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Queer Cartography: Mapping Signage in Glad Day and Gay Village

The Church-Wellesley village, known as a cultural enclave for the queer community of Toronto, serves as a great case study into the significance of signage in communicating cultural histories and social nuances. Walking through its streets, the abundance of rainbows serves as a mascot of the community, adorning small and corporate businesses, street signs, and crosswalks. This is a stark contrast to the adjacent streets of Yonge and Jarvis. Juxtaposing the three neighboring streets reveal that signage in Church-Wellesley village reflects the community's values, culture, and history. Studying these signs provides an opportunity to delve into the neighborhood's fabric, offering insights into its events, support centers, and messages of affirmation. In his seminal work, Heathcott (2007) posits that architecture acts as "a kind of archive, a catalog of choices as to the organization, circulation, adornment and habitation of space" (p. 240). He further emphasizes the significance of an interdisciplinary approach to comprehend these material sources, highlighting the importance of combining material culture studies with architectural and urban history.

The maps above attempt to highlight the value that the Church-Wellesley village places on community and celebration and the impact that has on Glad Day's interior. To record our observations, we started by walking slowly on each of the streets and noting any queer signage we saw. We took pictures of the signage as we went and drew an x on a hand drawn map to note where the signs were located. Afterwards we grouped the different signage into colour coded categories and marked them onto a new map to show the location of different signage types. The rainbows in the final map connect all the queer signage in the neighborhood and flood into Glad Day, visualizing a connected community in the bookstore influenced by exterior values. Contrasting the presence of signage on Church Street with adjacent streets highlights the story of community in the Gay Village, by showcasing the absence of signage on Yonge and Jarvis. Many assumptions can be made about the predominant use of signage in the Church-Wellesley village. One of the conclusions that can be drawn from Heathcott's (2007) lens of the accidental archive, is that celebratory queer signage in the neighborhood is a point of resistance to heteronormative culture, and oppressive and violent queer histories in Toronto. This analysis has guided us to expand on our previous curiosities surrounding the role Glad Day plays in Toronto's queer community and how Glad Day has changed throughout history. Adopting Heathcott's perspective as a lens, we will explore how the signage in Glad Day, itself a historical piece of Toronto's queer community, reflects and is shaped by queer history in Toronto.

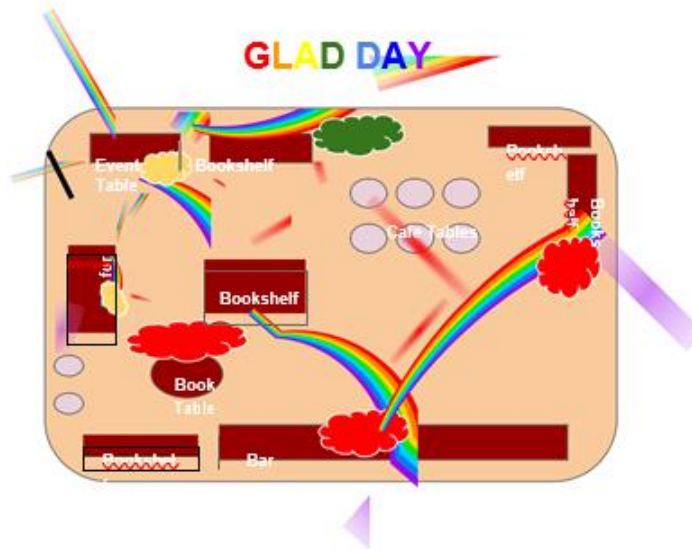
The public and private spaces of Church-Wellesley village house a variety of advertisements, public service announcements, posters, and storefront messages. We

captured a streetbox media, with the raw aesthetics of grassroots graffiti, demonstrating the village's activist spirit. The relatively small sticker reads "Justice for Nahel, for Regis, for Taresh. Nahel Merzouk was a 17-year-old Moroccan shot and killed by police officers in Paris a few months ago. Regis Korchinski-Paquet, and Taresh Bobby Ramroop, were both Canadians who also suffered a fate of death at the hands of the police. The illustrated poster seen under the sticker highlights figures of diverse backgrounds underscoring that the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights as being inseparably linked with broader racial and social justice movements and spanning beyond immediate geography and culture. This sense of the queer community beyond borders is reflected in a sign within the bookstore proclaiming, "You can help bring a Ugandan LGBTQ+ Refugee to safety in Canada.". A storefront's message, "It Takes a Village," coupled with the statement "Keep On Keeping On," establishes the village as not just a geographic location, but as a community that remains resilient against adversity. It emphasizes the collective as opposed to the individual and serves as somewhat of a reminder to look out for others in the community. The added branding elements, such as #VILLAGELIFE, assert the location's prominence as an epicenter of LGBTQ+ life and activism. This care for the well-being of the collective is further contextualized by health clinic signage observed in the bookstore. It is well known that queer bodies have been historically and presently excluded from many/all avenues of healthcare, thus advertising safe places for members of the queer community to access healthcare in Glad Day positions the bookstore as a node in a community centered culture, resisting historical conceptions of queer bodies.

Discussing our positionalities is crucial to better understand how they impact our ability to attain "objective" results, particularly when researching a community to which group members may have varying connections. Kusek and Smiley (2014) explore the "fluidity" of insider and outsider status among researchers, highlighting the importance of moving away from "objectivity" as a final goal since both statuses compromise research attainment (158). Our group being made up of solely queer members can be beneficial and provide a facilitated route to finding personal connections to the queer village and its values. However, our differing experiences of queerness, which lead us to find "insider" and "outsider" status at different times from each other, might lead different group members to overestimate how accommodated certain parts of the queer community might be by the recorded signage. Our exploration of signage is influenced by our individual abilities to resonate with the gay village based on our personal experiences. While positionality is present and relevant to our research, it does not mitigate the effectiveness with which we can navigate it (Kusek and Smiley, 2014; 158-159).

The signage in Glad Day bookstore and Church-Wellesley village offers an immersive gateway into queer history, culture, and values. Each sign, slogan, and illustration serve as tangible artifacts of past and current struggles of the community and simultaneously pay homage to queer culture and history. Heathcott's (2007) idea

of unintentional archives has been demonstrated in the signage across the Church-Wellesley village. The environment invites urbanists and casual observers alike to delve deeper into Toronto's queer history. An interdisciplinary approach – combining the nuances of material culture studies, architectural history, and urban history – is required to truly comprehend and appreciate the community's references and priorities. This demonstrates the unique role of signage in the village and Glad Day; they tell stories, they reference historical nuances and invite those passing through to engage with the heart of the community, its values, its struggles, and its celebrations.



Bibliography

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