

The “complex map” of Home in Liquid Modernity Re-thinking Mobility and Stability in Nicolas Dickner’s *Nikolski*

Originally published in 2005, Nicolas Dickner’s debut novel won several awards including the Prix Anne-Hébert in 2006; Lazer Lederhendler’s 2008 English translation won the Quebec Writers’ Federation Award for Translation as well as the Governor General’s Literary Award for Translation. The book, in its English form, garnered further critical and popular acclaim when it became the 2010 Canada Reads winner, championed in a series of televised debates as a standout work of Canadian fiction (“Book Profile” n. pag.). With additional translations, *Nikolski* has become a truly important Québécois, Canadian, and international work because of its intricate overlapping narratives of three highly mobile Canadians as well as its poetic evocations of mobility, loss, and belonging. My focus in this article is on the notion of home, which is the nexus of these three ideas and which Dickner compellingly suggests should be understood as a “complex map” (99). His evocation of the map metaphor is significant because home has long been conceived of in relation to a singular location on the basis of rigid nationalist and capitalist world views—most notably, through the sense that citizenship or ownership can fully legitimize claims of at-homeness and thus easily define home in a materially “home-centred culture” (Morley 26). Dickner incisively illuminates an emergent view that works to interrelate rather than isolate experiences of mobility and readily accommodates the reality of our multiple connections to places and people.

Nikolski is particularly well suited for reconsidering the nuances of home because the novel is international and diverse in its reach, discussing suburbs, decayed urban centres, sparse islands, liminal spaces of transit, the exotic

and the banal, distinct places and those that seem placeless. The geographic scope of Dickner's debut includes much of Canada as well as faraway locations, not for the sake of exoticism but as a testament to the complexity of genealogies, migration histories, and narratives of home spaces. Beginning in 1989, the novel spans a decade during which its protagonists rethink home by travelling but also re-contextualizing their past mobility in relation to that of others. One of the ways in which Dickner investigates mobility and its consequences is by examining the notion of strangers—not only meeting strangers but also the feeling of being a stranger. Yet, rather than highlight alienation and loneliness, Dickner shows the broader potential for family and community amongst strangers through the idea that, unknowingly, strangers may (already) be closely connected. *Nikolski* interweaves the narratives of three protagonists who are unaware of their links: the unnamed narrator of his own chapters, this narrator's half-brother, Noah, and their cousin, Joyce. Linking the three is Jonas Doucet, absentee father to the boys and a maternal uncle that Joyce heard stories about but never met.

The three protagonists are related but exemplify very different experiences of the stability and mobility inherent to home. On one hand, the unnamed narrator is initially as immobilized by the comfort of the familiar as his mother, who was a travel agent but after his birth only ever "travelled" by reading guides (237-38), yet he eventually decides to see the world. On the other hand, for Noah, mobility is the norm because his childhood is spent on the road—"a narrow nowhere" (37)—in a trailer and he desperately seeks to settle in one place, only leaving Montreal when he finds out that he has a son with a former girlfriend. Lastly, Joyce more consistently embraces mobility and avoids her cousins' dramatic shifts. Her childhood is spent in a remote village where travel is not much of an option with the exception of the "seasonal variety of nomadism known as transhumance" (46), with residents moving in summer to the coast for fish. Joyce eventually half-settles in Montreal before fleeing potential prosecution for computer piracy, and she most clearly illustrates a strategic approach to mobility that Dickner shows as increasingly central to understanding not just *where* but *how* the idea of home is "made."

In this article, I examine *Nikolski's* rich imaginary landscapes in order to explore what I call the process of "home-making," in which gender-neutral "home-makers" quite literally "make" themselves at home. The personalized mapping of home, which Dickner's characters undertake with increasing proficiency, incorporates the self-reflection that Martin Heidegger argues is imperative for *dwelling*, a notion that for Heidegger includes thinking

about as well as constructing and conserving home. Heidegger wrote about dwelling mid-century, but in what Zygmunt Bauman has written about prolifically and called liquid modernity—an era which followed solid modernity around the end of the twentieth century and which is characterized by fluidity, particularly through increased uncertainty, risk, and flows—our means of engaging with or committing to thinking about dwelling are greatly altered. A socio-economic context defined by incessant change and flux would seem antithetical to Heidegger’s sense of dwelling, and yet dwelling is shown in *Nikolski* as not only possible but in many ways necessary for these mobile and fluid protagonists as they (re)locate and meaningfully position themselves within a socio-political and material reality. The three main home-makers in *Nikolski* are cartographers of home and the very process of mapping assists them in “ever learn[ing] to dwell” (Heidegger 159) as well as discovering what Gaston Bachelard describes as the house’s “powers of integration” (6). Furthermore, the home-makers in *Nikolski* do not simply locate a physical “corner of the world” (Bachelard 4) but map multiple “corners” on different scales in order to construct a more meaningful identity anchor, one that is capable of reflecting the multiplicities and liquid modern contexts of home-making.

My central argument is, first, that the process of mapping home depicted in *Nikolski* importantly highlights strategies of adaptation rather than escape amidst modern flux, and, second, that Dickner’s work showcases innovative means of fostering stability, commitment, and community in an age of increasing flows. The novel does this by offering the view of home as a complex map, which I understand as multi-sensory and multi-scalar,¹ and by depicting diverse protagonists who are not simply passive readers of externally identified “homes” but active, lifelong cartographers of their sense of home. Throughout the novel Dickner investigates Yi-Fu Tuan’s claim that “[h]ome, for the modern person, is a point of departure rather than the locus of permanent loyalty” (103) and builds on Sara Ahmed’s critique of the conventional “assumption that migration is necessarily a movement *away* from home” (16). *Nikolski*, I suggest, contributes to this discourse by examining the multifaceted relations between our “roots” and “routes.” Joyce, for instance, views her migrations as moves *towards* home, her pirate heritage, and childhood dreams, which she links to the Caribbean. Noah, meanwhile, expresses contradictory emotions that pull him both forward and back: “I’m feeling kind of rudderless. I could go back to square one. Buy a trailer and head back to Saskatchewan . . .” (190). However, even

as a child Noah possessed a “miniature inner atlas” (36) and over the course of the novel he finds that he can rely on a complex map of home to help him to learn to dwell because, instead of marking “square one” (190) or another location, this mental map offers a palimpsestic, constantly re-charted multi-dimensional grid of home.

The Privilege of Mobility: Tourists and Vagabonds

The protagonists of *Nikolski* can be called nomads, but they are not Bauman’s two kinds of liquid modern nomads because they use mobility in order to understand rather than escape ideas of home, settlement, and belonging. In *Globalization*, Bauman argues that the term “nomad” has become overly fashionable and misleading because “it glosses over the profound differences which separate the two types of experience” (87). The two types that he proposes are the tourist, unfettered by allegiances and supplied with endless choice, and the vagabond, denied the agency of choosing where to move and in many ways how to live. Akin to the digital divide, Bauman’s point is the veritable global *mobility* divide, but the tourist-vagabond binary should not be read as a condemnation of all travellers or regulations regarding migration, both of which can certainly offer social and economic benefits. Not only is mobility not equally distributed but, as Rosemary Marangoly George points out, home “is not equally available to all” (9). Dickner explores the responses or alternate ideas of home that such a reality can provoke in home-makers who lack a more traditional legacy of geographic belonging. Noah’s mother’s trailer, the narrator’s isolated suburban childhood home, and Joyce’s home village—or, more accurately, her grandfather’s old house, which goes “adrift” (59) shortly after his death—are all important parts of each character’s own complex map, but which cannot define the idea of home for them.

Noah gets a job delivering groceries by bicycle in Montreal and finds himself exploring “a complex map of the area, at once physical and cultural” (99), and the theme of unofficial mapping runs throughout the novel. Noah’s epiphany is influenced by his very mobile childhood, during which he idealized home as a decidedly stable location—he considers jumping out the trailer window just to remain in one place (37) and when he finally gets a room in Montreal “he feels unworthy of occupying this place” (82). However, Noah discovers that one address or even two dimensions are not enough to explain his relation to space and his sense of home: “he would need a mobile, a game of Mikado, a matryoshka or even a series of nested scale

models” (99). For me, the dynamic, overlapping, and nested aspects of this description imply the multi-scalar home, an idea that requires multiple geo-cultural scales as well as private and public dimensions to be understood. The shifting perspective in the novel—that “zooms into and out from a local, personal position: Canada, Quebec, Montreal, Little Italy, an apartment, a room, a bed, a thought” (Lederhendler 41)—becomes an integral aspect of the interwoven narratives. It is only after discovering this expansive approach to thinking about home, rather than upon finally moving out of his mother’s roving trailer and into an apartment, that “[f]or the first time in his life, Noah is starting to feel at home” (Dickner 99).²

For Catherine Bates, “*Nikolski* is a novel with a postcolonial aesthetic that foregrounds the inherent problem with maps” (206), and this problem is met not with a rejection of maps, but with creative solutions to these problems. Bates examines Noah’s “palimpsestic mental and embodied map” (206), and she suggests that Joyce’s use of a hand-drawn dumpster-diving map made by an archaeology professor shows her role in “developing an alternative cartography of the city, which undermines the planned, official version” (205). In addition to these alternate depictions of space, there is a map of the Caribbean inside the Three-Headed Book, which showcases different relations to mobility. The book has no title but is named for the three very different yet compiled historical narratives that align with each of the characters: information on treasure islands for Noah, the archaeologist; a pirate tale for Joyce; and the story of a castaway for the Montreal Island-trapped narrator (154). All of these unique maps exemplify the evolving possibilities of locating and charting home in liquid modernity, as Joyce and her cousins continue exploring their “roots” through various “routes” and, in this way, they map and assemble home rather than simply pinpointing or rejecting a home space.

In *The Black Atlantic* Paul Gilroy uses the metaphors of roots and routes to elaborate on the “double consciousness” of the African diaspora, and the relation of roots/routes has extensive relevance to the idea of mapping home, particularly as Gilroy points out that it is not only European traditions that are “more interested in the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and meditation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes” (19). James Clifford draws on Gilroy’s work and applies the relation more literally to his own idea of “travelling cultures,” arguing that although “roots always precede routes” (3) in previous understandings of dwelling, the two are

actually deeply intertwined through “different patterns of affiliation and displacement” (88). *Nikolski* depicts these very patterns. Dickner has said that the idea for the novel stemmed from the patterned migrations of sperm whales in *Moby-Dick* and from anecdotal stories of running into friends while halfway across the world as though participating in such whale-like patterns (“Nicolas Dickner reveals” n. pag.). The characters in *Nikolski* not only seek out connections by uprooting but also explore old as well as new roots and engage with various communities.³ Noah initially defines himself through “the paradox of being the descendant of both the reservations and a deportation” (22) on account of his mother’s Chipewyan and his father’s Acadian heritages, and such “patterns of affiliation and displacement” (Clifford 88) are continued through his own decisions to remain in, leave, and return to his former apartment in Montreal.

Each of Dickner’s main characters seeks his or her own mix of stability and mobility, not as hypermobile tourists or mobility-restricted vagabonds but as alternative types that are not only mobile and settled but that, importantly, chose to commit to home spaces in spite of and even because of their (im)mobility in Montreal or a “hemisphere next door” (269). In order to explore Dickner’s alternative types, I use as my starting point the idea of “nomadology” that is explored by his characters, particularly Noah, who first envisions a university degree in this strange field.⁴ Having to choose a major at university, Noah finds himself “looking for the Diploma in Applied Nomadaology or the B.A. in International Roaming, the only disciplines for which he felt he had some talent, but there was no mention of any such degrees” (39). Nomadology, as a study of nomads or nomadic practices, suggests the need for a deeper analysis of the reasons for as well as means and effects of migration. Noah’s notion of “nomadology” highlights emerging mobilities and kinds of commitment that are central to Dickner’s novel as well as his idea of home-makers charting their own innovative maps of home.

According to Martin Jay, Bauman’s overarching project of liquid modernity suggests that “We are all nomadic extraterritorials, who restlessly transgress the increasingly porous boundaries left by solid modernity. We have learned to value transience over duration, and cope—more or less—with the erosion of even our sense of enduring individual selves” (98). Dickner complicates such an assessment in *Nikolski* when, on one hand, Noah feels that “[h]is family tree was, like everything else, a transient thing that receded with the landscape” (28-29), while, on the other hand, Joyce seeks “to elude the clutches of her family tree” (60). Ultimately, Dickner shows that such

extremes—the tourist’s transience or vagabond’s entrapment—do not, in fact, undermine the modern relevance of the concept of home. Instead, such experiences work together because mapping incorporates relations to other people, places, and social forces into the already composite idea of home. In fact, Dickner’s characters more than “cope” (Jay 98) with the issues that Bauman outlines; they manage to thrive by looking to unconventional examples rather than expectations and norms. Joyce looks to historical and virtual pirates, the narrator eventually escapes “the gravitational pull” (282) of guidebooks and seeks answers *through* travel, and Noah delves into the history of the Garifunas.

The Garifunas offer a particularly salient alternative home-making model. These “great voyagers” are “neither wholly Aboriginal nor entirely descended from the African slaves” (150, 207), and they become a means for Dickner to overtly reframe answers to questions of belonging for his protagonists: the answers do not require a singular location but the creation of a complex map. Noah claims to be staying on Margarita Island (with his son and his girlfriend, Arizna) in order to research the Garifunas for his doctoral project. His interest is not surprising considering his mobile, itinerant background and since “no one, not even the greatest ethnologists, can properly explain the intricate mechanism that allowed these orphans, though uprooted and exiled, to hold on to their identity” (209). People of varied ethnic or geographic ties who etch out their own belonging in the face of an intrusive colonial or bureaucratic order also bring to mind the “second San Pedro” (88) community which begins with immigrating family members from the Dominican Republic but grows to include “stray Guatemalans or some Cubans just passing through” (90) as well as Noah when he lives in Maelo’s apartment. Also importantly, Noah’s interest in the vibrant history of the Garifunas works to counter his own experiences of “the scientific coldness” of scholarship on Indigenous cultures after being “traumatized by Professor Scott’s Indigenous Peoples’ Prehistory course” (115) early in his university studies in archaeology or, more broadly, to counter what Heather Macfarlane describes as “[t]he myth of the vanishing Indian [that] has long been used to marginalize Native peoples; it relegates them to museums and anthropological studies as artifacts” (11).

New Kinds of Home-Makers: Passersby and Pirates

The dimension that I see *Nikolski* adding to Bauman’s distinct types is the question of agency, and I propose the text’s representations of the passerby

and pirate types as incisive explorations of agency and home-making within the socio-economic conditions of liquid modernity.⁵ In “From Pilgrim to Tourist—or a Short History of Identity,” Bauman discusses the stroller and player figure as two additional examples of what he also calls a modern “life strategy” (24), but he does not return to either in his subsequent writing as they are tangential to the tourist and vagabond. The passerby and pirate types that I theorize through Dickner’s novel are part-tourists and part-vagabonds in a way that supplements and enriches Bauman’s tourist-vagabond binary. Furthermore, these new “strategies” in *Nikolski* not only expose the breakdown of old home-making practices that the tourists and vagabonds reject but also reveal the emergence of new home-making practices, relations, and commitments. My main contention regarding Bauman’s illuminating work on liquid modernity, as well as on its tourists and vagabonds, is that when he refers to commitment, he conjures a static idea which was embraced in solid modernity and is avoided in liquid modernity with an approach best explained with the advice: “do not commit yourself too strongly to people, places, causes—you cannot know how long they will last or how long you will count them worthy of your commitment” (“Pilgrim” 25). I want to suggest that our understanding of commitment as largely permanent or definitive cannot remain the same across these eras because we cannot revive the often predetermined responsibilities expected under solid modernity or the conditions that could foster them in a time so deeply affected by extensive liquidity and flows. In *Nikolski*, Dickner sagaciously illustrates more fluid yet stable approaches to commitment through the decisions of his protagonists to forge and re-establish loyalties and other adaptive but meaningful links.

In examining a sense of liquid modern commitment, Dickner investigates the scope of what John Durham Peters discusses as the dichotomy of being homeless and “home-full” (21). These extremes echo Bauman’s homeless vagabond and “home-full” tourist dynamic (even though Bauman’s tourists are not traditionally sedentary, they are undoubtedly “home-full” through their access to or potential ownership of multiple home spaces) but Peters eventually settles on diaspora as an alternative to the extreme positions. He views diaspora as existing conceptually between nomadism’s “rootless liberty” and nationalism’s “organic connection” (38) because it is capable of accommodating various shades of a mobile and yet rooted existence. *Nikolski* touches on the mass and relatively permanent immigration or resettlement of more traditionally conceived diaspora through the

protagonists' Indigenous and Acadian roots, but the diasporic mobility of the various half-Doucets also problematizes supposedly permanent "organic connections" and equally abstract "rootless liberty" (Peters 38). The diverse histories of diaspora and individual migrations in *Nikolski* complicate traditional associations with the term and shed light on new commitments and freedoms of the passerby figures, who are less privileged tourists and not quite "home-full," and the pirate figures, who are more privileged vagabonds and neither physically nor conceptually homeless.

The novel does include characters that represent the tourist and vagabond "life strategies" which Bauman theorizes and this is important in establishing other "strategic" configurations. Yet even Dickner's tourist and vagabond present a twist on Bauman's stock figures. In regard to the former, Noah's girlfriend, Arizna, represents the global elite, but unlike her mogul father, she uses her family's money in activist endeavours including a publishing house with titles on Indigenous studies and alternative economies (187). The other figure is poignantly represented by a Montreal homeless man who serves as a reminder that the tourist's privilege is also denied to individuals in prosperous areas of the world. Additionally, the "vagrant wearing a Maple Leafs hockey tuque" (77) is sporting the logo of a Toronto team in Montreal, which makes his defining attribute more noticeable for being so distinctly out of place. The literally homeless figure also undermines the romanticized view of a nomad's "rootless liberty" (Peters 38) by foregrounding the rigors of a nomadic life.

The pirate and passerby types share characteristics with the more passive stroller and player figures which Bauman initially explored in addition to tourists and vagabonds. However, by filling out the tourist-vagabond spectrum rather than offering equally passive types, the pirate and passerby are able to fruitfully problematize Bauman's notion that those living in liquid modernity typically avoid commitment. For example, *Nikolski's* narrator is a passerby, or less privileged tourist, and life seems to pass by as he observes instead of fully engaging with his surroundings. Bauman's notion of the stroller similarly includes an emphasis on pleasures without attachments as well as a level of commitment comparable to watching television ("Pilgrim" 28).⁶ However, while passersby in *Nikolski* might not seek out permanent attachments, they value deeper engagement and commit in their own ways. The narrator's life suggests an overarching detachment—his school friends have "disappeared, swallowed up by the course of events" (Dickner 14) and "it seemed natural for [him] to dissolve [him]self" (17) in the bookstore

where he works—yet never to the extent of Bauman’s commitment-avoiding, novelty-seeking, hypermobile tourist. The narrator’s engagement may appear minimal but he is actually quite devoted to the used bookstore as well as its customers and makes an effort to find a worthy replacement once he finally decides to see more of the world and “pass by” on a grander scale. Although he expresses a prejudice when the ad seeking his replacement includes the stipulation, “Nomads need not apply” (280), mobility is not demonized in *Nikolski* beyond this rather practical concern of finding longer term labour in an economy that increasingly favours globally mobile career drifters.⁷

Joyce, meanwhile, represents the pirate figure, one that flourishes because of liquid modernity’s flows and economic interconnectedness. Because she has more privilege and agency than a vagabond type, she is able to insert herself into a new landscape, taking or “looting” what she requires. As her computer piracy suggests, the pirate figure need not steal goods but can also copy, borrow, and adapt objects and ideas. The link that the role has to Bauman’s additional strategy of the player is less direct than the example of the stroller to the passerby but also worth mentioning in order to reframe stereotypical associations of pirates. The player, Bauman explains, functions through “moves” (“Pilgrim” 31), like in chess or another game, as well as the mobility of literally moving away. The link to the pirate is that players can “cut their losses’ and start from scratch” (“Pilgrim” 32), something that Joyce seems to partially do on several occasions when she leaves the east coast and then Canada. The player has an ambivalent relation to engaging and even winning since there are always other “moves” and new games, but the similarly practical pirate type demonstrates a more active agenda and deeper intent to, in this case, map and claim a home.

One chapter title in *Nikolski* explains that “[p]irates are pragmatists” (180), and this sentiment—strengthened by Joyce’s interest in salvaging garbage in her quest to build a computer and become a virtual pirate—sheds light on the agency that the pirate type recovers in order to shift from immobilized vagabond to someone who must fight for and maybe even steal the right to more mobility or any mobility at all. The pirate figure in *Nikolski* is also tied to liberation as someone who works on the margins of a system which upholds the mobility divide that Bauman’s tourist-vagabond binary so effectively illustrates. As a young child, Joyce was told stories about “[a]ll kinds” (238) of pirates but her cousins insisted that female pirates did not exist. She realizes that “the more often they said it, the more [she] wanted to prove them wrong” (238) and only the narrator, her exceptionally well-read

acquaintance as well as unknown cousin, gives her childhood goal historical credence (239).

Lastly, Noah draws both of these figures of nomadology together and shows the fluid nature of the strategies: he was a passerby as a child traversing western Canada with his mother, a kind of pirate on Margarita Island, and fluctuated between these two positions when in Montreal. Over the course of his travels, Noah keeps learning to mediate his experiences of mobility with his expectations of stability, never feeling fully rooted or afloat while he continues to understand the “roots” that connect him to people as well as places and the “routes” that are available to him. In one instance, he recalls driving past a schoolyard in his mother’s trailer as some of the kids “gazed yearningly at the road” and “the captives envied the nomads” (37). But Noah is familiar with what the romanticized nomadic life can entail and what it misses. His constant mobility does not allow for interpersonal relations or community beyond the enclosed space of his mother’s trailer and its ancestral ghosts (22). It is not surprising that, when Noah finally arrives in Montreal, he is not picky about where he settles, just fully focused on settling *somewhere*. Looking at a newspaper he “points arbitrarily” (78) to an ad for a room, but quickly learns of the difficulties of settling as it becomes increasingly clear for him that feeling at home involves more than this act of identifying a single, stable residence.

The tourist and vagabond figures that Bauman outlines offer a paradigm for understanding mobility in the twenty-first century, and this is a paradigm that Dickner’s novel develops by exploring new ways of integrating multiple kinds of home spaces and relating to home amidst the flows of liquid modernity. Dickner shows that the passerby and pirate are capable of anchoring themselves—and, moreover, are willing to anchor themselves—in spite of the incessant economic and social fluctuations of this era. I have suggested that “mapping” can more methodically describe the conceptual work of integrating different experiences and expectations of home. In *Nikolski* this integration occurs through Dickner’s concept of a “complex map” (99), which I understand as a personal conception of the multi-dimensional idea of home. In fact, I propose that the agency of the pirate and passerby “life strategies” as home-makers stems from their ability to see home not as the tourist’s sustained escape or the vagabond’s entrapment but as the composite map that Dickner proposes: one that includes personal as well as social dimensions, multiple scales, and is always “at once physical and cultural” (99).

A Multi-Scalar, Multi-Sensory, and Dynamic Mental Map

The framework of the complex map is important because it is able to integrate a home-maker's "roots" and "routes" by offering an immersive, virtual, four-dimensional cartography which grows in detail over time but also adapts to changing conditions and needs. Not merely a clear-cut, flat visual representation, this map includes overlapping geographical and cultural scales as well as a matrix of sensory and landscape memories—from the links contained in material objects to smells and sounds as well as familiar topographies like flatlands or cityscapes and specific streets, buildings, or rooms. Such a map of home is an expression of modern dwelling, and Dickner models emergent home-making practices when his characters explore and re-evaluate the increasing diversity of ideas of home in liquid modernity. Maps trigger many important trajectories in the novel: budding scholar, Noah, "learned to read from road maps" (28); Joyce declares that she wants to be a cartographer in order to mask her desire to be a pirate (62); and a stack of *National Geographic* maps fall on the narrator before the Three-Headed Book's map is returned and he finally embarks on his own travels (149).⁸ The conventional as well as alternative maps that the protagonists encounter help each of them learn to map their physical, cultural, and deeply personal sense of home.

Because sounds, sights, and smells play a vital role in the links that each character's complex map of home includes, bodily experiences and sense memories also forge this "synaesthetic" (Bates 207) mental construct. Dickner's narrator, for instance, states, "It's impossible to confuse the subdued murmur of Mallorca with the resonant roll of Greenland's prehistoric pebbles, or the coral melody of the beaches of Belize, or the hollow growl of the Irish coast" (3) and explains that "there's no mistaking the shores of the Aleutian Islands" (4), where the village of Nikolski is located and where Jonas Doucet died. The narrator is a recluse throughout the novel yet these claims offer a glimpse into his desire to travel and learn to dwell by becoming an active home-maker. He asks, "Since when do diesel engines imitate breaking waves?" (4) and eventually calls this sound the "[d]ubious poetry of the suburbs" (4). The wave-like sounds from childhood inform later experiences by connecting them to this former home. Similarly, Noah offers a comparison that is aural as well as visual, when, "Gazing at the sea, he once again experiences the dizziness one feels on the great plains of Saskatchewan. The monotone roar of the waves is reminiscent of the wind in the barley fields" (221). This kind of landscape memory is superimposed

on new places and becomes a part of Noah's complex map of home. In yet another example, for Joyce the smell of fish blood is "so familiar" (71) that when she smells it on her hands after a day of work in the Montreal fish store, "[w]ith her eyes closed she can almost believe she is back in her father's kitchen" (74).

Several scholars have explored the relation of body and home, and Dickner shows that the body, a kind of ultimate and inescapable home, mediates and helps to map the memories and experiences of home. James Krasner focuses on touch and suggests that our physical engagement with home spaces is "interwoven with emotion and memory" (190), while Margaret Morse focuses on sensory associations with home and argues that the idea maintains an abundance of sense memories, such as a "fortuitous and fleeting smell, a spidery touch, a motion, a bitter taste" (63). In *Nikolski*, the feelings of home that memories generate are often recounted in order to explore larger ideological questions about what home means for each character. Noah, for example, investigates the figurative sense of being steady on land and lost at sea. He thinks that he is "stepping onto solid ground" (91) once he leaves his mother and her trailer but, while posting a letter to her through General Delivery, he feels as though "that ground is slipping out from under him," leaving "nothing but rolling waves, choppy seas and dizziness" (91). This unexpected reaction helps Noah realize that home cannot be truly stable, comfortable, or unchanging, whether he lives in his rented room on the Island of Montreal or at Arizna's house on Margarita Island. While Noah does not succumb to a happenstance kind of existence that for Bauman epitomizes liquid modernity, he also eventually stops seeking refuge in a misleading idealization of stabilities, such as families very firmly "rooted" in specific areas, which were the norm in solid modernity.

Bauman warns against "regressive fantasies of which the images of the prenatal womb and the walled-up home are prime inspirations" (*Liquid Modernity* 213-14) and *Nikolski*, instead, offers "fantasies" of home-makers as variously committed explorers and self-reflexive cartographers. In spite of Adrian S. Franklin's salient claim that "[i]n a more mobile, more networked, connected and extra-territorial world, the paradox at the centre of Bauman's work is that the social bonds that can now be created (and even proliferate) are looser, weaker" (344), *Nikolski* depicts ways in which commitment to people and places can flourish. If social bonds are looser, they can also be more flexible—as with Noah's erratic yet stable relationship with Arizna—and if they are more easily broken, they can also be more easily

made—such as Joyce’s opportunity to live in the Dominican Republic with the grandmother of Maelo. Likewise, technical innovations that impact the increased accessibility of transport and consumer goods can dilute the once assumed permanence of the idea of home but they also forge new relations that can be incorporated into a more expansive, multi-scalar, and multi-sensory idea.⁹ Unlike a single house, address, or region, which in and of itself cannot adequately describe a sense of home for people in a mobile era, the complex map is built *through* modern experiences of physical as well as virtual mobility and the multiplicity of intricate associations, such as Noah’s realization that “[n]ever again would he be able to separate a book from a road map, a road map from his family tree, or his family tree from the odour of transmission oil” (30).

Because the mapped, multi-scalar home is based on inclusion and shifts rather than exclusion and rights, it models the possibilities of dwelling and co-inhabiting in more open and equitable ways. I have suggested that Bauman’s tourist-vagabond binary can be used to show the social problems that a mobility divide fosters: tourists, people who feel at home anywhere, can be apathetic or complacent, while vagabonds, those who cannot feel at home, are denied agency—a voice in local, regional, national, and global politics—even in regards to the decision of where and how they may live. Dickner’s novel illustrates to some extent how the passerby and pirate can engage with their surroundings in potentially problematic ways should they mostly pass over or literally pilfer, but these new types remain productive as distinct agents in the creation of a sense of home. They are active home-makers who understand that mobility increases encounters with strangers and transforms individuals into strangers, and these individuals often cannot simply stumble across or “find” home but must find ways to claim it and make themselves at home. Noah does so at the end of the novel by bringing his son back to his old apartment in Montreal, while Joyce goes to the Dominican Republic in order to further reconnect with her pirate legacy, and the narrator chooses to explore his “own road, [his] own little providence” (282) in spite of his mother’s isolated and father’s itinerant lifestyles.

Through protagonists who become active home-makers and commit to “learn[ing] to dwell” (Heidegger 159), Dickner implicitly supports the notion that social and political change hangs on the material and metaphysical experiences of being at home. By depicting the compelling experiences of protagonists who avoid the tourist’s detachment and work to reclaim

the agency that the vagabond is denied, *Nikolski* not only rejects familiar practices of pinpointing or bureaucratically claiming a static home space, but also offers a model for mapping a vital nexus of belonging. In the final scene of the novel, the narrator tapes back into the Three-Headed Book the missing map that Noah gives him—the map that was “orphaned in his hands” (41) when Noah initially took the book with him to Montreal—and then the narrator leaves the reassembled book in the clearance bin. This ending, “a discovery that clouds the issue rather than clarifying it” (287), is Dickner’s invitation for readers to explore the logic of the complex, multi-scalar map of home through *his* “three-headed” novel: a book with no map inside its cover because one is inevitably created in the mind of its reader-cartographer. By presenting a new way of narrativizing and mapping an individual’s experience of the stability and mobility inherent to home, Dickner ingeniously demonstrates that the idea of home is not a relic of solid modernity but an even more important identity anchor in a globally mobile era increasingly defined by liquidity and change.

NOTES

- 1 Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling describe home as “multi-scalar” or spanning multiple scales and “porous” (27), which *Nikolski* implicitly demonstrates for all three protagonists as they map the geo-cultural scales and permeable boundaries of their sense of home.
- 2 According to Claudine Fisher, in *Nikolski* “the theme of home clashes with that of the outside world bringing back the constant dichotomy of motionlessness opposed to the desire for freedom,” yet Fisher also points out that “Noah is the happiest when both home and freedom are embraced at once” (1196), which suggests the more complex relations of mobility and stability that I examine here.
- 3 See Emily Johansen’s work on “‘territorialized cosmopolitan’ subjectivities” (48) for an examination of similar issues within the context of a singular urban space.
- 4 Noah’s sense of nomadology is not the conceptual notion coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, most notably since the diploma he imagines is in *applied* nomadology. Above all, Noah is concerned with everyday life—his everyday life, especially, which includes a childhood defined by constant mobility—more than abstract philosophical approaches to institutionalized knowledge or social theory. Bauman’s focus is similarly on everyday life (as his term “life strategy” indicates), and he remains wary of romanticizing nomads by ignoring the privilege of self-styled, jet-setting nomads.
- 5 In his analysis of *Nikolski*, Laurence M. Porter notes a trend in contemporary literature that this novel follows by exploring “ancient tactics for ensuring individual and community survival” one of which is “the gleaner and the squatter” (300). To some extent, these terms suggest a passerby and pirate, respectively, but the additions to Bauman’s “life strategies” which I explore here are specifically liquid modern strategies or tactics that describe emerging norms within this socio-economic context.
- 6 The stroller figure that Bauman describes is closely related to the *flâneur*, a figure theorized by Walter Benjamin and taken up by Anne Friedberg in a consumerist context

when she proposes the shopping mall as “a site for flânerie and for a mobilized gaze instrumentalized by consumer culture” (12). Consuming home spaces and objects need not suggest any engagement with or commitment to the idea of home, both of which the passerby exhibits as a more active home-maker.

- 7 In *Consuming Life*, Bauman refers to Russell Hochschild’s term, “drag coefficient” (10), a quality which employers seek to avoid in liquid modernity, with “drag” referring to things or people that tie one to a place.
- 8 Other navigational items, which become talismans for the protagonists, complement the significance of maps in the novel along with its themes of mobility and stability: the narrator’s compass, a gift from his father which “doesn’t point exactly north” (12) but to the village of Nikolski; Joyce’s grandfather’s duffel bag, which might have gone to Jonas had he ever returned (58); and Noah’s Book with No Face, also known as the Three-Headed Book, left behind in the trailer by Jonas when he parted ways with Noah’s mother (29).
- 9 See David Morley’s *Home Territories* for his analysis of the impact of technology and global media on the expanding “territories” of home.

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