expectations of how one is to move in public space. She raced a bus, then a bike, once she stopped and put up her dukes challenging a passing car, which she then raced after. She sat and waved at cabbies, swirled in the breeze, and picked up garbage. She did headstands in abandoned lots, baseball slides through intersections, and moved in slow motion for seemingly long periods of time. Yet, the disruptive potential of the piece came to the forefront for me when Bieringa began to walk down the center of the Nicollet Ave along the double yellow lines with a very large red rock she had picked up from the rubble of a construction site (Figs. 9 & 10). At first, Bieringa walking in the street with a big rock seemed funny; the kind of humor that produces nervous laughter. The rock was so big it made her look like a child. But the humor soon became poignant and then somehow tragic. There was desperation to find one's own path as the cars went by on both sides going 25-40 mph. At one point a man who had been walking in the other direction came out into the road and walked alongside Bieringa for a couple hundred feet. Eventually, he went back to his side of the street and continued on his way.



Figure 9: Olive Bieringa dancing on top of a mound of construction debris outside the Ichiban restaurant. Photo by author.

Bieringa told me later that the man had thought she might be suicidal and wanted her to come out of the street and let him call someone to come get her. At first, when the man asked what she was doing, Bieringa had just answered ‘I’m walking in the middle of the street.’ After it became clear how concerned for her safety he was, she explained it was a part of a performance and that she had no intention of doing herself bodily harm. After this, he wished her well and continued on his way. This passerby was not the only one to try and stop Bieringa — numerous cars honked, slowed down, or tried to switch lanes. Also, as Bieringa

passed the Clicque beauty salon the stylists noticed Bieringa and began to bang on the windows, gesturing at her. Some of the audience members waved back at them.



Figure 10: Olive Bieringa walking down the center of Nicollet Avenue carrying a large rock. Photo by author.

We were so secure in our understanding of the event—that it was just a performance—we were unable to see the concern expressed by those who did not know, those who thought that this was *real* and thus had a moral obligation to help Bieringa avoid injury. After the performance when Bieringa told me what the man had wanted, the cars and beauty salon took on a whole new meaning. It made me proud of the care displayed by strangers, but it also made me question all the people who walked by and did nothing. Did they realize it was a performance, or did they not care? I also began to question the surety of the audience that Bieringa was safe. Did our alienation from the activity lead to complacency of the danger? Eventually Bieringa had returned to the sidewalk with her big rock and handed it to an audience member (who had no idea what to do with it—she eventually put it next to a building) and then Bieringa was off and running again.

Witnessing Dance:

[T]he immaterial is something—only it cannot be imposed (known), it can only be exposed (felt); that is why we are called to be its witness. To witness is to be called by an event.... Witnessing such spaces is not easy, it calls us to betray our roots in habitable modes of thinking...

shifting the focus over so slightly to keep things alive, to be in tune to the vitality of the world as it unfolds. (Dewsbury, 2003, 1923)

The BodyCartography Project is able to de-naturalize and reanimate their chosen sites 'by moving the dancers and the audience through it during the dance' (LeFevre 2005, 46). Site-specific art is prized because of its presumed singularity and authenticity (Kwon, 1997). The presence of the artist creates an event, which endows the site with a certain uniqueness that cannot be repeated or even fully described. Art and place both have the power to move us because they each "present to us something other . . . the intensity of a work of art or the sensations of a dance, communicates its own meaning – it is just that it is on a different register to that which we are used to" (Dewsbury, 2003, 1914). NRT is committed to exploring this different register for knowing, looking for the affect of a space or event (Latham, 2003). However, NRT is not the first to try and understand these relationships (Seamon, 1979; De Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991; Benjamin, 1999; Routledge, 2005). In fact, there have been many city-based artistic movements in the 20th century, from the Dada and Surrealists through to Fluxus and the Situationists, who have all used similar modes of traversing the city (Lucas 2004, 1). All of these movements were using the aesthetic and creative implications of *Flânerie* as a thinking tool.

The *flâneur* in Benjamin's writings was an idle wanderer in crowded city streets (1999). The idleness was productive in that it is contemplative and directed by the unconscious (Benjamin, 1999, 453). Thus the *flâneur* is "writing rather than reading the city. This is an important distinction, as his [sic] spectatorship is an active one... creating a narrative as he goes along" (Lucas, 2004, 3-4). The *flâneur* was a decidedly masculine figure in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Wolff, 1985). The anonymity of masculinity, the ability to be "invisible" in public space, allowed the *flâneur* to observe and not be observed. The notion of the *flâneur* remains questionable to this day. "Aimless strolling, "street walking" per se, still conjures up connotations of prostitution, although it fits the definition of *flanerie* precisely" (Mouton, 2001, 6). Women have specific roles to play in public space - that of a worker or consumer (Wilson, 1992; Domosh and Seager, 2001). Participating in city life in other ways becomes a fundamentally transgressive and transformative act. "The city... becomes a new structuring presence that enables her and those around her to participate in an alternative model of spectatorship not defined by a strict subject/object dichotomy" (Mouton, 2001, 9).

Of the various artistic movements trying to understand the revolutionary undercurrents in city spaces through *Flânerie*, the one that speaks most clearly to Bieringa's performance and NRT is the Situationists International's (SI) notion of psychogeography and use of the *dérive*. Asger Jorn (1958) defined psychogeography as "[t]he study of specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals."

The Situationists used a practice called *dérive* [drift] “to explore the hidden, non-physical connections between spaces, as well as to chart the patterns of desire within a space” (Lucas, 2004: 4). During a *dérive* “[o]ne or more persons during a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action... and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (Plant, 1992, 58). A *dérive* is intended as a non-verbal discourse on urbanism; a method to *see* the “psychogeographical relief, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones” (Debord, 1956, 50). Simply walking is not enough; the drifter is mindful, playful, constructive, and actively aware of the psychogeography of the space as she makes her “transient passage through varied ambiances” (Debord 1956, 22). The feminist drift, like a flaneuse, becomes an act of progressive praxis, a critical device for being in the city.

It is this self-consciously critical lens that links the SI and NRT. Both are approaches that question the rationalist view that dominates much of modern life. They each seek to explore what is left out of the modernist storyline through play and experience. And, while both SI and NRT focus on the material realities, their mutual interest is in the more-than-representational. It is true they take different approaches, one closely linked to the Marxist French tradition, while the other is clearly an Anglo intellectual movement, yet they have similar critiques of what is missing from understandings of society. SI and NRT are both looking for a revolution in everyday life where things like art and life not separated, and where people are freer to be creative and play. Therefore SI and NRT are referring to similar things in their writings, though with different language and in different contexts. So for instance, in the language of NRT the “varied ambiances” of a city street would be labeled its affect, which “is spatially and temporally distributed and stretched out into various presences and absences” (Anderson, 2006: 736). Thus, Bieringa was responding to the psychogeography (or affects) of Nicollet Ave. on that sunny afternoon. Bieringa drifted down Nicollet Ave. She was drawn to certain aspects of the streetscape and allowed her audience to understand the experience of being on a city street in a new way.

Self-propelled movement (like walking or drifting) creates a particular sense of place due to the direct contact with the environment through multi-sensory inputs. The sensing body must acknowledge the material characteristics of the environment, which includes the psychogeography (the affects). Adams (2001) describes one manner of walking as ‘light peripatetic.’ Walking as ‘light peripatetic’ is seen as a kind of ritual where one walks with the conscious intent of ‘attun[ing] oneself bodily and mentally with the universe and especially with nature’ (Adams, 2001, 193). I would argue that the above characterization of walking fits what Olive Bieringa was doing as she walked/danced/drifted the 7 blocks of Nicollet Ave during *Go! Taste the City*. At a public showing of a short film made of the 2006 version of *Go!* that included Olive Bieringa and a second dancer, Bryce Beverlin, the two answered questions that directly address this

concept. When asked how they trained for this performance, Bieringa began speaking by describing the difference between dancing in a city street and in a theater environment as

the world, literally. In the world [on the street], you can't rely on the reflexes built in traditional dance training. The dance floor is not even and it may start to rain. There is so much material to work from. Once you start making choices and stop just being overwhelmed by the stimulus, you are able to work with your environment (Bieringa and Beverlin, 2006).

Beverlin continued, with Bieringa nodding in the background, "before you go you prime your mind, quiet your thoughts. You feel with your senses and become more aware of them. Once you really feel them, you are able to compose from them." Bieringa ended this discussion by stating categorically that, "The world is incredibly inspiring." This statement may sound banal, but in Bieringa's case it is one of the foundations to her dance philosophy. She dances in the public realm because she is inspired by what she finds there.

The performance by Bieringa was very much like a drift (derive) in that it was meant to expose those edges within cities that lie below the surface of the social consciousness. By making the invisible barriers on city streets visible Bieringa's walk/dance/drift turned reconnaissance into action transforming the environment while observing it. The activity of dancing in a public street is not revolutionary in scale; but it can qualify as a 'transgression' of public space (Cresswell, 1996). Site-specific art is able "to be *out* of place with punctuality and precision... addressing the differences of adjacencies and distances *between* one thing, one person, one place, one thought, one fragment next to another" (Kwon, 1997, 109, 50, italics in original). Thrift describes this as situated creativity, which produces "new variations of actions... [that] generate a new model of human action" (2000, 272). The performance of *Go!* was 'at best noticeable... at worst ...can cause severe disturbance to ... established methods of conduct' (Beverlin, 2008). Tim Cresswell argues that individuals and acts that transgress social expectations of spatial behavior denaturalize dominant norms thereby subverting, and revealing, the power relationships present (1996). The performance of *Go!* consciously used transgression as a form of resistance to the distinction between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' behaviors on public streets. The performances were intended to open new possibilities of playful practice, and consequently encountered strategies for disciplining space.

Bodies are restricted in cities by strategic surveillance, policing techniques, CCTV and aesthetic monitoring (Edensor, 1999; Davis, 2000). There is also the inevitable mixing with various social groups that occurs on city streets. Michel DeCerteau describes how walking is tacitly used by urban pedestrians to create spaces of emancipation (1984) by composing a path, a fleeting creative inscription, which attempts to avoid the undesirable encounters and constraints. Yet when one

steps beyond simply resisting the disciplining of space, and moves into transgressing those rules, then more concrete disciplining of public actions commences. Despite Trevor Boddy's claims that Minneapolis skyways do not allow for the performance of 'a clenched fist, a giddy wink, [or] a fixed-shoulder stride' (1992,123-4), it was only when dancing (moving in a way that was clearly more than just 'a fixed-shoulder stride') in the skyways during the *Buy Nothing* performance in 2004 that Bieringa and her performers, including myself, were told to leave by security guards. Our regular modes of walking in city spaces make the other options of how to move invisible. And yet when the other options are shown, the security guards or police still them again.

Go! Witness! Then what?

It's time to play a game called Do-It-Yourself Horoscope! Here's how it works: I provide a skeleton outline of your fortune, and you fill in the blanks.... Ready? Weave the following threads together to create your oracle. 1) The magic toy is within reach. (2) Sexy heresies are risky and wise. (3) It's good to take liberties as long as you do so with gentle sensitivity. (4) Are you smart enough to be pregnant with well-earned hope? (5) A funky asset is 18 percent larger than normal. (6) The sinewy, supple, serpentine approach will require all your concentration and provide all you need.

Aries horoscope 18 August 2005 (Brezny, 2005b)

The BodyCartography Project, and Olive Bieringa as its representative, transgressed the norms of city streets by adding a new practice: dance. Her performance of *Go! Taste the City* consciously resisted those rules which bind us to normalized modes of movement. She *chose* to skip, roll, slide, and swirl down a Minneapolis public street. She spun, raced, did headstands, and rolled around on the ground. Bieringa did not just move along Nicollet Avenue, she offered "[a]lternative ways of perceiving, responding and existing in the world, in public and with one another" (Bieringa and Ramstad, 2009). Her activities were not acceptable behaviors outside of performative experience. Yet despite, and often because of, the fact that her actions broke the rules, her performance was fun. Her dancing absorbed the attention of those who watched her; there was intensity to it. So much so that the people following her began to emulate Bieringa's actions by going into the water, entering an unfamiliar coffee shop, or crossing under fences to get a better view of her dancing. Through interacting with individuals, and with the streetscape, Bieringa used her moving body to reveal the psychogeography that was always already there. The de-familiarization inherent in performance just made it easier to see by directing the audience's intention/attention to the spaces between affect and action. Olive Bieringa was demonstrating a light peripatetic form of being in public. She inspired the adults who saw the performance to heighten their own sensitivity to places.

The particular place for the performance, a seven block section of Nicollet Avenue, was chosen because of the dramatic change that occurs over those blocks as Nicollet Avenue goes from a downtown hub of corporate activity to an ethnic area dominated by restaurants and groceries and the patrons of those establishments. Olive Bieringa engaged with the populations that inhabit Nicollet Avenue on a summer evening and was able to reveal how some bodies are more noticeable than others. When she behaved ‘normally’ she was invisible, yet when she walked in the street she became the object of care and even interference. Bieringa describes her dancing as about “engaging with and revealing the landscape that is already there. It is not about dumping something into the landscape.... [the performance] is a negotiation and an interaction with a public space.... an opportunity to engage with people” that she would not ordinarily interact with during her day (Bieringa and Beverlin, 2006). Bieringa is very “sensitive to the situation [as she performs]. If someone wants to play with me—I’ll play. I’m celebrating life with people” (Bieringa and Beverlin, 2006). She has noted that it is often individuals who have the option of being “invisible” in public space that are the most uncomfortable interacting with her. However it is important to remember that “the choice to ‘belong’ ... does not belong to everyone equally.... [T]he ability to deploy multiple, fluid identities in and of itself is a privilege of mobilization that has a specific relationship to power” (Kwon 1997, 109).

Olive Bieringa’s race, gender, and occupational status were explicitly juxtaposed against others she encountered as she moved through Minneapolis’ city streets. Bieringa was not the stereotypical woman in the city. Despite going into restaurants and hair salons she was not a consumer. Nor was she polite as she balanced on her shoulders with her feet in the faces of those who would not acknowledge her. Bieringa slid down embankments, picked up cigarette butts, and generally got very dirty. She used her female body to disrupt (transgress) what women ‘do’ on city streets. “When streets effectively belong to cars, they cease to function as places” where people can gather and interact (Solnit, 1998, 3). Bieringa actively interacted with elements and individuals of the city that most take for granted or try to avoid. Her actions highlighted how different actors within society respond to difference, at least in this one instance. The clientele of the salon were scared of Bieringa’s antics, a patron of the New Delhi restaurant joined in even after she had been thrown out of the establishment, and the Somali men at the International Corner Café ignored her completely. Many writers who comment on moving in public space focus on the strategies involving control by means of oversight and systems of surveillance. However, the performance was seen by persons of authority (police officers), by highly transitory individuals (the cabbies), and the general public. The relationship of surveillance in this case was much more nuanced than is generally described.

By engaging audience members both at the level of the mind and the body, Bieringa fostered a new sense of place; the street itself expanded. She asked her audience to consciously consider how meaning was entwined in their urban

environment. While many of Bieringa's audience members were probably familiar with Nicollet Ave, they gained a whole new perspective of the radical changes that can occur in urban areas as they followed her explorations of the city street. The disparities between wealth and poverty were stark and tangible. There was no litter to pick off the street near the modern masterpiece of Peavey Plaza, yet the lot next to the abandoned liquor store was strewn with broken glass, plastic wrappers, and odd bits of metal. As Bieringa traversed those seven blocks, the white office workers in loafers and pumps gave way to cabbies, the intoxicated, and individuals like the wayward Viking who was clearly just passing through. Nicollet Avenue took on a whole new meaning for those who saw it under the careful guidance of Olive Bieringa. One does not need to "dance" down a street to become conscious of the "constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones" (Debord, 1956, 50), one only needs to *slow down* enough to see them.

I was amazed when I went back to Nicollet Ave to "map" the performance that she had covered only 7 blocks and that in those 7 blocks there was so much to see and experience that I blindly walk by. For instance, despite living blocks off Nicollet Ave at one point in my life, I had never really noticed the cabs, and their drivers, that this performance made me see as Bieringa raced them, waved to them, or hoped not to be run over by them. Conscious interaction with the city allowed the invisible to become visible and action to replace reaction. I began to write the Nicollet Ave rather than read it. Thinking about traversing the city from within the framework of SI and NRT created the capacity in me to envision new ways to live and think about a familiar place.

NRT challenges us to recognize the centrality of what cannot be easily represented in everyday social practice and "demands methodological and interpretive strategies that build this recognition into their very core" (Latham, 2003, 1996). Dewsbury believes that "witnessing" an event "represents a genuine and important shift away from thinking life solely in terms of power knowledge... towards apprehending life knowledge, that which speaks to the affirmation of life itself, to our feelings, desires, and beliefs" (2003, 1928). In this performance the audience slowed down and was given the opportunity to see the constant currents of affect swirling in our city streets. Bieringa was not dictating my interpretation of her actions; she offered an alternative way of being in the world and then left it as a 'do-it-yourself' performance. The audience was expected to weave together the images and then tell their own story. This is my story of the performance. I don't know if NRT is a magic toy, or my use of it is a sexy heresy, but it certainly feels like a sinewy, supple, serpentine path that hold the promise of hope.

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