DANCING OUT OF PLACE
Geographies of Performance and Vancouver's Independent Nightlife

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis draws upon an interdisciplinary approach characteristic of a performance perspective to examine the ways in which performances of identity and belonging are constituted through social dance, play and the engagement of city space. The study is based upon detailed observational and participatory data gathered over the course of one year (2005-2006) while attending indie dance parties within the urban centre of East Vancouver. The research follows the movement of Vancouver's artist-identified youth who strive to create something outside of the 'big-business' dance clubs that occupy the city of Vancouver's appointed entertainment district, weaving together an alternate, complex and mobile portrait of the city in play.

The thesis begins with the concept of the mainstream and argues that though the concept manifests sometimes as an ambiguous construct that indie youth define themselves against, the mainstream is much more than an imaginary entity. The mainstream is both material and geographical while the relationship between dominant culture and some youth subcultures are mutually dependent. The concept of social space features prominently within the thesis; interviewees constitute themselves in relation to what it means to be 'in' and 'of' East Vancouver, revealing their identities as closely tied to place and also to social class. Identities are not only acquired negatively (in opposition), but are also positively acquired, through constitutive practices. Noting that social class is materially based, I argue that it is also both performed and performative, as a persistent mode of distinction within the indie scene. These complexities of performance are approached through the rubric of social dancing, a playful yet grounded practice that is productive precisely because it enables analyses that are at the same time social, spatial and embodied. Indie dance events offer the opportunity to connect participants to place (East Vancouver) and through body movement (dancing) to reaffirm membership in this group.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Indie kids, Art kids, Hipsters

As many analysts have noted, and as many people on the margins in one way or another know from experience, the world of representation and of aesthetics is a site of struggle, where identities are created, where subjects are interpellated, where hegemonies can be challenged. And taking seriously that pleasure, that life-giving capacity of aesthetics, performance, bodies, and the sensuous is, within our regime of power and truth, an indisputably political act.

Dorinne Kondo (1997: 4)

Introduction

This is an ethnographic study of contemporary artist-identified (indie) social dance

parties in Vancouver, Canada's Eastside and, more precisely, an interrogation of the

intersections of performance, space, identity and urban nightlife practices. Dance parties and the

performances they create must be understood in relation to other spaces: sanitization of the city

of Vancouver's downtown core; rocketing real estate and the displacement of low-income

people; the reinforcement of policing activities as well as new public ordinance laws; the

regulation, zoning and licensing laws of entertainment spaces (specifically dance clubs); and

accompanying neoliberal rhetoric — which together instantiate the disintegration of anti-

consumerist creative spaces to dance socially and have fun. Vancouver's alternative (more

commonly known as "indie" [1]) dance parties, dominating the more impoverished areas of East

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[1] "Indie" in this context signifies a particular art scene within Vancouver. More broadly, the term also stems from the indie music movement, based on a subgenre of rock & roll music which is separate from other rock music genres such as techno, pop, country, metal, or grunge, for example. Indie music itself refers to a broad, diverse range of music, however, the term originally referred to rock music and artists that were considered independent from the mainstream, commercial music industry and more commonly associated with underground culture. This no longer seems to entirely hold true, as mainstream music by, for example, the Strokes, Franz Ferdinand, Radiohead and Bjork, at one time considered indie by some, reveal the easy confusion and permeability of such boundaries. Genres or subgenres often associated with indie music include emo, lo-fi, post-rock, garage rock, psych-rock, folk-punk and electro-clash, to new-wave and 80s post-punk influenced alternative music, to list but a few. The term indie in Vancouver (as elsewhere), nevertheless, refers to much more than simply a music-based movement.

Vancouver, strive to create something outside of the 'big-business' dance clubs that occupy the city of Vancouver's appointed entertainment district. Spaces are encoded for specific uses and with particular meaning, as Tim Cresswell (1996) notes. We have expectations of what kind of behaviours are appropriate in particular spaces: there are spaces to eat, spaces to sleep, spaces to pray, and spaces to play. What does it mean, then, for those involved to challenge these classifications by dancing outside a city's designated entertainment area, often in temporarily occupied spaces? I am interested in the sentiments and contradictions of identity and belonging that also occur when dancing 'out of place.'

The skill, pride and pleasure that dancing affords participants in Vancouver's indie youth dance scene is connected to place. The dance parties take place in East Vancouver, and the fact that many of the participants are from 'East Van' informs attitude and practice. Spaces located in East Vancouver and, more often than not, occupied by those marginalised within Canada's social and cultural system, are ideologically loaded, and so is one's desire for association with such areas when initiated out of choice rather than necessity. Consequently, dance parties provide an opportune location to interrogate the interwoven complexities of spatial practice, identity and belonging that I have encountered within Vancouver. By beginning with spatial/dance practice as a way into the enquiry, it brings the physical body (rather than simply the theoretical body) back into social theory (Thomas 2003), and posits time and space, or space-time, as integral elements and as necessary inclusions into the study of social processes (Massey 1997; May and Thrift 2001; Pratt 2004). East Vancouver's social dance parties provide a grounded site to unpack local affiliations, class erasures, and embodied performances, and all of the multiple discourses that shape our understandings of place.

There are good reasons to look more closely at dance parties at this point in time: a wide interdisciplinary debate has emerged around the need to look at what we do as much as what we say, accompanied by a shift from an overwhelming emphasis on language and discourse. Dance is often the medium or practice that theorists have turned to in order to think about the practical and political possibilities opened by a focus on the body (e.g., Nash 2000; Thrift 1997). Much of this theoretical fascination with dance is quite abstract, however, and it is surprising how little critical work has been done on social dance. Although there are many cross-disciplinary studies on film, art, music, theatre, sport, youth culture, and the body, the study of dance tends to remain confined to the fields of cultural anthropology and dance, and continues to be a marginal topic in related fields such as women's studies, sociology and even cultural studies (Desmond 1997).

Though there are important studies that focus on elite dance forms such as ballet as well as studies that attempt to reveal the political nature of dance by bringing the margins to the centre (see for example, Savigliano's (1995) study of tango, Muñoz's (1999) study of gay club dance, and Browning's (1995) study of Samba dance), little has been done on what Jane Desmond (2000: 48) terms the "middlebrow," white, middle-class social dance movements, where the political implications are less obvious (Saldanha's (2007) ethnography, *Psychedelic Whiteness,* is one of the exceptions). This is an important omission because this is a social location in which many people define themselves and ignoring these dance movements reinforces a tendency for white middle-class culture to function as an unmarked norm. Desmond (2000: 47-48) argues for a reinvigorated investigation of (often neglected) social dance forms (rather than simply theatrical dance forms), local scenes (rather than simply studies of 'other(ed)' communities) and of the "amorphous middle class":

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Too often casually dismissed without examination as "bourgeois," or characterized merely as that against which working class cultures resist, this middle has its own complex history, its own internal class and racial divisions. To understand how the cultural tastes and social identities of this vast "middle" are constituted, we should take seriously those cultural appetites and practices by which many people define themselves (Desmond 2000: 48).

Investigations of 'bourgeois' leisure can offer insight into the ways middle and working-class youth practices often intersect and inform one another.

Although variations of leisure dance culture are evident throughout North America, it remains of little interest to the scholarly lens. For the most part, it is the British Centre for Cultural Studies at Birmingham University (CCCS) founded in the 1960's (including scholars such as Stuart Hall, Angela McRobbie, Iain Chambers, Dick Hebdige, and Stanley Cohen), that developed and legitimized subcultural studies. Youth subcultures, and to a lesser extent, their dance cultures subsequently have gained some academic recognition within cultural studies. However the research has been predominantly male-centric (Angela McRobbie is an exception). Critical accounts of club cultures, for instance, have emphasized men's capacity to control capital and dominate music production (e.g., Thornton 1995), while diminishing the significance of women's and girl's participation and subjective experiences, which is often realised in the dancing itself (as Pini (2001) following Angela McRobbie (1991) has pointed out). Critics have also noted that subcultures are heterogeneous and loosely affiliated; membership boundaries can be fleeting, partial, fluid, while occupying only one aspect of a fragmented self-identity (Bennett 1999). There is an ambiguity to subcultures, as there appears to be no coherent dominant culture to resist, as subcultural outsider (Muggleton 2000; Sweet 2005). This is perhaps part of the contradiction of late capitalism, whereby subcultural artefacts and aesthetics are continually co-opted by the cultural industry (and vice-versa), calling into question the specificity of subcultural style and ideology (Sweet 2005). Despite these postmodernist claims, Carrington

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and Wilson (2004: 74) argue for the continued political significance of dance cultures. They comment: "[p]opular culture, and music culture in particular, has never offered ready-made identikit formulas for oppositional praxis. Rather it is the potential that dance cultures produce for an alternative public sphere within which new spaces of belonging can be found that is most significant." With this last statement in mind — that dance cultures offer the potential for new spaces of belonging — I explore how Vancouver's indie participants (also referred to as alternative, hipsters, scenesters or art kids), perform membership within their own, particular subculture, participating in the collaborative process of "meaning making."

The Ethnography

To date, there is limited research with regards to how young people, particularly within the indie scene, view the landscape of the city through social dance practice and subcultural membership. Given the lack of information concerning indie youth and their night time leisure practices, I have employed an ethnographic method of analysis to document their experiences. This research is an ethnography that investigates the contemporary nightlife practices of artist-identified/indie youth who reside, work and/or play in East Vancouver, Canada. Using qualitative data, the use of city spaces for leisure activities is investigated as a cultural practice that is significant to some young women and men. The study is based upon detailed observational and participatory data gathered over one year while attending indie dance parties within the urban centre of Vancouver. The data draws from 25 in-depth, open-ended qualitative interviews obtained over the course of the year (2005-2006); and a multi-layered framework attentive to the intersections of performance, identity, and space. My emphasis is on spatial and identity practices, thus this study is more broadly based on performance, those performances that surround the dance party, rather than dance per se. In order to situate the practice

geographically, culturally and politically these performances are interrogated in relation to space: the symbolic and material meanings of space as well as the politics of bodies in space.

In Vancouver, indie events are often associated with an art show but can also involve any combination of music performance, dance party, and/or performance work. However, it is the dance party itself that is of interest here. Such events are in many ways characterized by those who attend. The term "indie" is slang for "independent," signifying that participants in this community, mainly (self-defined) artists or associates, consider their aesthetic as independent from mainstream culture. Their practice is nonetheless influenced as well as appropriated and commodified by the "middlebrow" mainstream.

Self-identified indie youth are certainly not particular to Vancouver. Indie youth in New York, for instance, have a large influence on indie youth in Vancouver. However Vancouver indie youth have their own particular characteristics, context, and geography. Though the Greater Vancouver area has a population of 2,116,581[2] making it the third-largest metropolitan area in Canada and home to more than half of the province of British Columbia's population (Statistics Canada 2008c), the municipality of the city of Vancouver itself is relatively small (with a population of just over 578,041).[3] Indie events occupy only a small portion of the city's downtown core and this shapes the insularity of its indie community. Those who participate are a small, fluid local group of what appears to be young, working and middle-class adults (approx. 18-35 years of age). Though this is an ethnography of young adults, the term 'youth' is employed throughout because in Vancouver those in the indie scene are most often referred to

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[2] This is according to the population counts of the 2006 census (Statistics Canada 2008a).

[3] See City of Vancouver (2007a) and Statistics Canada (2008b) for more information.

as "indie *kids*"; a term which gestures towards the scene's status as part of a youth culture practice.
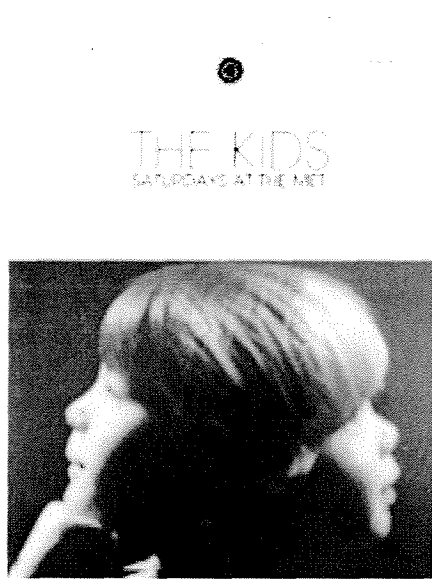
Figure 1-1. The Kids. Flyer for an indie dance night at the *Met*, 2006.

An Integrative Approach

Performance studies (itself interdisciplinary), cultural studies, human geography and feminist analysis all inform the theoretical approach of this thesis. Drawing on performance theory I consider performance as potentially liberating and simultaneously normative, the significance of what people do as well as what people say, and locate the study of practices as interactive, rather than as fixed or limited (Schechner 2002).

Many performance theorists draw on a Foucaultian notion that power relations are not static, imposed from the 'top down.' Rather, the trajectory of power is multifaceted, mobile, relational and always in flux (Foucault 1995). Where there is dominance there exist simultaneous acts of resistance, whether resistance is grand or minute, strategic or spontaneous (Faith 1994). While acts of resistance do not necessarily overturn existent power relations, some

can and do resituate power relations; in this way resistance makes its own incursions and inscriptions into dominant culture (ibid.).

Like all social life, urban nightlife practices are subject to disciplinary controls which are both spatial and social. Those that seek the joy of dancing amidst the city landscape do so within a regulatory regime of body objectification, realized through internal and external surveillance, normalizing judgment, and discourses that divide, exclude and stigmatize. Taking Foucault as a starting point, I examine how normalizing discourse and judgment functions within, throughout and outside of Vancouver's indie dance community. Acknowledging the two-way trajectory of power, this is also an investigation into how expressions of resistance, located at the site of the dancing body, simultaneously challenge the status quo.

In his discussion of the importance of the study of everyday, or rather everynight, practices (specifically clubbing in Britain), Gordon Lynch argues that understanding dominant ideologies can help to discern "in what ways people can resist dominant ideologies of their society or find opportunities for authentic self-expression (cf. Hall, Hebdige, Fiske)" (2005: 19). Though I find everynight practices important to the study of ideology and self-expression, I reject a dichotomy between cooptation and resistance and shift my focus instead to understanding the ideologies and trajectories of power that exist *within* subcultures and subcultural practices. I, therefore, have two points of interest in relation to the practices that are part of social dancing. First, I am interested in how bodily practices such as dance instantiate power relations, such as class position, but in complex ways that simultaneously (re)enact particular processes of normalization, and occasionally offer deviations from the reiteration of the norm through the liminal process of play. Second, indie participants are not easily framed as

either dominant or marginal, working-class or middle-class, or as co-opted within the

hegemonic or as resistant to it. In this thesis I work with and explore these ambiguities.

Research Aims

1. To link research on performance, space, and identity.

2. To examine how everynight practices are connected to the local urban landscape through an ethnography of Vancouver's indie youth.

3. To draw out and take seriously some of the power dynamics, tensions and ambiguities that mediate cultural practices and aesthetics.

4. To push the boundaries of critical inquiry by integrating an interdisciplinary approach that draws from feminist analysis and methodology, performance studies, cultural studies, human geography and dance.

Thesis Structure

Chapter Two outlines the research methodology and introduces more thoroughly

Vancouver's indie community, setting the scene. In the subsequent chapter (Three) I locate indie

dance parties within the limits of the city's entertainment district, and draw upon interviews to

explore how these spaces are gendered. This chapter is integral to the outset of the study as it

begins to investigate the ways in which indie youth's conceptions of self come to be defined in

opposition to whom and what they consider mainstream. Chapter Four further complicates

mainstream/alternative binaries through a case study that analyzes dominant culture's co-option

of alternative aesthetics. It consists of an exploration of discourses around youth leisure, urban

development and protest through controversies that surround a particular punk house party.

After establishing counter-culture allure, Chapter Five draws upon theories of

performance and cultural capital to integrate and expand upon these concepts by examining the

interrelated aspects of class identity, space and belonging. More specifically, it explores how East Vancouver and the Downtown Eastside are imbued with class meaning and in what ways youthful spatial practices interact with and make sense of this meaning-making. Finally, Chapter Six details Vancouver youth's experiences of dancing at indie-based parties. Because this chapter privileges embodied experiences, it acts as a necessary counter-point to all previous analysis.

The thesis's theoretical orientation is signposted here only as an indication of its later development in the following chapters. This is methodologically significant, for integrating theory, rather than positioning it as exterior to the accumulative data, serves to concretize and prioritize the interdependence of theoretical and material debates, towards an active analysis. The thesis as a whole moves through different geographical areas in Vancouver, following a social cartography of indie youth's spatial imagination, one that is anchored in geographies that are fluid in interesting ways. To document this shifting social cartography, the chapters travel from the West Side to the Granville Strip to East Vancouver, Main Street to the Downtown Eastside, to the individual subject, following the movement of Vancouver's indie youth who weave together an alternate, complex and mobile portrait of the city in play.

Fieldnote Excerpt 2007, The Unicorn (East Pender)

We arrived at the new, unofficial Saturday night dance spot, the Unicorn around midnight. Through word of mouth I had been informed that the dance night had moved from the Biltmore Hotel to this new location in East Vancouver's Chinatown. Although there was no sign and we did not know the exact address, we spotted the location by the 'hipsters' (artist-identified young men and women) milling about outside, and the numerous bikes lining the sidewalk. The inside hall, bordering a Chinese restaurant, was packed with young 'indie kids' (more accurately described as young adults). There was a line-up from the front door leading all the way up the stairs to the guarded entrance of the party. There seemed little chance of getting in. Adding to this feeling was the large number of people by-passing the line-up by the authority of the guest list. While an aggravation for those not on the list, this feature maintains the dance night's status as alluring, selective and familiar.

We paid our five dollars at the door and climbed the stairs to the dance party. The small, crowded room inside the party consisted of an over-packed dance floor full of sweaty and enthusiastic Vancouver indie youth, a small makeshift bar with only a small line-up, a few tables and seats lining the sides of the room and some tiny karaoke rooms in the back. With a simple glance around the room, I spotted a multitude of people familiar from previous dance parties, art shows and music events as well as several regulars that I had already interviewed. The age range consisted primarily of young adults between 18 and 23, however, there were also many people in their mid- to late 30s. Three or so very young looking male DJs occupied the stage in front of the dance floor playing an eclectic mix of popular hip-hop, electronic, grunge, indie rock and 1960-1980s classics. To everyone's pleasure (represented through participation and body language), dancing was primary and there was little room to do much else. As people

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jostled and jerked about as a group to the changing modes of music with eyes closed, hips swinging and arms flailing, there was a strong growing sense of excitement, energy and affiliation within the room.

From 1:30 a.m. or so, two police officers stood quietly in the back of the venue watching the activities until everyone had left the building after closing time (2 a.m.). To the owner's apparent dismay the crowd took its time dispersing, as many were reluctant to leave. Some of those present carried on to the Columbia, (a nearby bar that is open until 3 a.m.) to continue dancing. This party in an area of town normally depicted in popular media as a downtrodden space of violence and drug use, is a site rich with creativity and physicality, offering, for some, a sense of affiliation and belonging; and for this researcher, an opportune location for ethnographic inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

SETTING THE SCENE

The Ethnography

In order to investigate social dance as a cultural practice I conducted an ethnography in

Vancouver, BC, which included detailed observational and participatory data, qualitative

interviews and feminist critical analysis. I am interested in the 'role and meaning' that social

dance has for indie participants in everyday life and how their dance practice connects to city

space. For many, the strength of ethnography is the insight it provides of social phenomena in

their natural setting. Ethnography attempts to include a subjective viewpoint, and also requires

considerable reflexivity on the part of the researcher.

Many dance theorists find ethnography particularly suited to the study of dance. In

Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry, Frosch (1999) notes that the attraction of

ethnography for the analysis of dance is that kinaesthetic empathy and perception or "felt data"

can also be analysed, using the body and feeling as a research tool. More specifically, Frosch

(1999) and also Desmond (1997; 1999) note that cultural knowledge is embodied in movement,

especially highly stylized and codified movements such as dance, thus the participant aspect of

participant observation becomes integral to the understanding of movement. Without active

participation on the dance floor it would have been difficult to locate or share physical empathy

with interviewees' responses to dancing (see Chapter Six), and to fully understand the shifting

cartography of indie youth's nightlife practices. Social dancing within the west is most often

associated with pleasure (both physical and mental) and without this body knowledge, I might,

for instance, have produced a more cynical and, I think, less comprehensive study; I might have

been mindful of the power dynamic present within systems of representation yet unaware of the agency some women gain from the physicality of this practice. Further, without active participation off the dance floor, in terms of coming to the dance and leaving the dance, my knowledge of the scene's spatial flows, hierarchies of social capital, and modes of transportation (such as bike riding) would have been limited.

Frosh warns that ethnographies are never complete or definitive. Rather, she maintains that ethnographies emerge with "a contradictory, multidimensional and, perhaps, conditional understanding of a particular time and space" (1999: 260). Speaking of dance researchers engaged in feminist ethnographic research, Desmond draws attention to the amorphous nature of ethnographic research and its capacity to allow for the researcher to see linkages between micro- and macrosystems necessary for comprehending how power functions through axes of difference.

> Because every field setting can be thought of as immersed in a larger social context, which itself is embedded in a larger social system, field settings can be amorphous. It is easy to understand how a feminist ethnographer can take information from everywhere, at all times. Although this attitude may be true of all ethnographers, it is significant for feminists who seek understanding of the links between the micro- and macrosystems of gender politics (Desmond 1999: 55).

The dance floor itself is marked by these micro/macro systems of politics. Individual, gendered experiences of movement, for instance, may inscribe new meaning into dance spaces marked by governmentality and heterosexuality (see Chapters Three & Six). Discerning power flows is complemented by attention to the spatial. Thornton argues that while club culture is a global phenomenon, it is nevertheless always rooted in the local (1996: 3). My ethnographic study is necessarily rooted in the local and is representative of a particular time and space. It is not a

comprehensive study of indie dance culture, however, I hope it will contribute to understandings of the politics of youth dance cultures more generally.

Conceptualizing Indie Culture

The umbrella of 'indie culture' has become a global trend, visible in North American and Western Europe. The popular, free international encyclopaedia website *Wikipedia*, in which the internet-using public creates its own information (thus subject to popular opinion rather than necessarily "informed data"), defines hipster/indie culture as such:

> A hipster is a person who is strongly associated with a subculture that has been deemed "hip." The term was used originally in the 1940s and 1950s to describe aficionados of jazz, and it eventually described many members of the Beat Generation, but its usage declined in the 1960s, with the advent of hippies. Since the mid 1990s, the word "hipster" has been redefined to refer to members of a different subculture. Modern hipsters are those devoted to ironic retro fashions, independent music and film, alternative comics, and other forms of expression outside the mainstream. They are often associated with indie culture. (Wikipedia, 31 May, 2006)

Much mainstream attention has centred on sarcastic enumerations of 'hipster clichés.' For example, Robert Lanham (2003) has published 'The Hipster Handbook,' a sarcastic chronicle of contemporary hipster sensibilities. This has also sparked response in defence of indie/hipster cultures. A simple search of the *New York Times*, using the term 'hipsters' as a key word, reveals a multitude of articles on contemporary debates around the arts, style and gentrification.[4] Along with multiple print and web-based articles there exist many independent films that draw upon and represent aspects associated with indie culture. In addition, the recent popularity of the spectacle of urban partying is evidenced in numerous websites that contain photographs of the 'who's-who' of hipster nightclub party scenes. Two sites of note are The New York-based

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[4] For example: Frosch (2008), Kugel (2008), Ryzik (2008), Spector (2008).

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website, *lastnightsparty.com*, and the L.A.-based site, *thecobrasnake.com*. In conjunction with such internet sites (or 'photo bloggers'), a plethora of anti-hipster blogs have also emerged — notably the New York City anti-hipster forum, *hipstersareannoying.com*.

None of these more general characterizations of indie culture, however, fairly represent how indie culture materializes on the micro, local level, such as in the city of Vancouver. Indie culture manifests quite differently in different geographies. Sarah Thornton argues that the embodiment of dance is critical to local specificity: "[d]ance styles, for example, which need to be embodied rather than just bought, are much less transnational than other aspects of culture" (1996: 3). Dance styles can of course be transnational, but their meaning and style shift as they move, as Savigliano's (1995) study of the tango reveals. While noting that global capital works in pervasive ways and that even local places can be riddled with transnational influences, this study focuses on specificity, investigating how subcultural identity is inevitably tied to localized place.

Although always subject to and influenced by macro global and national trends, most Vancouver hipsters would claim little association with the more generalized definitions of indie culture. This loosely connected subculture, while international in form, takes on a specific peculiarity that is rooted in the local. Significantly, Vancouver indie practice emphasizes the support of local artists and is intimately identified with a place, East Vancouver. Thus Vancouver's indie identification does not attach itself to the bodies of individuals, but rather to city spaces.

Part of this local practice is evident in colloquial terminology. There are a multitude of terms which are utilized to indicate Vancouver's indie scene; which include both the more universal terms: hipsters, scenesters, indie kids, and art kids; and the more locally specific

names: beardo weirdos, Emily Carr hipsters, the Kids and Strathcona hipsters. (Emily Carr is a post-secondary art school, Vancouver's only school solely dedicated to art, and Strathcona is a local East Vancouver neighbourhood adjacent to and somewhat intermingled with the Downtown Eastside.) As well, though influenced by international music, magazines, and clothing brands, it is local artists, designers, musicians and events that are intentionally and vigorously supported by Vancouver's indie community.[5] This trend plays an important role in Vancouver's vibrant and youthful arts community.

What constitutes 'the scene' is contested both within and outside of Vancouver's indie community. Between April 2005 and May 2005 Vancouver's weekly entertainment paper, *The Georgia Straight*, published one article attacking (Henley 12 Nov., 2006) and one article defending (Beckett 12 Nov., 2006) Vancouver's indie scene. Describing a local art show, one author complains that "Main Street art-nerd/geek-chic scenesters" are "the sort who routinely drop $200...for throwback getups, pose as poor people but refuse to take the bus, and spend the bulk of their time in trendy, minimalist cafés making clever comments and criticizing anything they deem mainstream" (Henley 12 Nov., 2006). In response, another author, Beckett, counters:

> ...the majority of people I saw were wearing clothes made by young local designers.... Many of them had bartered for those clothes, trading services and products of their own [...] to events where they were likely going to support art made by more of their friends. Most of these kids, if they were to have a spare $200, would be more likely to spend it on a piece of art on the walls than on fake vintage clothes (Beckett 12 Nov., 2006).

The above arguments debate indie youths' relationship to consumer culture and anxieties around class-status. In particular, it is the anti-corporate-consumer attitude that permeates indie culture, which is often critiqued within and outside the scene — as a contradictory relationship.

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[5] These include local artists such as Shane Ehman, Ken Roux, Amy Lockhart, Brian Jungen, Sydney Vermont and Aurel Shmidt; local bands such as Pride Tiger, Destroyer, Bonapart, the Organ, Black Mountain, Lady Hawk, P:ano and Book of Lists; and local designers such as Sunja Link, Picnic, Dace, City of Pula and Erin Templeton, to name a random few.

Nevertheless, these kinds of debates work to establish and contribute to Vancouver's indie community. While the indie community within Vancouver is a small networked group, it resists definition. Although social networks and material culture exist and are created within Vancouver's indie scene, many indie 'scenesters' disavow the fact that they are actually a part of 'the scene,' despite the fact that they are attending the events, share an aesthetic style and have many friends within the community. As one Vancouver indie participant stated: "So that's the scene. Not that I'm saying I'm a part of it, because I could really care less" (23-2). This attitude attests to the commentary on the *Wikepedia* web-site which notes: "Many would argue that the term "hipster" itself has become mildly derisive, and it is seldom used as a label for self-identification, except in an ironic or self-deprecating way" (Wikipedia, 31 May, 2006).

The indie scene's disavowal perhaps stems from the fact that it is a community that generates its own internal critique; a dialogue which represents the on-going and self-reflexive re-working of the scene. Importantly, the indie scene is often critiqued within itself as becoming too commercial, too popular, too insular or dominated by an elite few, too snobby or too young. The now-defunct website blog by anonymous *Little Dirty Looks* titled "Vancouver's Hipsters are Boring" personifies this attitude of internal critique, as the author is obviously intimately familiar with the scene. In a humorous, sometimes ridiculous, ironic and/or cruel tone the blog lampoons: the elitism of Vancouver's 'scene' and the men that dominate it in their capacity as organizers and DJs; the insurgence of mainstream music at dance parties; the aesthetics of 'hip and homeless;' and the absurdity of the name "The Kids" in reference to Vancouver's indie scene dance parties. Needless to say, the blog sparked considerable dialogue from the local indie community and was eventually taken off the web. In the final stages of the blog, *Little Dirty Looks* states:

All I really wanted to do was to try and make people have a little sense of humour about something that they obviously take way too seriously.... The Djs and scensters named on this blog should to a degree, expect people to talk about them like this, considering that they are constantly in the 'public eye' and could even consider themselves "local celebrity" [sic].... I also think that it is important that we do support local artists, designers, musicians, etc... so stop reading this blog and giving such a crap about it, and go support somebody. This thing is really just a blip in your existence (accessed 13 May, 2006).

Although the blogger critiques Vancouver's indie scene (of which she/he is obviously a part), she/he also asserts the importance of supporting *local* artists, designers, and musicians who also define the community.

Despite this emphasis on the local, the style of internal critique practiced by *Little Dirty Looks* is not new and resembles similar anti-party forums in other cities. While the emergence of Vancouver-based anti-hipster forum, *Little Dirty Looks* and the spectacle of Vancouver's urban party websites such as, *kathyisyourfriend* and the *Party Army*, are local responses to more popularized, international (though mostly American) trends, the content remains particular to the context of Vancouver.

In general, Vancouver's indie youth share a common interest in particular aesthetics of music, art, dress, and dance movement. Significantly, art, in its varied manifestations, is the connecting thread between indie participants. In fact, all but one of the interviewees in this study worked in some respect in the arts and culture fields such as art, film, music, television, radio, fashion and journalism. Other facets of geographical and social location also connect participants. For instance, the majority of interviewees had resided at some point in East Vancouver, while 68% were currently living in the area at the time of the interview. The indie dance scene draws from the material reality of East Vancouver neighbourhoods that are defined by working-class people, ethnic diversity, rapid gentrification, and a counter-culture aesthetic.

Indie youth are certainly not among the most marginalized within Vancouver's landscape. However, many of them are working-class residents of Vancouver's Eastside and face structural barriers that are not encountered by middle and upper-class youth. (See Fig. 2-1 to 2-3 for a map of the city as well as the spatial make-up of low-income households and single-parent families within Vancouver.) The primary location where indie events take place is also the area of residence for the majority of interviewees (this is indicated in Fig. 2-4 which also marks two key areas mentioned in the thesis: The entertainment district and the site where a party took place on Main Street in 2004). On the other hand, although the scene itself is more ethnically diverse than it appears at first glance, it maintains a status of white, heterosexual privilege.
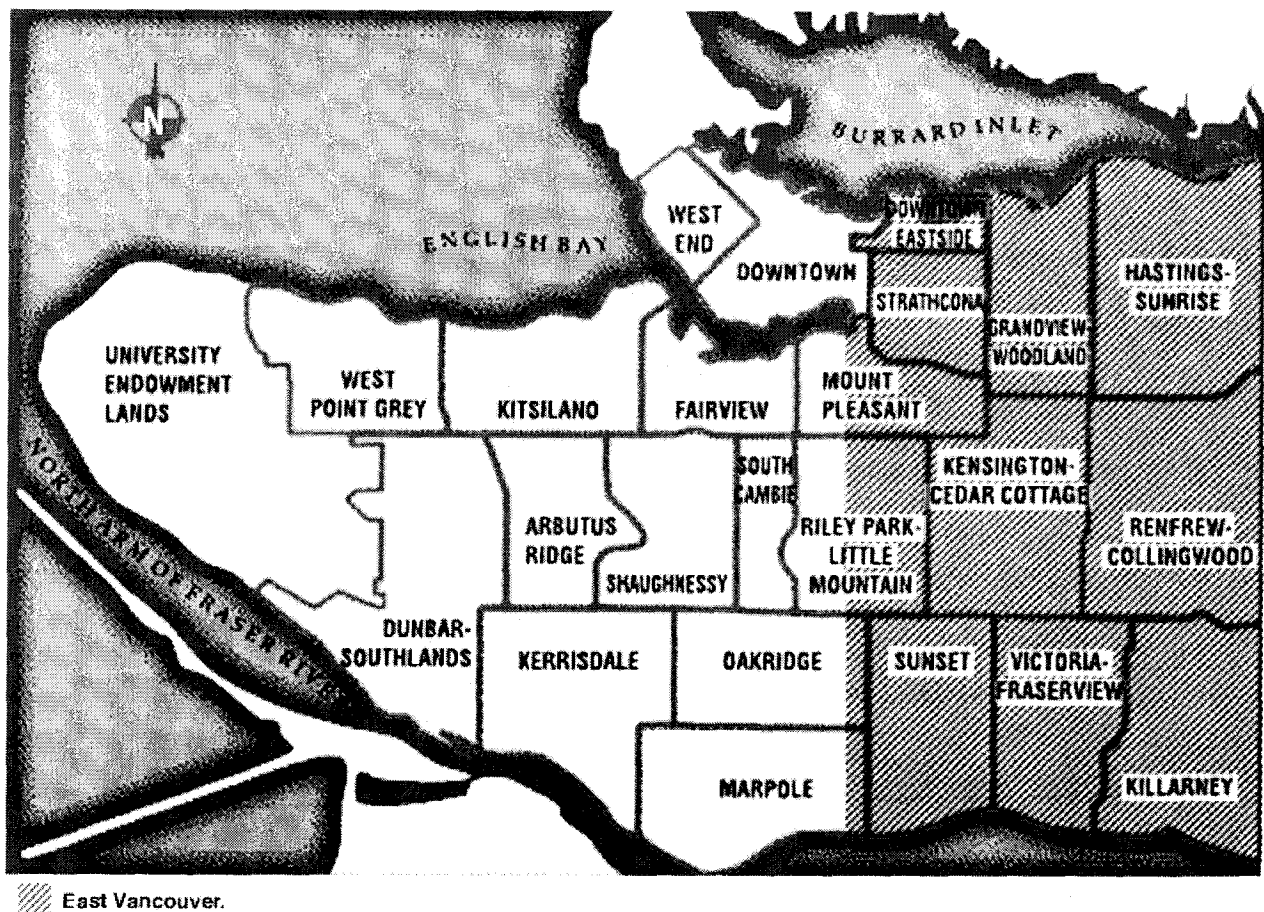
East Vancouver.

Figure 2-1. Map of Vancouver, B.C., Canada and Vancouver's Eastside

Low-Income Households
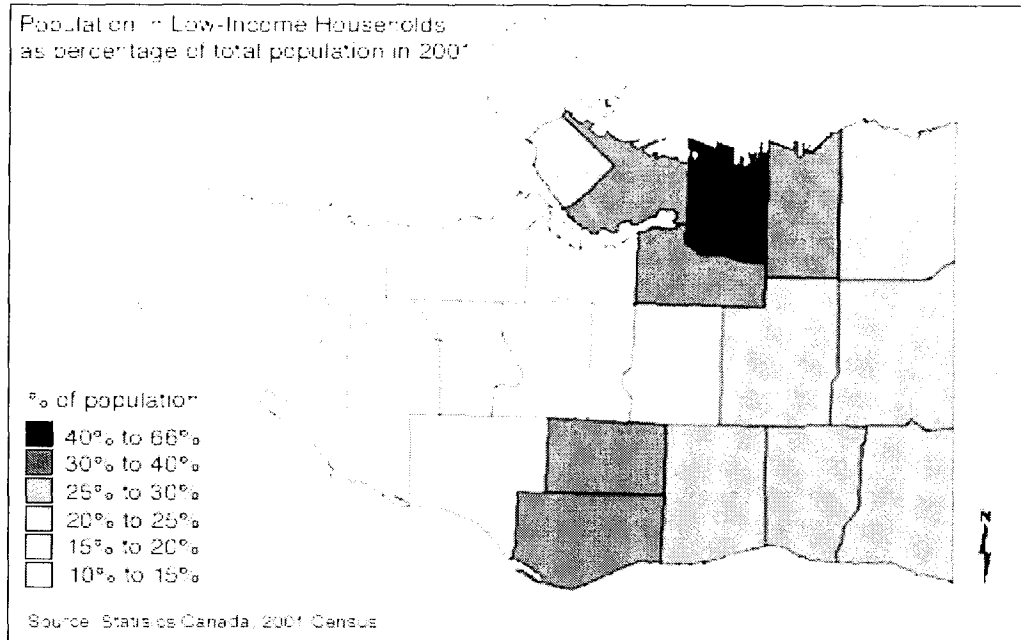
Figure 2-2. Low-Income Households. Dark red representing 40% -65% of population, to off white representing 10%-15% of population, Vancouver 2001 Census. (Data Source: City of Vancouver 2006a).

Single-parent families
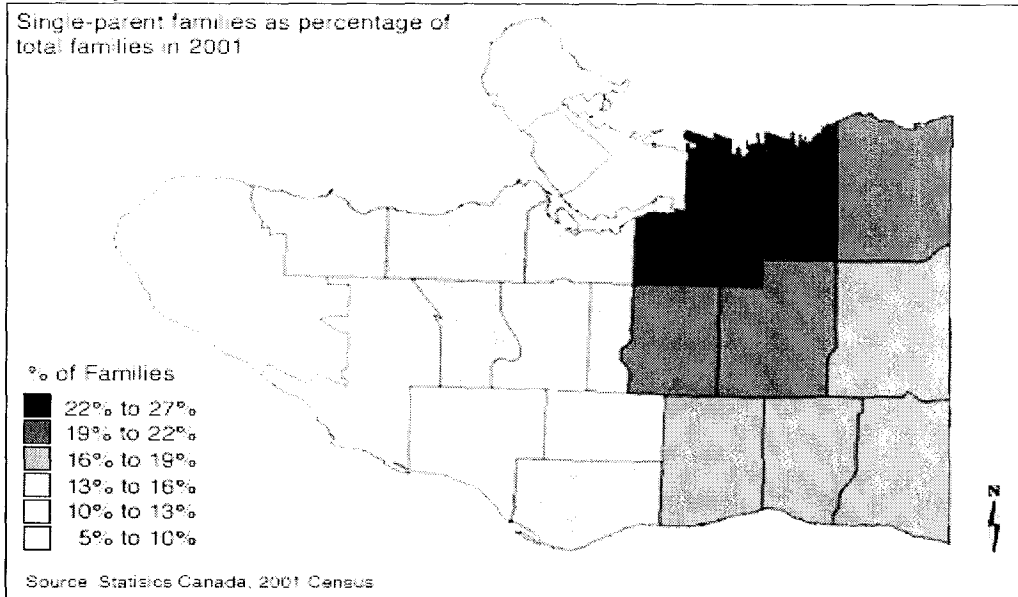
Figure 2-3. Single-Parent Families. Dark red representing 22%-27% of single-parent families to white representing 5%-10% of families, Vancouver 2001 Census. (Data Source: City of Vancouver 2006a).

A General area of the Vancouver entertainment district.

B Approximate location of 2004 punk house party (see Chapter Four).

Primary area of indie events.
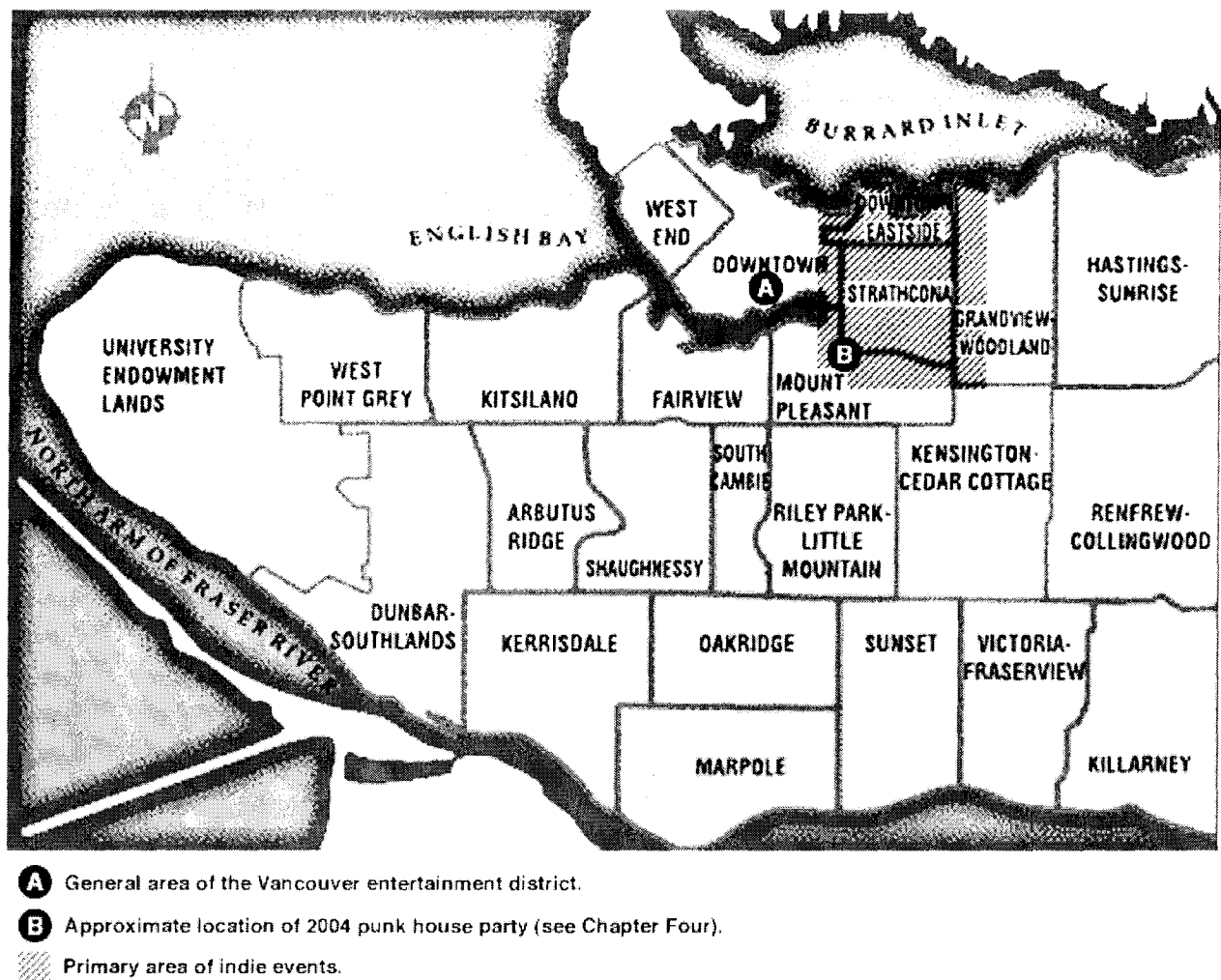
Figure 2-4. Key Areas Discussed in Thesis

Indie Dance Parties

Perhaps the simplest way to explain Vancouver indie social dance parties is to note that

the indie dance scene is comparable to, but different from, rave dance. Both involve non-

partnered social dancing, neither have *formally* codified movements, both take place outside

more established dance venues in unconventional spaces and both involve their own

subculture's shared aesthetic in terms of style and clothing. (Of course people do dance together

in couples, alone or in groups and often there is a slow dance at the end of the night.) Unlike

rave dance, however, characterized by a particular genre of music, such as acid house, jungle and techno (Thornton 1996) and also by particular beats per minute, within Vancouver's indie scene, the music genre is less easily characterized. In fact it is rather eclectic, and the dancing is not always the primary focus.

Vancouver's indie dance scene is closely aligned with Vancouver's art community. Often dancing is secondary to the live music or art show that heads the event. This is reflected in the drugs of choice: alcohol and cocaine are preferred over ecstasy (an optimum drug for dancing). Although indie dance events are sometimes carried out in quasi-illegal spaces and are in many ways discouraged by the city, the scene does not currently suffer the active criminalization and moral regulation that rave dance was subjected to in the 1990's in Canada, Britain and the United States (see Glover 2003; Hill 2002). In Vancouver rave dancing still exists but has fallen out of popularity with many youth. Although various social dance forms, trends and styles are popular in Vancouver, such as Bhangra, hip-hop, salsa, as well as those dance styles less easily named or categorized which occur within 'mainstream' club venues, the indie dance scene is popular with a small group of youth that frequent an equally small geographic radius.

Dancing within Vancouver's indie community usually takes place at dance parties that are either weekly (usually in pubs) or one evening events (usually at house parties, art spaces or warehouse spaces in East Vancouver). Leisure social dancing, the common dance mode at Vancouver indie dance parties, is participatory rather than performance based, thus people chose to dance at various levels of involvement in the same space with others. This means that the roles of the dancers and spectators are interchangeable rather than separated by a categorical divide (Ward 1997: 18). This differentiates it from theatrical dance forms, for example, where

the dancer is separated from the spectator by means of her/his technical training and/or skill. Indie dance practice is a form of leisure and, unlike the social dance forms of tango, square dancing, and salsa (all of which follow more specified and somewhat choreographed movement codes and may be performed in unison), is a social dance in which the movement is relatively individual and non-codified. Although choreographed performances requiring a division between spectator and performer occasionally take place within the indie scene, the majority of dancing is made up of individual independent movement that has not been choreographed, and gender differences in movement structure are not immediately identifiable.

This is not to say that the movement does not have a particular style, as it does. Though social dance styles are always fluctuating, common physical movement patterns can be observed, and also embodied. The dance styles are responsive to and representative of the music that is played. Music choices change over time and also vary with social circles and the venue. Youth within Vancouver's indie scene attend a mixture of live music (usually local bands) and disc jockey (DJ)-based music events, however, there is usually more dancing when the music is not live. The music tends to have lyrics and consists of a mixture of electro, indie rock, mod, 80s pop and post punk, 90's rock, hip-hop, metal and top-forty. As a result of an emphasis on guitar and synth-based music over bass sounds, body movement, when the interviews were conducted, tended to be vertical; the evidence of hip, bum and pelvic movement were in many cases minimal. Rather, the linear use of legs, arms and the head dominated the movement style. Later in the ethnography, after the interviews were conducted, hip-hop music gained a more prominent role at dance parties as did hip, bum and pelvic movements.

Creative Spaces: Situating the Site

Vancouver's indie scene is linked closely to location and place. Most events take place on the Eastside of Vancouver, and tend to center around Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and its surrounding neighbourhoods (see Fig. 2-4 above). This is also where the majority of interviewees resided at the time of the interview. Indie events are considerably mobile; venues continually change, reflect creative uses of space, and do not remain popular for long. Four kinds of spaces, from public venues to more private locations are prominent (see Fig. 2-5 to 2-9 below). This includes down-market venues (pubs that have long been frequented by Vancouver's poorest communities such as the *Columbia*, the *Balmoral*, the *Patricia Hotel* and the *Astoria*); mixed art galleries or art spaces (such as: *Anti-Social*, a skate board shop cum art gallery; *Blim*, a mixed-media art/music/silkscreen gallery; and *Seamrippers*, an artist collective); warehouse spaces (such as 100 Block Hastings Street and *Bloodstone Press*); East Vancouver house parties and alternate (often public) spaces (such as community centres, old churches, the alley of *Misanthropy* and outside Victory Square). Although spaces are always in flux, core participants and content often remain similar.

Figure 2-5. *Pat's Pub (The Patricia).* **403 East Hastings Street**
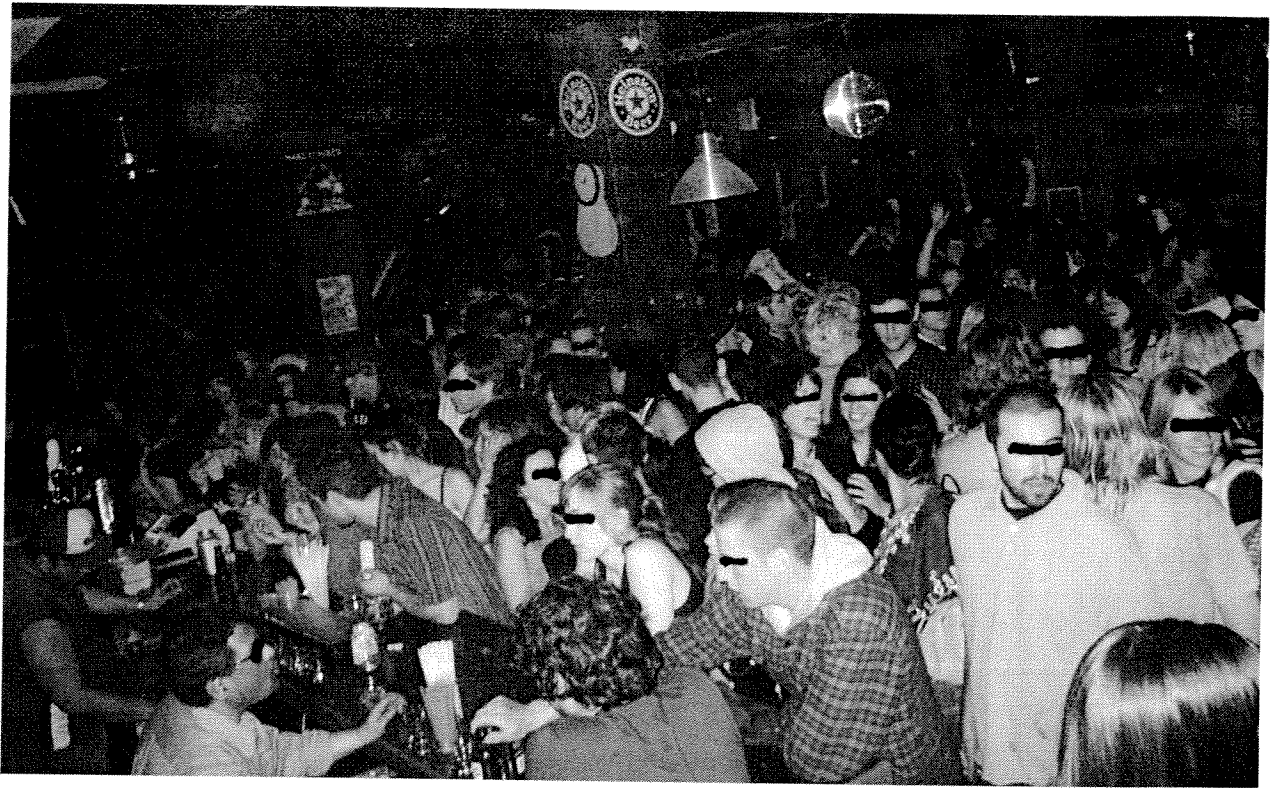
Figure 2-6. Inside *The Columbia*. Indie night at 303 Columbia Street

Figure 2-7. 100 Block Hastings Street. Warehouse Spaces

Figure 2-8. Alley of Artist Collective *Misanthropy*

Fri Mar 11/05
DANDI
WIND'S
LAST VAN
SHOW
(for a
while)

Figure 2-9. Dandi Wind. House Party in East Vancouver. Photo thanks to the *Party Army*

The use of alternative spaces for dancing is not encouraged by the city of Vancouver. Because of the quasi-public, anti-mainstream status of these venues, most participants learn about events through word of mouth or through internet sites rather than local listings in the paper. (Flyers, popular with the rave scene, are not as prevalent.) More mainstream dance venues, such as those located in or around the city's appointed entertainment district of Granville Street, are usually avoided (i.e., *The Roxy*, *Tonic*, *The Caprice*, *Bar None*, and *Aubar*). One of the participants interviewed for this study tracks the emergence of Vancouver's indie dance parties and notes that such parties were also a response to Vancouver's city appointed entertainment district, the Granville Strip:

> …I've attended parties in the Downtown Eastside since, I think, about 2003 — around the time I started getting involved with the art scene in Vancouver. I had co-founded *Misanthropy Gallery*, a small artist-run center that was very active in putting on the art equivalent of these kinds of dance parties — art parties, basically. So I started getting hooked into what was happening on the DTES (we were on the cusp of the area as it was) because it seemed like a very similar scene. A lot of artists, Emily Carr students, indie rock kids, graffiti, skateboard kids — a real mix. I think the mixes that you would typically see at that time had a lot to do with how small Vancouver is as a city and as a social environment, and with relatively little to do for young people outside of the typical Granville mall club scene, you'd see a real convergence of subcultures under one roof. And it was rarely a problem, for the most part it offered people with relatively different backgrounds to dance and socialize together. Kind of utopian, when you think about it (25-1).

The above interviewee also points out the diversity of the indie scene in terms of subcultural style: skate kids, rock kids, artists.

Research Design

Data was collected through both participant observation and 25 in-depth qualitative interviews with indie participants, both female and male.[6] Initially, potential interviewees were recruited based on their level of participation within the indie scene, determined primarily by their regular attendance at indie venues. Participant observation was conducted at 21 events associated with the indie scene; these events were centred primarily in Vancouver's Eastside and often the surrounding areas of the Downtown Eastside more specifically. Vancouver's alternative indie performance and dance party spaces vary and shift in location depending upon factors such as the night, the event, the city's current configuration and contemporary forces. Of the 21 events covered: nine took place in bars (mainly located in the DTES but some were in Mount Pleasant); five took place in other spaces converted for dance events, such as artist spaces, businesses, community centres or warehouses; and seven were free, informal spaces such as house parties or public spaces.

Potential interviewees were approached by myself either in person, by telephone, or by e-mail. Subjects were selected based on their regular participation/attendance in identified venues and involvement in the 'indie aesthetic.'[7] I began with a snowball sample, originating from several sites, to gather further interviewees and also used these initial interviews to adjust my interview schedule. Many people contacted me after their interview to let me know they had found someone else who was willing to meet and talk.

For those interviewees who wished their identity to remain anonymous; numbered pseudonyms have been given to protect the privacy of all individuals. The names of people

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[6] Thus the focus is not on bartenders, long-term regular pub patrons or party promoters.

[7] Both the participant observation and the interviews were conducted in public places/venues and ranged anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half, with the exception of one interview that was conducted through the correspondence of several e-mails. Upon full written consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed.

mentioned by interviewees in conversation have also been changed. While photographs are included here in order to provide context, efforts have been made to conceal participants' identities, unless given permission to do otherwise. The inclusion of photographs and fieldnotes seemed necessary, for as Desmond (2000: 46) states, "[c]ombining approaches can be of single importance in helping us understand how 'dancing' happens, when and where, and what meanings and pleasures people attach to it under specific conditions." Further, Emmerson et al. stress the necessity of detailed descriptions (of, for example, participants' appearance, gestures and clothing) in order to help contextualize the actions and talk of those researched (1995: 70-71). Such detailed observations help to create more vivid images for readers, and serve to avoid more simplistic observations which rely on stereotypical clichés and vague generalizations (ibid.). They also serve to provide a more detailed and multilayered understanding of the Eastside spaces that indie events take place in.

My familiarity with the scene and my status as an artist and avid dancer as well as a long-time East Vancouver resident aided me in terms of recruiting initial interviewees, hearing about more private dance events and gaining the confidence of interviewees. Because members of this dance community pride themselves on being original, it is sometimes problematic for other dancers, artists, and researchers to gain access. Therefore my position as someone with access to participants within the indie dance community was opportune. My location and knowledge as a partial participant insider also assisted my level of understanding and translation[8] of things interviewees found difficult to express and/or did not think necessary to explain. This also proved frustrating at times, as I often had to make respondents elaborate upon

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[8] Devault (1990) discusses translation in terms of an ability of a woman interviewer, based on a shared understanding under patriarchy, to fill in from experience things women are unable to explain. Obviously, attending to this gap is for the most part tenuous. Because crucial differences between women, such as race, age and class, also shape our understandings of experience, such a rapport is never guaranteed, as Carby (1982) and Edwards (1990: 477– 490) have suggested.

comments such as: "you know what I mean." Distancing myself in order to gain insight into what I may have originally taken for granted was also a more complex process, requiring constant reflexivity. While I may share some experiences with interviewees, my primary relation to them was as a researcher, and it is this researcher status that was ultimately privileged. Thus I tried to avoid the "overrapport" with interviewees that feminist Ann Oakley (1990: 34) warns against.

Linda Smith (1999) has been useful in understanding the role of researcher with both insider and outsider status. Indeed, Smith (1999) cautions that, due to the complexity of identity, there are many loci which serve to construct the researcher, in this case me, as an outsider. While remaining committed to the subjective experiences of participants, Stanley and Wise (1990) caution researchers that they must also remain sensitive to the inter-subjectivities of researcher and participant. Difference in status and power, for instance, continually construct the interview process.[9] My position as academic outsider may have, at times, structured interviews in such a way that was too formal for participants to want to engage with, while my difference in age (of up to 13 years with some) may have impeded the intricacies of social networking. Melvina Johnson Young (1993) reminds us that power relations are always present in the interview process, and as Allen and Cloyes (2005) note, such power relations instigate the construction of expressions of experience into a form of 'social performance.'

Acknowledging the importance of the subjective voice and epistemic privilege (Narayan 1988), while resisting a claim of "official insider voice" (Smith 1999), I have included numerous quotes by participants in an effort to let them speak for themselves. In the case of ethnographic studies of youth cultures, Paul Hodkinson (2005) argues, and I concur, that a

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[9] See, for instance, Edwards, R. (1990: 477–490).

position of initial proximity, relative to 'insider status,' may offer valuable insight in terms of the research process and with attention to shared understanding and reflection. Cultural proximity between researchers and respondents allows for "access and rapport, at the same time as constituting an additional resource that may be utilised to enhance the quality of the eventual understandings produced" (ibid: 16). I believe my own research on the spatial and embodied social dance practices of Vancouver's indie youth has been augmented by my partial semblance of cultural similarity with my respondents.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, particularly the interview transcripts, I draw from grounded theory, a methodological approach that allows for constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Grounded theory is a bottom-up procedure that allows for themes to emerge from the data; thus creating theory from the themes and categories that surface (ibid.). This open approach is meant to prevent overly precipitous conclusions by the researcher by privileging the voices of the participants. For Strauss and Corbin (1990), this method is realised through the process of microanalysis. Microanalysis involves a detailed review of transcripts to generate the study's initial categories as well as to determine the interconnections between categories. This involves a form of coding, a determining of themes within the data. Therefore, along with the original subjects of interest that were part of this study's interview schedule, close and repetitive examination of the transcripts allowed for alternate themes to emerge, many of which had not been expected. After initially identifying a large number of topics, I considered the relationship among categories and collapsed them into a few primary categories. These were then used as the organizing principles of the chapters of this thesis.

Certainly the data I have collected and chosen to include in this study is shaped by my particular stance and interests. For example, another ethnographer with the same object of study may not share my feminist concerns and would therefore not find a gendered analysis particularly useful. What ethnographers include (or do not include) in their studies reflect varying points of view and perspectives. Thus "it is important to recognize that fieldnotes involve inscriptions of social life and social discourse" (Emmerson et al. 1995: 8). The method of determining and/or breaking down different ideologies (similar to and compatible with Foucault's concept of discourse) is also an integral means for the process of critical analysis. Following Gramsci, feminist researchers have drawn attention to the ways in which ideologies function as a means of social control (Pfohl 1994: 416-417). Ideologies, to clarify what is meant by the term, exist as a body of ideas that are never static and encompass many inconsistencies or contradictions. "Rather than viewing cultural rituals as ideological by-products of economic reality, Gramsci developed a notion of ideology as itself a material historical force. This force was contingent upon the ritual welding together of otherwise contradictory political, economic, and social realities" (ibid.: 416). According to Gramsci, ideologies function as a subtle form of power (ibid.). Ideologies are not simply forced upon people, rather, people actively participate in the ideological structures that often regulate them, and this is something I have been attentive to in the process of data analysis.

Biographic Information

Of the twenty-five people interviewed, the majority of interviewees, 64 percent (16), were female and 36 percent (9) were male. At the time of the interview 68 percent (17) lived in East Vancouver, 20 percent (5) lived either in the Westside of Vancouver or Downtown, and

three interviewees. 12 percent (3), lived in other cities outside of Vancouver (yet these three and many of those who lived Downtown had lived in East Vancouver at some point). The ages of interviewees ranged between 19 and 33 while the mean age was 27. Of the 25 people interviewed, 84 percent (21) identified themselves as white (including but not limited to Australian, French Canadian, Jewish, Irish, Ukrainian, British, Finnish, German, Croatian and "mutt"), while 16 percent (4) identified as people of colour: specifically Asian, Black, Chilean, and Mexican. All were Canadian citizens. However, based on observation, Vancouver's indie scene appears somewhat more ethnically mixed than is represented in this sample. Thus, the interview sample may have been informed by my own location as white and heterosexual.

In terms of education, 24 percent (6) had a high school or GED degree, 16 percent (4) had completed one year of college or trade school, 48 percent (12) had either completed or were in the process of a BA/BFA university degree, and 12 percent (3) were in grad school. With regards to socio-economic status, 52 percent (13) self identified as working-class, 24 percent (6) self identified as middle-class, 16 percent (4) self-identified as middle to upper-class and 8 percent (2) did not disclose this information. This information is simply based on interviewee accounts and no other data, thus because of the wide range of interpretations of class standing, actual class demarcations are difficult to determine. All of the interviewees but one, worked or participated to some degree in arts and culture fields such as music, the visual arts, television, radio, film, fashion and journalism. Of these, 72 percent (18) identified themselves as artists and 28 (7) percent did not. All interviewees identified themselves as heterosexual.

Table 1.1: Demographic Formation of Interviewees

Total sample of interviews: 25

Gender
Female 16 = 64%
Male 9 = 36%

Place of residence at time of interview
East Vancouver: 17 = 68%
Westside or downtown: 5 = 20%
Other cities (New York, Toronto, Edmonton): 3 = 12%

*All of the 'Other city' interviewees had resided at some point in East Vancouver as had many of the downtown interviewees.

Age
19-25: 9 = 36%
25-30: 7 = 28%
30-33: 9 = 36%

*Ages ranged from 19-33 while the average age was 27

Ethnic self-identification
White (including but not limited to Australian, French Canadian, Jewish, Irish, Ukrainian, British, Finnish, German, Croatian and "mutt"): 21 = 84%
Asian: 1 = 4%
Black: 1 = 4%
Mexican: 1 = 4%
Chilean: 1 = 4%

Education
Obtained a high school education: 7 = 28%
Obtained one year of college or trade/vocational school: 4 = 16%
In process of or graduated with a B(F)A: 12 = 48%
In grad school: 2 = 8%

Class self-identification

Self identified as working-class: 13 = 52%
Self identified as middle-class: 6 = 24%
Self identified middle to upper-class: 4 = 16%
Undisclosed: 2 = 8%

Artist identification
Interviewees who identified as artists: 18 = 72%
Interviewees who did not identify as an artist: 7 = 28%

*All but one interviewee worked in arts and culture fields such as music, the visual arts, television, radio, film, fashion and journalism: 96%

Sexual preference
All interviewees identified as heterosexual: 100%

Directions and Limitations

Of course there are limitations to this study. By its very nature, contemporary indie culture is difficult to define as its aesthetic is continually changing (once it is easily defined, it then becomes easily commodified and labelled as 'mainstream' rather than 'indie'). In Vancouver, alternative spaces continually shift and are therefore both difficult to document or even find. Live performance must be studied in the present, thus this investigation had a temporal urgency. As well, it must be acknowledged that both performances and interviews are interactive: people and events are affected by the process of study. This documentation of Vancouver's indie scene serves to shape and define it, even as it simultaneously offers something concrete for indie youth to define themselves against. Acknowledging how the researcher's position affects the content and context of the study while also finding ways to limit these changes had to factor into the research analysis. The translation of dance practice into writing is a difficult task. This is something I have had to grapple with as a researcher with a love of movement. While participants' own descriptions of dance, my personal ethnographic notes and the inclusion of photographs (when ethical) work together to provide a broader understanding of the dance practice, they do not replace the full sensual experience that one gains from being present at and participatory in dance. Chapter Six, in particular, attempts to 'capture' the dance, however, this remains a written document.

I want to stress that this research is not a comparative analysis, and, though subcultural theory is applied when useful, neither is it a subcultural study. I am not particularly interested in defining a subculture (that by its very nature resists definition), as such attempts often fall prey to gross generalizations and fail to recognise that meaning is always being (re)negotiated.

Rather, Vancouver's indie subculture is an entry point into the examination of the interrelation of spatial and embodied practices and identity formations. Youth within this study are not homogeneous. I use the terms indie/hipster or artist-identified youth to identify some distinctive practices that take place in particular places, rather than to circumscribe individuals within a subcultural identification.

I am particularly interested in how this study will inform wider social, cultural, and political factors which impact the spatially embedded moving body. It has been argued that social identities, mediated by class, race, gender, sex, age, ethnicity and nationality, are physically enacted through our body movement and that dance is significant in revealing ever-shifting power relations that exist within our social, political, historical, and cultural lives (Desmond 1998). This perspective is applied to a specific dance/performance community in order to reveal the intimate workings of power-relations and to determine how social identities are spatially performed within Vancouver's indie dance community.

Fieldnote Excerpt May 4, 2006, Karaoke Night at Pat's Pub (East Hastings Street)

There is no cover charge when there is no band playing at Pat's Pub, the small pub-style venue located within the East Hastings Street hotel, the Patricia. This particular night, Thursday, is Karaoke Night and it is free to get in. As I walk in, a small, scraggly, elderly man with a very long grey beard that reaches almost to his waist is hunched over with a cane in one hand and a microphone in the other. He's positioned by the back of the bar (sort of the stage or dance floor area) and is exuberantly belting out a classic rock song to the small audience, variously scattered throughout the dimly lit room. His enthusiasm makes me laugh. The 15 or so people in the bar make up an older, seemingly regular Hastings street clientele (with ages ranging from approximately 45-70) and a few stylishly dressed young people (mid 20s-mid 30s), which includes the wait staff and bartender. The younger crowd slowly increases, arriving for karaoke as the night progresses, although the bar never gets that busy. Both older and younger clientele continue to sing throughout the night.

Robert (the person I have come to interview) is sitting by the stage watching the older singer in a relaxed manner, having a drink, and waiting for both his turn to sing, and myself to show up. It is clear that Robert is both comfortable and familiar with the staff, including the man running the karaoke machine, and the interview is interrupted several times as Robert gets up to sing (e.g., New Attitude by Patti Labelle) and also to socialize with various people he knows coming into the bar. The loud singing makes it difficult to record the conversation audibly but we move to the back near the smoking room where it is a bit quieter. As many young people in Vancouver know, Robert has a distinct style that is all his own. And because it is a style that is not easily described as heteronormative, I suspect, it may incite ridicule and possibly aggression amidst the more conservative bars of Granville Street. Indeed, he later

confirms this suspicion by angrily relating the danger and violence he is met with when in that

area at night. He consequently avoids the Granville Strip. Tonight, along with his prominent

moustache, he is wearing his usual second hand garb; tight fitting chequered plaid pants and a

very small, knitted Popeye sweater. He often wears sweaters that look as if a granny made them.

My favourite is when he dons a Rick James costume with Big Ham at his Canned Ham

music/performance shows, which includes a tight red body suit and long dark braids.

Several of the younger men at Pat's have beards, are wearing sweatshirts, and dark

colours, while several of the younger women are sporting tight blue/grey jeans or pleated skirts,

layered shirts and medium length angled hair cuts that shag in the front and droop in the back

(reminiscent of a cross between a small-town mullet and a young Marianne Faithful). The look

is a mix of old and new clothing (mostly old it seems) and slightly dishevelled but stylish in what

can be described as an East Van sort of way.

This night seems to seamlessly integrate an older, regular Pat's Pub clientele with a

younger hipster crowd. The two groups do not appear disparate in a way that other nights have

sometimes seemed elsewhere; although those had mostly been dance parties and this is not. The

idea of artist youth as gentrifiers (something I have been contemplating) did not seem relevant

in this context. Rather, from my perspective, this night at Pat's Pub seemed an important site of

community formation and pleasure for all involved. It embodied something, openness to a

variety of expression (without aggression) and diversity in terms of age that, based on my

observations and interviews, remains absent from the more big-business venues in the city's

entertainment district. The elderly song-smith with the enormously long beard expressed

genuine enjoyment when Robert flamboyantly sang, and vice versa. Karaoke night at Pat's Pub

in East Vancouver contrasts sharply with Vancouver's "official" Entertainment District on

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North Granville Street. The following chapter explores indie youth's resistance to this

mainstream dance club area.
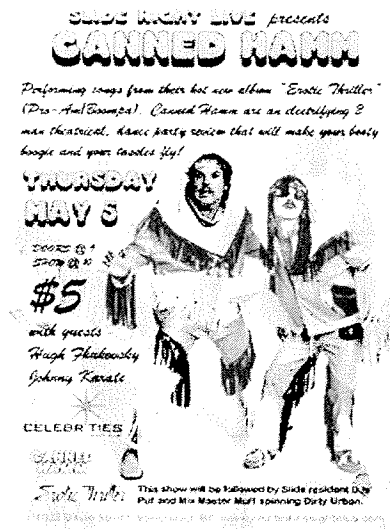
Figure E-1. Flyer for Canned Hamm performance with interviewee, Rob Dayton, 2006.

Figure E-2. *Hotel Patricia* **(Side Entrance), 2006**

Figure E-3. Inside *Pat's Pub*. Band: Rodney Mueller, 2004. Photograph thanks to Jeremy Mendes

CHAPTER 3

YOU MEAN I HAVE TO GO TO HELL IF I WANT TO DANCE?

CONSIDERING THE MAINSTREAM

Vancouver's indie youth construct their identities in relation to the mainstream, and because of this, it is imperative that the meaning of the mainstream be explored. This is no simple matter because, as Thornton notes, within studies of popular culture there seems to be little consensus as to 'who' constitutes the mainstream (i.e., is it dominant culture, mass culture, middle-class or working-class?)(1996: 87-115). She criticizes a range of key cultural theorists for uncritically invoking the term 'mainstream' as an empirical social group against which subcultures are defined. Equally problematic in her view are analyses that blur the boundaries between subculture and mainstream because they fail to recognize the "social significance of the concept of the 'mainstream' to youthful maps of the cultural world" (1996: 98). Thornton herself describes the mainstream as an 'embodied social structure of youth' (ibid: 98), and as a construct that is heterogeneous and fluid.

Like Thornton (1996), this investigation is less focused on labelling a 'dominant' mainstream or a 'subversive' subculture, and is rather more interested in the social structure and ideologies *within* the subculture itself. But more than this, and unlike Thornton, I locate the mainstream not only in discourse but in space. Youth in this study strongly identify themselves, as emphatically 'not' mainstream. It is through their understandings and articulations of the mainstream that one can begin to understand how the indie youth identify themselves outside of it. The distinction between mainstream/not mainstream is most vocalized through their multi-layered and contradictory rejection of heteronormative gender roles, despite their own self-

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identification as heterosexual subjects, and this is something that I will explore in depth in this chapter.

Though youth construct the mainstream as an imaginary entity against which they define their world (as Thornton suggests), there also exists a very materialized and spatialized understanding of the mainstream. The mainstream is also geographical; indie youth locate it within the Granville entertainment district along with the west side of Vancouver generally, and also as *not East Vancouver*. Such a distinction (mainstream/not mainstream) is concretized and naturalized through space. I begin with an exploration of Vancouver's entertainment district as an actively produced, normalizing space in order to argue that it is important to understand the 'mainstream' as more than simply an imaginative entity — as not only discursive but also as a grounded site which produces, maintains, and reiterates the moral contours of heterosexuality (among other things) within the neoliberal city. Following an exploration of how power, governmentality and heterosexuality work together to produce the mainstream space of the entertainment district, I turn to interviewees' subjective experiences to examine their collective rejection of a particular form of aggressive heterosexuality and how they use this to define themselves against this spatially constructed 'mainstream.' This chapter excavates (rather than simply stereotypes) the mainstream by examining the regulation of Vancouver's entertainment district and indie youth's opinions about this constructed space within the context of the nightlife entertainment of dancing. Their comments cover 'top-forty' clubs, dress, sexuality, safety, and a comparison of the sense of community and belonging they experience outside of mainstream spaces.

Producing the Granville Strip

In light of the upcoming 2010 Winter Whistler Olympics, the City of Vancouver, BC, is eagerly supporting projects to 'clean-up' and 'revitalize' the city.[10] Until recently, downtown Vancouver has been characterized as part of the 'no fun city' due to strict liquor laws and heavy regulation of liquor establishments.[11] Vancouver has had few nightlife venues compared to other major global cities, bars that existed closed relatively early (between midnight and 2pm), and there has been strict enforcement of policies on capacity limits and liquor licensing. However, since 2003, Vancouver has been remarketed and remodelled (at least superficially) as the 'Fun City'.[12] Extended hours for nightlife venues on North Granville Street (until 4am on weekends) were made official in May 2, 2004 and are part of an initiative to encourage tourism and to centralize nightlife to one core area (Hume 8 Nov., 2006: A1-A13; Vancouver City Council 2006: Ub1(a, b &c)). Following an initiative that began in the 1990s, since 2006 the entertainment district, which centers around downtown Granville Street, is now in the process of being rezoned as Vancouver's 'official' and 'primary' entertainment district (City of Vancouver 2007c), where the nightlife economy of youth-dominated bars, clubs, music venues, tourist entertainments and restaurants are encouraged to thrive. After hours, Granville Street becomes a hub of crowded activity as youth rove the area in search of entertainment, covering the sidewalks while waiting in nightclub and/or dollar-pizza line-ups. As part of an eco-density project in the downtown core, retail and nightlife entertainment has become focused to a few key streets in order to prevent their spread to areas surrounding Granville Street which have

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[10] The City of Vancouver's 'Project Civil City' (2007) which targets crime, panhandling and homelessness is a case in point. For a comprehensive list of articles related to Project Civil City see the Vancouver Public Space Network (2007).

[11] This is aside from Vancouver's reputation for strip clubs and exotic dancing.

[12] In fact, in 2005, Downtown Granville Street bore city banners that read: "Fun City."

been rezoned as high density neighbourhoods (City of Vancouver 2007c: 1-5). The entertainment district is maintained by the city's two-tiered licensing system which supports sub-area differences in terms of hours of operation, levels of noise control, the concentration of liquor establishments allowed in an area and density controls within entertainment establishments. Several city initiatives such as rezoning, new liquor licensing regulations, the upgrading of hotels, the limiting of adult-oriented retail and modified transportation policies (including access to the Olympic Skytrain route with the Canada Line) have been implemented in order to contribute to Granville Street's revival as a locus of commercial activity and nightlife entertainment (City of Vancouver 2007c: 1-5). Accordingly, this revival has also facilitated a rent increase in the area (ibid: 5).

New rezoning and liquor licensing regulations, however, also discourage entertainment venues that fall outside this small geographic region. This affects a significant amount of local establishments located outside of the city's appointed entertainment district, as well as the groups that frequent them. The moral and legal regulation and policing of nightlife is not equally applied, and while the city has currently provided aid (through policy initiatives[13]) to those corporate nightlife venues relocating to Granville Street, liquor establishments in the Downtown Eastside are not currently granted extended hours and, as Vancouver City Council (2006: Ub-1(c), see page 7) has noted, seem to be most negatively impacted by the extended hours bylaw. While both the entertainment district of the Granville Strip and the liquor establishments that occupy Vancouver's Downtown Eastside are highly regulated, the intent and purpose of regulation is markedly different. The regulation of Granville Street serves to protect corporate activities and the consumers of nightlife entertainment, while simultaneously keeping those who

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[13] See for example, City of Vancouver's 'Policy Report Licensing' (2006c) and the City of Vancouver's 'Granville Street Redesign Homepage' (2006b).

do not conform to this agenda (such as the homeless) out of such spaces. Conversely, the focus of regulation with regards to the Downtown Eastside (DTES) has primarily been that of containment: the containment of immorality, crime, disease and drug use to prevent it from spreading outward towards the rest of the city (Woolford 2001). My objective is not so much to provide an analysis of how different spaces within the city are regulated, but to draw attention to the type of regulation, prominent in the entertainment district, that interviewees resist.

Project Civil City (2007) was introduced in 2006 by Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan and the Non-Partisan Association (NPA) dominated city council. In an effort to 'clean up the city' by 2010, the project has streamlined newly invigorated enforcement practices such as the ticketing of those who infringe upon city bylaws. One objective of Project Civil City is to reduce public disorder in the Granville entertainment district, and new city ordinances have been directed towards this area (Project Civil City 2007; Mills 1 Oct., 2007). Offences subject to ticketing include, for example, panhandling[14], urinating/defecating/expectorating in a public place, fighting in public, loud noise (not including that made by traffic or construction), jaywalking, smoking, business licensing and bicycle riding infractions (City of Vancouver 2007b; Project Civil City 2007).

Various tactics have been recommended and/or deployed to enforce these bylaws. And, with recent extended hours for Granville Strip nightlife establishments come more stringent rules. The Vancouver Police Department, for instance, were allotted $565,000 to deal with additional monitoring and enforcement of the entertainment district in 2006 (Vancouver City Council 2006: UB-1(b)). Project Civil City has also recommended that metal detectors and ID scanners be made mandatory at all Vancouver nightclubs (2007b: 12). As of December 2005,

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[14] There is an obvious irony in ticketing those who are too poor to pay the proposed fines, an outcome likely to result in criminal offence.

Vancouver has also become home to Canada's first armed transit system; with little consultation with the general public, SkyTrain police (employees of Vancouver's privately owned transit system—TransLink) are now licensed to carry guns (Pablo 2006: 15). The city's initiatives towards the crackdown on crime and disorder in the downtown core also coincide with concerns put forth by the Vancouver Board of Trade[15] (Paulsen 10 April 2006). Their form letter to the government states:

> In less than 900 days, we will be playing host to the 2010 Olympics and welcoming the world to Vancouver. Canada's high criminal victimization rates and rampant public disorder — including, but not limited to, *aggressive begging* and open drug markets — will undoubtedly be showcased to the world.... Solutions to deal with crime and public disorder have been implemented in other countries with much success. It can be done in Canada. Let's get on with it. (Lee 2007, emphasis added)

Couched within the rhetoric of public safety, Project Civil City appears to be more concerned with the *regulation* of homelessness and poverty, particularly the activities of begging and panhandling, than the supposed 'breakdown of public order.'

In support of increased security measures, many Granville Street club proprietors have also hired private security guards to patrol the public streets (Mills 1 Oct. 2007; Lupick 7 Nov. 2007). Private security guards, licensed and non-licensed, considerably outnumber police officers in B.C. (Lupick 7 Nov. 2007) and are representative of an incorporation of state regulation with private, business affiliated policing. For instance, Genesis Security, a popular private security company that conducts its own voluntary surveillance of the downtown core and elsewhere (Genesis Security 2007), is employed by several of the entertainment districts' local nightclubs (as part of Bar Watch, a collective nightclub security initiative) and by the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association (DVBIA). The DVBIA represents

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[15] The Vancouver Board of Trade website (2007) which lists crime as a key issue in Vancouver posts crime statistics, recommendations for an increased police force, the use of closed circuit television for public surveillance, as well as form letters which lobby government officials (Mayor Sam Sullivan, Premier Gordon Campbell and Prime Minister Stephen Harper) to counter public disorder by the 2010 Olympics.

property owners and business owners in Vancouver's downtown area and has created its own

crime prevention taskforce, the Downtown Ambassadors. The Downtown Ambassadors

(members of Genesis Security), recognized by red uniforms, patrol Vancouver's downtown

streets providing tourist assistance and crime prevention, acting as the 'eyes and ears' for local

businesses (Lupick Nov. 7 2007) and attempting to address what they term 'quality of life'

issues. These issues are remarkably compatible with those put forth by the Vancouver Board of

Trade: "The goal of the [Ambassador] program is to address "quality of life" issues such as

panhandling, litter, illegal vending, graffiti etc. with the understanding that these issues not only

affect the general quality of life in the downtown but also the overall crime rates" (DVBIA

2007, emphasis added). The Ambassador policing is funded entirely through tax levies on local

property and businesses (ibid).

Not only are the public domains of the Granville entertainment district regulated, but so

too are the private domains. The parameters of regulation of the Granville entertainment district

range from the formal regulations of zoning and policing activities, coat checks, video

surveillance cameras, private security guards, bouncers, metal detectors and age limitations to

the more informal regulatory practices of dress codes, the cost of door cover, location, and the

social regulation of norms (including sexual norms), demeanour, state of health and style that

are part of (though not exclusive to) more mainstream, corporate nightlife venues. Part and

parcel of nightclubs' 'chain of surveillance' is the reinforcement of social divisions determined

by factors such race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and age (Rigakos 2004: 4). Describing the

situation of the Granville Strip over a decade ago, geographers Lees and Demeritt state that:

> In Downtown South, City council has actively responded to concerns of new residents
> about the bars and sex shops along Granville. Although Council lifted a five-year
> moratorium on new liquor-license applications in June 1997, it has attached strict
> provisos, requiring new businesses to operate surveillance security cameras and take other

measures to control the litter, noise, and rowdiness of their patrons both within and beyond their premises (1998: 352).

While strict regulations of patrons are enforced in downtown nightclubs, some patrons (those suspected to be more high-risk — i.e., "gang members") are more heavily scrutinized than others. Eradicating gang-activities is one of the crack-downs instigated not only by city police but also Vancouver's Club Zone (a collective of downtown clubs that belong to Barwatch and deal with, among other things, security issues). One of the city's daily papers, *The Vancouver Sun*, details some of the security measures members of Barwatch implement in order to prevent club shootings:

> …most of the major nightclubs in the area belong to Barwatch, which uses video surveillance to check patrons going into their establishments….most of them use hand-held metal detectors, operated by security companies rather than nightclub employees….the plainclothes firearm interdiction team has been effective at keeping guns out of the clubs by stopping and checking gang members and other high-risk individuals, both inside the clubs and on the street (Bridge 2006: B6).

Such media coverage construct as common knowledge the idea that 'gang-members' tend to frequent more mainstream bars while the threat of gang-related activities is put forth as a means to justify surveillance in the private realm of the club, as well as outside in the more public realm of Granville Street. Men of colour who are not visibly of middle-class status are often depicted as gang-members within popular media. This reveals one paradox of Vancouver's 'mainstream,' that it is racially represented as a consumer space that is both white and non-white. However the media, the city and the police continue to locate the entertainment district as a white space in need of protection from 'others', including racialized and poor people, and this converges with the district's containment and avid surveillance. One Barwatch member, arguing for harsher penalties for nightlife enthusiasts, stated: "[p]eople do what they want to do on the streets and there is no punishment, no fines, no nothing" (Ward 12 Jan., 2007).

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Indeed, the local government's constructed and enforced entertainment district has gained a strong reputation for aggressive disorder. Declaring the crowded street scene of the entertainment district dangerous, chaotic, and violent due to the plethora of clubs, late closing times and an abundance of alcohol and testosterone, Vancouver police (following Toronto) are attempting to set up a network of CCTV surveillance cameras in the downtown entertainment district as soon as possible (Hume 8 Nov., 2006).[16] According to Vancouver Deputy Chief Rich, "Open public disorder, fighting in and around the bars and assaulting police officers has become all too common" (ibid: A13). The need to regulate the public is further naturalized by media coverage; for example, an article in the daily newspaper, *The Vancouver Sun*, reads: "Granville Street is like a 'ticking time bomb,'" and chronicles the necessity of police and private security guards in an entertainment district where male violence and cases of the date rape drug, GHB, are a prevalent threat (Eustace 26 March 2007). While the cover of the Vancouver daily newspaper, the *Province* (18 March, 2007), reads: "THE STREET OF **SHAME**. Every Weekend, Granville mall hosts an orgy of drunkenness and street brawls. Police say it's time to end the madness." Youth disorder, characterized by an aggressive masculinity, is put forth as something to be controlled, while there is little acknowledgement as to how rapid growth, formal and informal regulation and containment of the entertainment district might facilitate this "orgy." As it threatens to erupt as an uncontainable space, the 'public' street of Granville, with the support of the city, is regulated and dominated by private enterprise both inside and outside. Whether or not the Granville Strip still constitutes public space has become debatable.

Foucault sensitizes us to the multiple formal and informal disciplinary practices of social control. His analysis of the disciplinary practice of surveillance is particularly useful here as it is

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[16] There are already a number of privately administered cameras along Granville Street.

a practice which both the city of Vancouver and Vancouver's mainstream nightclubs are eagerly

implementing, through video surveillance, private security, dress codes and bouncers. In

Discipline and Punish (1995), Foucault outlines the emergence of a new regime of power in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which he terms "bio-power."[17] The human body as living

entity, can be approached as a tool that can be both manipulated and controlled through

disciplinary technology and body objectification. Through technologies (the joining of power

and knowledge) disciplinary techniques are bounded in an effort to create a docile body, a body

which can be 'subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Rabinow 1984: 17 quoting

Foucault). Such body techniques, Foucault maintains, which rely upon multiple sites of power,

including the power of the disciplinary gaze rather than forceful constraint, are useful in places

such as schools, hospitals, factories, the army and (what is a primary focus here) in city centres

(1995: 195-228).

Using an analogy of the Panopticon (a prison structure in which each individual is

visible within their cell, while visibility to cell members is denied), Foucault (1995) relates how

those who assume they are under constant watch begin to practice self-regulation. Foucault

states, "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for

the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in

himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the

principle of his own subjection" (1995: 202-203, sic). Control is maintained while physical

confrontation is avoided. Under this regime, discipline comes from within as well as from

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[17] The focus of bio-power is centred on the knowledge, control and intervention of both the human species and the human body. Foucault argues that during the classical age "... there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'bio-power'" (1980: 140). He further notes that this 'great technology of power' (which included the deployment of sexuality) was an indispensable factor in the development of capitalism (ibid. 140-141). Through the 'administration of bodies' (i.e. the ordering of bodies in space) and a calculated, meticulous management of life (i.e. the evolution of demography), bio-power produces a normalizing society (ibid.: 140-144).

without and everyday activities (under constant watch) become a performance of sorts, which come to define subjectivity. This form of regulatory practice, maintained also outside of the prison, draws upon normalizing judgement and discourse, a continuous and insidious form of anonymous power that qualifies, stigmatizes and is hierarchical (ibid.). Invoking comparisons to Foucault's panoptic analogy, individuals who visit Vancouver's entertainment district encounter disciplinary measures of surveillance and are expected to adhere to the disciplines of corporeal conduct. Of course these disciplinary measures appear fairly ineffective considering the Granville Strip's reputation for street brawls and public disorder — constituting the city's justification for further surveillance. Yet public displays of 'playful' aggression are to some extent expected when young, heterosexual, inebriated (white) men gather and could therefore be considered part of the 'normative' corporeal conduct in a way that aggressive behaviour by racialized men or displays of poverty, such as pan-handling for instance, are not. In fact, the dominant behaviour which permeates the entertainment district is personified by an aggressively asserted heterosexuality (which is demonstrated through interviewees' comments later in the chapter). This correlates with a number of studies in which interviewees characterize mainstream nightlife entertainment, in opposition to alternative dance spaces, as dominated by a predatory form of masculinity (e.g., Chatterton and Hollands (2003); Henderson (1993); Pini (2001)).

Osborn and Rose (1999) note that it is precisely the ungovernmentality of the city, and its continual immanence (through transgressive pleasures, for instance), which becomes a resource for strategies of governmentality. The threat of public disorder then, becomes a reason for spatial control. Yet contemporary strategies for maintaining this control, within the imagined urban spatiality of the city, draw upon the citizen, enabling multiple sites for new forms of

governmentality. According to Osborn and Rose, government is enacted, less from the 'top down,' as through diverse domains of relatively autonomous citizens, organizations such as hospitals, schools, firms, community bodies and individuals, who take on responsibilities which were previously the domain of the state (1999). Barwatch, for instance, in its efforts and ability to control club patrons' 'civility' and participation, acts as a regulatory domain that benefits city politics and consumer imperatives, as does the Vancouver Ambassador Program. Such an alliance with regards to the pleasures of the city, Osborn and Rose maintain, acts to contain and re-package transgressive pleasures (which have the potential to escape governmental control) creating 'civilized pleasures,' such as an entertainment district of "commodified contentment" rendered safe for market enterprise such as urban tourism (Osborn and Rose 1999).

The mechanisms of knowledge and power that Foucault relates have also enabled capitalism's success. Capitalism draws upon disciplinary techniques, including methods of control (such as surveillance) and the spatial practices (such as hierarchical spatial ordering) needed to facilitate control (Rabinow 1984: 18-21). It is not particularly surprising that many of Vancouver's profit-driven mainstream dance clubs (as members of Club Zone) and business members (such as those who are members of the Vancouver Board of Trade) have supported the city's containment (to the entertainment district) and surveillance of/around late night entertainment (such as dancing). There exists an interdependency between private property and private security. As the privatization of urban spaces proliferates, public spaces are increasingly controlled by private interest (Rigakos 2002; Wakefield 2005), through, for example, business improvement areas. New technologies of control, such as private security guards and the use of closed circuit television (CCTV) reflect more than surveillance strategies, they come to embody a form of governance (Wakefield 2005), producing a 'civil city' where tasks originally

associated with the state are taken up by the private realm. This is problematic for multiple

reasons: corporate interest may supersede public interest; the private realm is one of little

accountability (for example, the process for making formal complaints against security guards is

not well known in B.C. (Lupick 7 Nov. 2007); surveillance strategies often result in the erosion

of civil liberties, the lack of privacy, restrictions on freedom of movement for suspected

offenders and discriminatory practices such as social stratification—whereby the privileged,

conformist and compliant are sorted from the 'undesirables' (see Davis 1998; Rigakos 2002;

Wakefield 2005). Limiting Vancouver's entertainment district to one main, regulated location

facilitates governmental, capital and corporate control over individuals, (while simultaneously

differentiating the 'dangerous crowds' of the entertainment space from those that permeate

depictions of the DTES by media, health officials and police). Those seeking the popular

entertainment of dancing are encouraged to do so only at specific locations and venues (venues

which can afford the high rental rates of the Granville Strip, driven by intense competition) thus

creating a (mainstream) hegemony of entertainment spaces.

What I also want to point out is that the hegemony of the entertainment district, as a space

of 'civilized pleasures' (Osborn and Rose 1999), also takes the form of a heterosexual

hegemony. As part of Foucault's investigation into the anonymous disciplinary power of

normalizing judgment and discourse, he politicizes sexuality. Foucault (1990) links the history

of sexuality and the body, and how we come to understand ourselves as sexual subjects, to

modern technologies of power. Through a multitude of interlocking discourses, working as

technologies of power, the monogamous heterosexual has come to be legitimized as the norm,

while all 'other' sexualities are pathologized and subject to scrutiny (Foucault 1990; Rabinow

1984). Subjected to and invested in dominant discourses (e.g., scientific, religious, moral) which

naturalize the 'normal' and maintain its dominance through social control, we internalize standards of normality, and this becomes part of our own subjectivity. The normal can then be maintained and produced through 'techniques of the self,' with power directly and intimately connected to the body, underpinning everyday pleasures.

Indeed, a number of theorists have brought our attention to the hegemony of heterosexuality, noting that because heterosexually has been normalized, it has been understood as unproblematic and as natural rather than revealed as ultimately constrained and/or produced by power relations. Adrienne Rich (1980) describes heterosexuality as a compulsory fiction, a political institution maintained and enforced through state practices which work to ultimately disempower women. Judith Butler (1990), drawing from Foucault, theorizes gender as performative in that it re-enacts already extant meaning systems as part of a heterosexual matrix which, through the reiteration of heterosexual norms, (pre)constitute the subject as unitary, stable and true. This repetition ultimately works to conceal and disavow the instability and production of sex and gender, enabling gender inequality, biologically rationalized, to remain unchallenged. Heterosexual hegemony is maintained by condemning those who fail to conform.[18]

While heterosexual norms underpin a wide range of social relations and institutions, they easily extend (often unacknowledged) into (pre)conceptions of space (Bondi 1992; Valentine 1993, 1996; Rothenberg 1995; Hubbard 2000, 2001). Indeed, space is fundamentally shaped by a multitude of dynamics including gender and sexuality. Gill Valentine (1996) argues that public spaces are produced as heterosexual through everyday repetitive, performative acts which both

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[18] Privileged and normalized to the extent that it escapes interrogation, heterosexuality is intimately linked to whiteness (as Stokes (2001) and Dyer (1997) have pointed out), as both occupy a place of privilege that is invisible in its ubiquity.

regulate and work to naturalize the hegemony of heterosexuality. For example, she observes that everyday spaces are orally and visually saturated with conversations and musical lyrics expressing heterosexual desire, public displays of heterosexual affection, and media images which glorify the nuclear family, all of which impact spatial conceptions (ibid.: 147). Certainly gays and lesbians continue to challenge the heterosexual dominance of these spaces of which their sexualities are denied. Phil Hubbard (2000) notes that while spaces are often theorized within the polar geographies of either 'gay' or 'straight' space, and that researchers have brought our attention to the ways in which lesbians, gays and bisexuals often experience everyday spaces as 'aggressively heterosexual,' much more explicit work needs to be done towards understanding how *heterosexual* spaces are variously and complexly sexed. Of course, mapping porous heterosexual space also involves examining the ways systems of oppressions, such as racism, sexism and class-bias, are interwoven within the heterosexual matrix. For example, Hubbard (2000) points out that spaces are coded in sexual terms, as sexual (e.g., the bar/nightclub); as non-sexual (e.g., the dentist office, although this does not always follow); and as deviant (e.g., non-heteronormative: the gay bar, the sex workers' street corner). As part of this scripting, spatial landscapes within specific contexts are constructed as moral/immoral, normal/perverted (ibid.: 194).

There are two points that Hubbard argues that are pertinent here. Firstly, that "[t]he spatiality of the city reflects and produces wider notions of sexual morality, contributing to the naturalization of heterosexual norms in the process" (Hubbard 2000: 200). And second, that heterosexually identified people, as part of a complex identity system, can also experience some everyday spaces as aggressively heterosexual. Hubbard (2000: 197-8), drawing from Nast (1998), explains that patriarchy and heterosexuality intertwine to render procreative,

monogamous sex as healthy, natural and moral, while all other sexualities are constructed as deviant and abnormal (including homosexuality, prostitution, masturbation and any form of "women's sexual gratification independent of procreation") — as are the spaces they are associated with. City spaces take on moral geographies and these, in turn, become naturalized within space through the fiction of heterosexual performances (among other things) enacted through repetition and maintained through regulatory regimes (Hubbard 2000: 198). This seems to be the case for Vancouver's Entertainment District, as a space constructed by the city and entrepreneurial interests, maintained through spatial boundaries and regulated (informally and formally) to enact a particular performance of heteronormativity — an enactment interviewees' speak to in the following section. Vancouver's entertainment district represents a moral space in that it reproduces and repeats (white patriarchal) heterosexuality. Though constantly threatening uncontainability, it is nevertheless protected through regulatory regimes and spatial boundaries, from the city's immoral spaces (spaces associated with deviant sexuality, including prostitution, homosexuality, and non-normative heterosexuality). Vancouver' DTES, characterized by sex-work, HIV/AIDS and poverty while also racialized, is an obvious example of such a space scripted as immoral.

If Vancouver's entertainment district signifies to a certain extent a moral or naturalized entertainment landscape, it follows that many are excluded from this space. Historically the entertainments of people of colour and the working-classes have been criminalized, more heavily policed and morally associated with excess and vice (Chatterson and Hollands have made this point speaking to entertainment practices in the U.S. and U.K. (2003: 47-54)), as have the entertainments associated with gay and lesbian communities. Kate Boyer (1991) touches upon this in her discussion of the moral and legal regulation of women within the city of

Vancouver in the early twentieth century. Boyer reveals some of the ways moral discourse

informed legal practice in the criminalizing and/or discrediting of women and racialized 'others'

(such as South Asian men). Becki Ross and Kim Greenwell (2005) map the racialization of

striptease dancers in Vancouver's predominantly West End and East End neighbourhoods

between 1945 and 1975. The authors note that while predominantly white and affluent West

End nightclubs were granted liquor licences well before the racialized, working-class East End

nightclubs (denied until the late 1960's), East End nightclubs were also subjected to intensified

police regulation (such as surveillance and raids) compared to their West End nightclub

counterparts (ibid.). They further argue that "[t]he historic separation of Vancouver's East End

from the West End along class lines was simultaneously rooted in racial segregation: small

communities of Chinese and African Canadians had residential and commercial interests in the

eastern working-class districts of Chinatown, Strathcona, and Hogan's Alley, and they both

owned and supported nightclubs, restaurants, groceries, and laundries after World War II" (ibid:

144-145).

More recently (2006), Vancouver's gay community, whose club scene centers around

Davie Village (near, yet not part of the Granville Strip), have expressed concern over the city's

rezoning and liquor licensing policies. While particular gay bars within the Davie Village have

been given licenses for later hours of operation (such as *Celebrities* and the *Odyssey*), their late

night status is both partial (not all gay bars in the area are granted a later license) and fragile.

For, as Hubbard (2000), Woolford (2001) and others have noted, gay communities have long

been stigmatized (and contained) as spaces of sexual immorality. For instance, the

stigmatization of those with HIV/AIDS takes on a 'moral configuration' within the urban

landscape. The symbolic separation between "infected' and 'non-infected" often becomes

realized through physical separation, reproducing what Woolford (2001.: 27) calls tainted spaces and healthy spaces, respectively. However, the middle-class character of Vancouver's Davie Village results in a markedly different form of stigmatization than that exercised upon the more impoverished spaces of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside: "…Vancouver's West End is considered to be an enclave for gay men, and it is another area of the city on which HIV/AIDS has taken a serious toll. However, the middle-class nature of this space, the sexual identity of the people with AIDS here, and the nature of their political activism all distinguish the stigmatization of this setting from that which is placed on the Downtown Eastside" (Woolford 2001: 28). Thus, the form of stigmatization of tainted spaces is not uniform.

Xtra West (Vancouver's gay and lesbian biweekly paper) argues that it is discriminatory that the late hours of operation along with extended liquor licenses afforded to bars on the Granville Strip (which intersects with the Davie Village) are not extended to gay spaces; in particular because many in the gay community are reluctant to participate in Granville-based nightlife due to Granville Street's reputation as an unsafe area (Mills 22 Oct., 2006; Mills 1 Oct., 2007). The Granville entertainment district is commonly understood to be a place dominated by heavy drinking, frat-boy ethos and gay-bashing. Vancouver's gay communities' concerns coincide with my argument that governmentality actively colludes (with private enterprise) in producing a protected, regulated and aggressively heterosexual mainstream entertainment district. This follows Collins and Blomley's (2003) observations of the entrepreneurial approach to the development of downtown urban spaces. They state: "[c]orporate and state planners in North American cities have articulated a need to create environments that give security and entertainment priority over interaction, diversity, and politics" (Collins and Blomley 2003: 51).

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Vancouver's current regulation and containment of leisure space affects those who are marginalized within the homogenized area of Granville Street including (but not limited to) women who express concern with their safety due to the strip's reputation for drunken violence and its overt pick-up scene; those considered socially undesirable by security enforcement (by means of race, class or conduct); those who do not conform to or wish not to participate in overt or exaggerated heterosexual behaviours or the performance of a particular form of heterosexuality and thus risk hostility; low income people (the working poor) who cannot afford to frequent the strip's more expensive establishments; the elderly who risk being ostracized in a youth dominated area; the homeless who are being been kicked out of the Granville district justified through the city's remodelling projects; and those youth whose alternative style defines itself against the Granville Strip's aggressively heterosexual, "top-forty" reputation, certainly indie youth. As one respondent in my study stated with regards to the dance clubs on the Granville Strip: "You mean I have to go to hell if I want to dance?" (15-2).

The Mainstream

For the participants interviewed in this study, the Granville Strip represents mainstream mentality. And yet, indie subculture and the monolith of mainstream culture are not polar opposites, they are slippery and fluid concepts that inform and depend upon each other. To Vancouver's hipster youth, what it means to be 'in' and 'of' Vancouver's Granville entertainment district implies something above and beyond the actual physical place; discourse surrounding Granville Street, although drawn from a certain reality also takes on the form of myth making, as 'distinction between symbol and object become confused, collapsed, conflated' (Ruddick 2005: 12). Many interviewees in this study differentiated themselves from the mainstream (culturally, economically, ideologically, geographically and aesthetically) as a means to define themselves, while defining the mainstream as something *other* than East

Vancouver. As Thornton puts it, "whether these 'mainstreams' reflect empirical social groups or not, they exhibit the burlesque exaggerations of an imagined *other*" (1996: 101). But my discussion of the production of the Granville entertainment district suggests a far richer and complex process; indie youth's discussions of the mainstream are not simply imagined exaggerations, they emerge in relation to the concrete spaces of the mainstream. As this chapter reveals, nightlife entertainment, specifically dancing, is geographically located and bodies are responsive to environment and space; as philosopher Henri Lefebvre articulates, "Possibly the most immediate relationship of subjects to space is through their bodies since 'it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived — and produced' (cited in Briginshaw 2001: 4).

Heterosexual aggression, violence and inebriation: Avoiding Vancouver's entertainment district

> I do not feel comfortable at all at any of the [mainstream] clubs, or even on Granville Street at night. It's one of the places where I'm *most afraid* of walking alone at night, even though it's super populated. There are huge, big, drunk men everywhere that are being *very aggressive* and showing *violent sexual tendencies*; that makes me very uncomfortable, *and in groups* which is also what makes me really…. It's the group thing too! (4-3, emphasis added)

The sentiments of this white woman from East Vancouver are echoed in many interviewees' accounts of the Granville Strip. In contrast to positive associations attributed to indie events, respondents expressed a strong dislike for more legitimate, popular or mainstream associated dance venues, particularly those located on the Granville Strip. Most significantly, interviewees expressed considerable fear of not only attending mainstream clubs located on the Granville Strip but even of walking down the public street of Granville. The concept of safety was not part of the interview schedule, but it is a theme that came up repeatedly in interviews. This is interesting as indie events tend to take place in Vancouver's Eastside and the Downtown

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Eastside, more particularly areas commonly characterized as 'unsafe' and 'dangerous' by the popular media, police and health officials. Indie kids tended to characterize the Granville Strip and other mainstream associated areas as unsafe. Countering common representations of Vancouver's nightlife, indie kids described East Vancouver as a comfortable, safe space that fostered community while the Granville Strip was represented as an antithesis to this.

One particular factor that interviewees found frightening was the way men on Granville Street and in Granville Street clubs seem to harass in groups, as the opening quote to this section articulated. One Mexican-Canadian woman who lives downtown stated that she avoids Granville Street because she finds the men offensive:

> On Granville Street I feel like guys are, I've been really offended. Like I've actually had to tell them to go to hell, because they'll say things. I don't feel threatened, it's not like they would do anything but it's just insulting sometimes the things that they'll tell you when you just happen to be walking by there (18-4).

Although she states that she does not feel threatened, she feels insulted and harassed. Another interviewee, a black woman from East Vancouver, associates mainstream, Granville Street clubs with aggressive group behaviour. Here she recalls a particularly disturbing incident:

> I don't have tons of experience in the mainstream bars. I went to a mainstream bar one time called *The Cellar*. It's on Granville Street, you go downstairs. And I went there with some people I was working with on a movie and I'd never been there before, it's like that whole Granville Street Strip, and I was appalled by what it actually was like. We just wanted to go there and dance. *But we were dancing and there was actually this semi-circle of dudes around all of the girls, leering and then trying to get in and dance on you and I don't know if it's normal in every club like that or just that club or whatever. I was appalled that that was fine, that that was allowed. I was freaked out by a guy and pushed him back and he acted like I was overreacting! So there was like five of them, it was really, really, really, freaky..... It was really scary* (10-3,4, emphasis added).

In the above quote, the respondent felt physically threatened and expressed surprise that such aggressive behaviour was normalised. Another white woman from East Vancouver discussed

why she chooses to frequent indie venues such as *Pat's Pub* located on East Hastings Street in the DTES, rather than more mainstream places such as those located on the Granville Strip. She noted that her decision was based on her status as a woman:

> I try to steer clear from places that I would feel uncomfortable on the basis of being a woman.
>
> *What would those kinds of places be?*
>
> Where for example, there are a lot of guys who might be really pumped up, you know, are whistling and cackling at girls.
>
> *So you feel more comfortable somewhere like Pat's?*
>
> Yeah, maybe, just about that aspect (19-4).

Thus, for her (and for many other women interviewed) one particular motivation for frequenting indie spaces over mainstream venues is to avoid sexual harassment. Another young white woman expressed that she does not feel safe or comfortable in mainstream clubs and avoids the aggressive 'macho' behaviour she associates them with:

> I don't really know anyone that goes to bars like the *Roxy* and all the Granville [Street] ones…. it gets a little bit too wild and I find in a lot of them *I don't really feel very safe in them or very comfortable. You just hear about people getting into a lot of fights outside. I think people who go to them have a lot of bravado and machismo going on and it's not necessarily the most comfortable environment for people.* For people like me anyway, who aren't really into kind of dressing like that and aren't young and aren't into dancing to that kind of music and stuff (17-1,2, emphasis added).

Participants characterized the Granville Strip as unsafe not only for women, but also for some men. One white man who lives and works in East Vancouver described male behaviour on Granville Street as both aggressive and frightening:

> Granville Street. Yeah well that strip has turned into a scary place where I don't even set foot on.
>
> *Why do you think it's scary?*

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Well let me tell you about the time when I was walking down the street one night drunk with friends. The car was ten feet away. Some guy at one of the bars starts yelling at me wanting to pick fights. They were all there just to pick fights, wanting to pick a fight with me. And I just said 'steroids make your balls shrink'. Next thing you know the cops have me shoved against the wall in hand cuffs and throw me into a paddy wagon even though the car was ten feet away and I had to spend the night in the drunk tank. *So let me tell you about walking down Granville Street, it's not safe. It's not safe. It's just not a safe region for people. It draws a very violent crowd. I feel safer here in East Van. I work down here, I pour beer at a bar down here. I feel safer down here* (5-5, emphasis added).

Similar to the women respondents, this man also feels much safer in East Vancouver, not because he fears sexual harassment on the Granville Strip but because he fears male group aggression, police hostility and particular manifestations of masculinity that he seeks to avoid. He contrasts his feelings of alienation within the space of the Granville Strip to the sense of familiarity and comfort he experiences in East Vancouver. Among interviewees, gay-bashing, drunken harassment and cat-calling were common characteristics attributed to those who frequent the Granville area (both inside and outside the clubs).

Many of the above interviewees relay their own dangerous nightclub experiences in relation to mainstream environments. This, then, problematises Thornton's dismissal of the mainstream as primarily an imaginary entity. Comparable to accounts offered by the present interviewees, Maria Pini (2001) has also noted similar responses to the mainstream in her study of women's experiences of rave club cultures in London, England. Pini's interviewee's relay accounts of predatory males and their own discomfort with certain expressions of masculinity evidenced in places they associated with the mainstream. Thus many of her interviewees experienced the mainstream as a signifier of sexually repressive situations (ibid.: 115-116).

Hooking up

If you're female, you'll get hit on; if you're male, someone will want to fight you. No matter: in both cases the offender will be too plastered to stand erect.

- Rebecca Philps on the *Roxy* nightclub, Granville St. *Vancouver Magazine* (2007: 1)

While interviewees found the Granville Strip unsafe, many interviewees, not surprisingly, also found that the pick-up scene was much more pronounced in mainstream venues compared to indie events. One white woman described the pick-up scene as more aggressive in mainstream clubs, stating:

> I would say [the mainstream pick-up scene] is more amplified. I wouldn't say it's different, I would say it's more obvious.... At a [more mainstream] club that I go to, this happens often, where I make clear body language that I'm not interested in dancing with somebody, very clear, very clear. Like I turn my back on them when they start coming up to me, I don't make eye contact, I'm looking at the ground, sometimes I even glare at them, honestly. And it tends to take [them] a while to notice. Like when I was going to *Celebrities* on Davie [Street] and it was really packed and there was huge amounts of people there, almost every time that I went I had to get into a shoving match and physically push people off of me and tell them to fuck off right.
>
> *Because they were hitting on you or because it was so crowded?*
>
> Yeah touching me, hitting on me and like grabbing, like in my face.
>
> *Were a lot of straight people there [Celebrities is a gay club that has straight nights]?*
>
> Oh yeah, definitely. And not just straight, not just not-queer, but like straight in a different way than just not-queer.
>
> *How so?*
>
> I don't want to be judgmental.... Ok there's a lot of what we used to call SOBS, *straight off campus*; we made it up. And it's, like honestly size is, like beefy guys, like the guys tend to be actually physically bigger wearing more base-ball caps, like a lot of brand names, like clearly. I guess also part of what it is, I'm just realizing, they wouldn't like me at all, at all. But a lot more, also, *moneyed* people, you know (4-4, emphasis added).

Her comments, "straight in a different way than just not queer" and "moneyed people," suggest that there exist multiple expressions of heterosexuality, which intersect with different subject locations, such as class. She characterizes the club's 'straight' clientele as wealthy, more college affiliated, and even alludes to a difference in male body types. Another woman characterized the downtown Granville area as a pick-up scene, something she considers to be a negative attribute:

Oh, I don't go anywhere on Granville. It's such a different scene. Even walking on Granville on the weekends annoys me because, I don't know, I can't relate to that scene. People seem to just go out to hook-up with other people and bring them home or I don't know what their deal is but they just get so loud and I just can't, I don't like it at all. And the music's bad at most places. I don't like top-forty and all that (18-3).

Again characterizing the Granville Strip as aggressive and also as a destination for suburban youth to 'pick-up,' this white man stated:

The whole Granville Street Strip is not something I particularly enjoy. Like just, yeah, the whole singles bar aspect of it, the whole suburban 20 [year old] somethings who come out to get really wasted and start fights (13-1).

Another white woman compared Vancouver's club scene to house parties, finding the former to be more overtly associated with sexual interaction:

I think the club scene is more, I don't know if it's fundamentally different but maybe the style is a little different. The club scene is more like you're dressing up and that's part of the reason your going out maybe is to meet some people. And in a sense it's harder to talk to people in the club scene because, I don't know, at parties there is some kind of premise which often isn't true, but there's a premise that you have some kind of link, like you must know someone who is in your circle, like *Friendster* [a social networking website] or something. You must have a common contact for you to be at a party. Whereas at a club you're almost shooting in the dark a little bit, you're really like, 'hi what's your name.' So I think it's more of an artificial thing. But at the same time if you go to a club people are more conscious of in their head they might go out and pick up, there's more anonymity perhaps than the party scene (8-6,7).

Respondents characterize club scenes as dominated by a 'pick-up' ethos while positioning alternative dance spaces as offering some reprieve from aggressive heterosexual attentions. This reprieve, in turn, offers some respondents a sense of freedom of expression while dancing, in respect that their movement-based displays of sexuality are less likely at indie events to be interpreted as a sign of sexual availability or advancement (which is further explored in Chapter Six). Noticeably, not only does the above respondent find the reasons for going out dancing to

be different between indie events and more mainstream events, he marks difference through clothing styles.

A number of researchers looking at rave dance have also noted that some unconventional dance spaces do offer alternatives to conventional male, heterogeneous space (see Henderson 1993; Pini 2001). Understanding the role that dancing plays within the realm of identity leads to questions of how experiences of dancing diverge based on various axes of difference. For instance, Sheila Henderson's (1993) study of rave culture highlights women's subjective experiences and reveals that one of the main features that drew young women to attend early British raves was not only the pleasure of dancing but also the sexually egalitarian environment, which was expressed as markedly different from the 'cattle market' practices evident in alcohol-based clubs. Similar to Henderson's discussion of rave culture, indie dance parties also tend to provide an alternative space to the 'cattle-market' mentality associated with more mainstream clubs. Many of the dance participants interviewed in this study expressed the view that they felt more safe and comfortable at indie events rather than more mainstream venues (centered around Vancouver's Granville Strip). Mainly, interviewees felt that indie events were more inclusive in terms of approaches to gender and sexuality and that the scene did not cater to more normative gender role expectations (such as the 'built' male body-type evidenced at more mainstream clubs).

Ascribing to dominant codified gender norms through appearance

Some respondents argued that the difference in gender dynamics between indie and more mainstream events was that mainstream patrons appear more heterosexually hyper feminine/masculine than indie patrons in their dress and also demeanour. While agreeing that gender differences appear more exaggerated in mainstream clubs, this interviewee, did not,

however, believe that such a visual difference necessarily extends to behaviour or attitude. She stated:

> Visually there's more hyper females in mainstream clubs but I don't know if that's, if internally they're like that. Just because they look like that, if I walk up and talk to them they might not be like that. [By visually I mean] just their appearance. How they [mainstream patrons] present themselves, I would consider it to be hyper-feminine sometimes, more Barbie doll style. Not to say that they all look like Barbies. But they often have very long hair, they'll be wearing quite a lot of make-up, they'll be wearing very feminine clothes that show off their physical attributes like their boobs and their bum, they're waist and hips and stuff. But that doesn't mean that the women there are hyper feminine internally when you talk to them, probably, I bet anything they're probably the same [as indie kids], 50/50 split. I don't think that it's any different. I just think that they visually look different (2-4).

Unlike the woman above, another woman draws the link from clothing and visual appearance to physical behaviour, and the performance of gendered roles, stating:

> You go to other clubs [non-alternative places] and the girls are all dressed up and they're doing their little body wiggle or whatever. *You know there's definitely these very specific gender roles.* You know, like the big guys, with the baseball cap whose loud with his beers yelling, being all loud and having possession over his woman whose always wearing tight revealing clothes or hairspray (1-5, emphasis added).

One man linked clothing associated with the mainstream to the professional class (for men), and as more sexualized (for women), thus re-inscribing gender roles through his critique:

> I would say, if you go to the Granville Street district circuit, in Vancouver there's this entertainment district of Granville Street, you will see, the guys will wear jeans or slacks and they will almost always be wearing collar shirts, kind of hip collared shirts but it's, you know, that kind of try to dress up a little, trying to look smart, *trying to look downtown urban, like you've got a professional good paying job and this is your cut loose for the weekend. And the girls will show a lot of skin*, like they're going to wear like, high-heeled shoes or pumps with no socks, and they're going to wear like short skirts and tank tops and low cut tops and they'll be wearing clothes where they're freezing but they're trying to show the skin. *So it just has more of that feel where people are trying to show off right, and get laid and look successful and look conventionally attractive.* Like look the way that is considered attractive when you look at magazines and movie stars and T.V. stars (6-5,6).

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Articulations of clothing and difference range from markers of gender difference (clothing which emphasizes conventional feminine and masculine representations of gender) to expressions of economic standing. Similar to the link made above, with specific clothing styles attributed to the professional class, the following quote links clothing style to *representations* of class-based aesthetics. Describing her preference for indie events, this interviewee attributed her preference to a difference in clothing style. She indicates that the difference of clothing styles between indie and more mainstream dress is that the former is more casual and affordable, while the latter is more expensive. The respondent describes the kind of clothing styles she believes dominates mainstream clubs:

> I don't want to say that I haven't dressed like scantily clad before because, oh God, guilty as charged and then some, but like you know [mainstream styles are] more typically trendy, like Robson Street [Vancouver's high end clothing retail area] kind of dressing. Where we [indie kids] are happy to go out, like, you might put on a skirt now and again but you know the most of us just wear a t-shirt and jeans kind of thing. We're not really into the back-less tops and I guess, club wear. More casual, just kind of more funky, second hand stuff, more like vintage or retro looking things. Whereas I think a lot of people, I mean, assuming, wear really clubby, ruffle skirts and like backless tank tops. It's not anything I'd want to wear (17-1,2).

The former statement reveals the ways in which indie style is defined in opposition to the dominant norm associated with the mainstream. Again dependant upon opposition, interviewees repeatedly characterized the Granville Strip, which they equated with mainstream clubs, as homogenous (unlike their own self-described eclectic style), as the following statement indicates:

> I think it's the homogeneity of that whole strip. You know I mean if they were smart they would just have a wristband that let you in and out of all the clubs because that's basically what it is. It's all the same music, it's all the same people and it's a little too much of like, I mean I guess it's just a different version of the peacock strut. Like everybody's just there to show off their new, like shinny button up shirts and I just think too it's people who don't go out a lot so they....or I don't know how to describe it but it's those people who are like puking on the sidewalk at 11 o'clock and it's just so completely not my scene. And also the huge, huge clubs, it's just a huge turn off. I don't know, I think mainly

because it's like. I mean it's a bit different if you're somewhere like in Europe they've got the huge clubs but they're playing good music. So the difference would be here they're huge clubs and they might as well have the radio on.[19] That's just bad, really bad. And I'm not a fan of popular music (16-3).

The above woman attributes the homogeneity of Vancouver's mainstream clubs to their large capacity, while also contrasting them to international dance clubs. In fact, the Granville Strip does host several club crawls. These are usually organized through an affiliation such as a university group; participants pay one price to attend and are transported together in a bus to multiple downtown clubs. Similarly, the following woman argues that Vancouver's mainstream clubs are so homogenous, so formulaic, that they could hypothetically be found 'any where in North America':

> All, or most of the bars on Granville Street are mainstream… the music is really top-forty, And, why do I think that? Because I think that that sort of scene, you could take that and stick it in any city in North America and it would carbon copy itself. It would be the same everywhere and I think that more of the alternative scenes, not just the indie scene, but like Goth scene and stuff like that, aren't everywhere. Those really depend on where you are (2-3).

Both comments suggest a type of 'fast food' dancing, a globalization of nightlife entertainment.

Another white man characterized Vancouver's nightlife by polarizing the different areas of entertainment, stating that Granville Street is a convenient locale for the more conventional crowd to dance:

> I'd say there's a couple different areas. The Granville Strip is like the dance club [area], like every city has that area…. [it's] for the suburbanites or for the people that just moved to Vancouver because it's there, everybody knows about it, it's not hidden, everybody knows Granville Street is the place to go if you want to go to a dance club. And it's convenient because of that; [because] it's there and there's always something happening. So if you work in an industry where you don't get Friday and Saturday nights off there'll be something on a Monday or a Tuesday on Granville guaranteed, so that's kind of convenient. So that's the kind of nightlife, the stereotypical nightlife that's kind of

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[19] In fact, some clubs do broadcast to the radio.

universal.... I guess Gastown and East Van kind of have, they're trying to do something different which is cool (14-5).

The above quote again represents the Granville Strip as a homogenous and homogenizing space that appeals, more directly to tourists and people from the suburbs, a common assumption. I would argue that some of these comments on the entertainment district's homogeneity are not, however, unfounded, and the heterosexuality described may be due to the city's current efforts to both regulate and contain its entertainment space to one area while attempting to promote it as a tourist attraction for 'civilized pleasures' (Osborn and Rose 1999). The remodelling of Vancouver's nightlife is something the following woman alludes to:

> ...The club scene is more, I don't know, *I think in Vancouver the way that all the bars have basically been pushed out with the exception on the ones on the Granville Strip* which are like mainstream, glossy bars which is just not really my scene. I mean I rarely go in them [mainstream bars] (8-2, emphasis added).

Indie kids tend to prefer dancing in the Eastside of Vancouver rather than the Granville Strip and this avoidance extends for many to the West Side of Vancouver. Their statements reveal various assumptions about the mainstream and how the mainstream materializes spatially within Vancouver. Interviewees spatially, ideologically, and economically as well as through sexualized and gendered stereotypes, polarize mainstream venues associated with the Granville Strip from East Vancouver indie events. Unlike indie events, which consist specifically of a small group of mainly artists and musicians, mainstream venues are described as places that cater to the larger swell of tourists, college students, suburbanites, heterosexual predatory males, and the professional classes. Through such differentiation, identities are constructed and difference is (perhaps superficially) maintained.

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Community and Belonging

Indicating that they were unable to relate to the more mainstream bars in Vancouver, respondents expressed a desire for community, one that they found was offered by indie-based events and lacking on the Granville Strip. One young white man commented:

> I've never been to any of the clubs on the Granville Strip. I don't think it necessarily elicits a crowd that I can relate to (21-1).

Another man equated spatial difference with a conservative 'world view,' thus grounding difference on an ideological level:

> Well I've also lived in Toronto so I don't think it's specific to Vancouver but especially in Vancouver, the nightclub scene here caters towards, for lack of a better term again, I don't like this term, just mainstream, mainstream people, people who like top-forty music, people who dress in a way that is kind of more just conservative *and I think just their world view and their political view just tends to be more mainstream.* And that's just, there are obviously a lot of people in the world who don't fit that mould. So in this city, in Vancouver, the nightclub scene just doesn't cut it for any of my friends and the broad circle of people that I know through friends of friends of friends (6-3 emphasis added).

He sees herself and her friends as unable to conform to what she sees as a conservative nightclub mould. The following young white woman negatively represents the Granville Strip as a space dominated by excessive intoxication and as an environment that is not conducive to the sense of belonging offered by indie events, commenting:

> I'm not really interested in the whole Granville Street scene, like tight shirts and short skirts and stuff. That's not really my thing. So I guess I like to go to a place where there are people I can actually talk to. Which isn't that I can't talk to those types of people but it's just like, the people that just seem to have their barriers down and are not trying to impress people, although in every scene you have that right? But you know, just somewhere where I can actually talk to people and joke around and maybe see my friends. And having good music and dancing is always good too. If there's people to talk to and it's got to have something other than getting drunk because hanging around getting drunk isn't very fun to me. There has to be some other activity going on. So be it dancing or looking at art or pretending to look at art or, I don't know, hanging around. *But just not getting drunk and falling down, or what ever* (9-1, emphasis added).

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As is represented in the above quote, many interviewees found that more mainstream dance clubs did not offer the same sense of community that they found at indie-based events on the Eastside of Vancouver. Respondents reveal a strong level of comfort with indie dance parties, as this following comment details:

> I think people on the Eastside that are going out are not younger but more, more there for maybe the music or the scene, it's maybe a social thing [rather] than a pick-up kind of thing. Its' more part of a *community* somehow than on the Granville Strip (21-2).

Significantly, throughout this discussion of the mainstream, the young woman made distinct repetitive motions of pushing away with both her body and her hands, as if to separate or block herself from any association with the Granville Strip. Her discomfort with the Granville Strip is so potent that it is physically embodied in her body language. Another white woman articulated this feeling of community that the indie scene provided her with:

> Well I think there's something to be said about going to a place and feeling like *there's a sense of belonging* there. You know you go to a place when you know a lot of people and *you feel comfortable* and you're together with them and you have an opportunity to say hi to a lot of people you know. *Sort of like a sense of community in a way*. But yeah that sense of belonging. When different people that you don't know start going to a place and it gets really crowded and there's not that sense of ownership anymore. There's something really attractive about feeling like you are a part of something even if it's not your club or it's not, you might not know who the owner is or who the DJs are or anything like that but you have that sense of belonging (1-1).

The mainstream, as it exists in the interviewees' imaginary, is depicted as catering to mostly white, wealthier patrons. This is interesting, as mainstream is often revealed as representative of working-class or 'low-brow' tastes (Bourdieu 1985). In the case of indie youth, their dismissal of capitalist entrepreneurship and the corporate-driven status quo are also directed at the mainstream. The mainstream is also characterized as being physicalized and embodied through popularized stereotypically gendered body types (i.e. men aspiring to appear 'pumped,' women ascribing to the 'Barbie' figure) and is considered more hyper sexual in terms

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of action, intent and dress (or lack of dress). Gender differences are considered to be more polarized. This follows George Rigako's (2004) study of nightclubs in Halifax, where he defines their setting as hyper-masculine and feminine as well as deeply gendered. Of course these are generalizations and muscular men may also be found at an indie club, for instance (although the *display* of hyper masculinity is most often down-played). The mainstream, and the Granville Strip as a concrete spatial realization of such an idea, is constructed as a homogenized conservative monolith by interviewees. And it is that monolith against which indie kids define themselves.

(Hetero)Sexuality and alternative spaces

Interviewee's more negative experiences expressed in their articulations of the mainstream and the clubs that litter the Granville Strip are contrasted here with their more positive experiences of sexuality and gender at indie clubs. The majority of participants interviewed felt that indie events were considerably more open to various sexualities, in a way that was violently discouraged in the many dance clubs on the Granville Strip. When asked whether they found the indie scene open to various sexualities many interviewees believed that this question was not an issue:

> That is, I find, not an issue. I mean I've never seen any problems with that what so ever. I think this city is really supportive of that, at least where I've been (23-4).

> Oh yeah. I would say so. Yeah there's lots of transgendered, young people there [at indie events], and just like lots of straight out gay people. It appears pretty open (9-5).

> Oh yeah, for sure (20-3).

> Yeah, I'd say it tends to be (19-4).

However, there was no consensus, per se, as to what determined an openness to expressions of diverse sexualities within the scene. For example, one white man found the scene to be 'liberal,' in that he had not seen any instances of homophobia:

> I haven't seen any homophobia or anything in the scene that I sort of exist in. I haven't seen anyone hassled or anything like that. I think people are generally pretty liberal, the people that I associate with (13-4).

However an apparent lack of homophobia does not always equate an openness to diverse forms of sexuality. One white woman had less of a 'non-issue' approach, and considered the scene to be a safe place for gay and bisexual youth:

> I think it's open to different kinds of sexualities, unlike some things I don't think it's promoting homosexuality as a trend but I think it definitely, it integrates it. It's just part of the eclectic, *it's like the fashion's eclectic, so is the sexuality* and so is what you listen to and it's a comfortable scene to be in if you happen to be gay or bisexual (3-5, emphasis added).

The constant links to fashion, such as the reference above, reveal the contradiction of the anti-capitalist ideology the indie scene espouses; while the scene is also consumption based, it can at the same time be critical of others' consumption choices. In other words, though indie participants are style conscious and may be seen wearing clothing from a range of local designers, they tend to negatively connect mainstream dance clubs with the fashion of chain clothing lines.

The majority of interviewees found that the indie dance scene was particularly open to various sexualities in comparison to other dance scenes. One Chilean-Canadian woman noted:

> Well. I think there's more transgendered sort of sexuality happening in the indie scene probably than there is in mainstream scenes.
>
> *Why do you think that?*
>
> Because, well if you just look at the word 'alternative' which is sort of independent, alternative, that's a life style of alternative. So that's their lifestyle too or whoever it is. So

I think people that identify with having alternative or different lifestyles would be more inclined to go to a place that is considered alternative by other people who are there too because you would automatically think that you would be accepted there. More than you would be at whatever that dance place is that used to be the movie theatre on Granville [*The Caprice*] (2-7).

One black woman also found that, compared to other scenes, the indie scene is fairly diverse in terms of sexuality:

Yeah, I think so. Way more so than what I assume other sort of scenes to be like (10-4).

Likewise, another white man noted that the indie scene was 'gay friendly,' but then commented that people are not necessarily openly gay:

Sure. Yeah I would think so as well. Like *Celebrities* on Davie [Street], which has traditionally been a gay bar, but they have nights like straight friendly nights, it's a mixture of gay people and straight people. But it's [the scene's] not usually, like some people broadcast it more than others as well, their sexualities, it's more of a private thing (11-4).

Whether or not the indie scene is open to transsexual, bisexual or transgendered people is not considered by the respondent. This is perhaps because he thinks of the venue *Celebrities* as primarily a 'gay dance club,' while the indie scene's focus is on artists and alternative youth. The following white man argues that indie dance venues are more open to homosexuality than indie rock shows and more mainstream dance clubs. Although he does not witness overt homophobia, he finds that all places are nevertheless, fairly uptight in terms of sexuality:

Let me put it this way. Karaoke, it's a mix. My night was a nice mix. I was really happy that there was a lot of people of various mixes, various ethnicities and various sexual orientations going. I was like, ahhh good. You know, I was like, ahhh ga. Indie rock shows in general, I will talk mostly independent music shows in general, live music independent shows generally are, a lot of it is very indie rock based. Indie rock comes from a very puritanical perspective. Very uptight, very sexually uptight. I will say this, I would say yeah, I would say a lot of it is really uptight, sexually uptight, a lot of repression. It is! It's uptight. It's the cardigan set and it's uptight.

Ok what about when you go out dancing?

Less so.

More open?

Yes, definitely, definitely. And some of the music is, the boundaries aren't as tight as they used to be either. And art openings are a little, I don't know.... I think it's uptight....I don't really see any homophobia. Because homophobia's not cool. I think some people are kind of homophobic but they'll kinda bite their tongue. But I also find that now a lot of people, a lot of younger people are getting less and less homophobic with the nightclub scene. It's less homophobic. I'm shocked when I encounter homophobia. But I will encounter it usually at those shitty nightclubs I try to avoid.

Such as?

Like *Stone Temple*, anything on Granville, anything on the downtown. All those places are pretty homophobic. I get it at my bar where I work at *The Dodson*. I've noticed some of those guys are totally homophobic. And I'll say 'hey', I love saying it, it's so cliché, 'some of my best friends are gay.' I don't say it very seriously (5-7).

The above quote highlights one primary factor, that interviewees prefer indie dance parties over more mainstream venues, or 'shitty nightclubs' that they try to 'avoid.'

One white man acknowledged that compared to mainstream clubs, indie events are not as heterosexist. Nevertheless, he also stated that indie events remain predominantly heterosexual:

Um, that's a tough one. I think like everything in our society, it's still predominantly heterosexual and I'm sure when people go out...the assumption is that most people are going to be straight rather than gay. I don't know for sure but I'm pretty certain that people can be openly gay at the type of house parties and art openings, [and] the Andrew, Andrew, Andrew/My Gay Husband parties (which are kind of like a one night stand alternative to nightclubs when you do pay money), and be openly gay. [Where as] I think [with] most of the clubs on the Granville Strip, a gay holding hands in there, there's a good chance someone's going to pick a fight with you (6-7, brackets in original e-mail).

The above respondent's observations of queer friendly environments are affirmed by another white woman describing her favorite place to dance. When asked why she liked one indie venue in particular, she explained that the venue was affordable (it had a sliding scale), and that it was queer positive, yet not exclusively:

It's a good crowd, it's usually a 20-35 crowd, other artists, and it's a good sort of interesting space too because they're very queer positive ... it's not like "we don't want men," there's a lot of women there, lesbians, but it's not trying to exclude anyone. They're very open arms and they want a mixed space that everybody is happy in.

What does it look like inside?

Dumpy but they tied to fix it up. It's got a fresh coat of paint on the walls but it's a basement so....medium size, dark. Dark lighting's very good for dancing.

Is there a coat check or any kind of regulatory thing?

No, no. [laughter] (19-4-5).

In particular, interviewees express that alternative (indie) venues *do* allow a space for more diverse expressions of sexuality, regardless of whether or not such a space is achieved. Perhaps some of these contradictions stem from the fact that though indie-based parties may be predominantly 'straight spaces,' they also allow for more fluid expressions of heterosexuality than the Granville Strip. Not surprisingly, interviewees' discussions of sexuality tend to depend upon a binary comparison of heterosexuality with homosexuality, straight versus queer, rather than a consideration of the complexity of how heterosexual spaces are variously sexed (as Hubbard (2000) has articulated).

> Although many interviewees claim that the scene is diverse and open to various sexualities and that sexuality is not a defining factor in their community, interestingly, everyone that I interviewed identified herself/himself as heterosexual. Although my interview sample is not representative of the scene as a whole, it does provide an idea of some of the sex-based dynamics. While many of those interviewed claimed that they are themselves, as is the scene in general, open to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual people, and though there is a large amount of same-sex dancing that takes place, the scene appears to be a heterosexual space that is open to diversity. Avant-garde art communities have been known to play with representations of sexuality and this

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context informs how deviations from the norm are perceived. For instance, cross dressing (see Fig. 3-1) within the particular space of the indie scene and for a specific performance does not have the same impact as cross dressing in a more conservative setting or on-going manner. The scene appears to offer a safe space to play with some heterosexual norms but does not necessarily work to actively transform these conventions.

Figure 3-1. East Pender Art-Electro Party
Photo thanks to the *Party Army*

As well, in terms of gender norms, there is a small disjunction between what interviewees expressed, and what I observed. Although gendered distinctions are downplayed at indie events, indie women and men are not devoid of sexualized dress. However, this is within a space that many women interviewees have expressed a high level of comfort and a distancing from sexist attitudes or predatory male behaviours, thus indie events offer some a safe environment for sexualized performances of self. Moreover, women at indie dance parties in general appear

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much less sexualized than women's appearance evidenced at bars on the Granville Strip, where there is more of an emphasis on conventional forms of beauty or compliance with social notions of hegemonic femininity. A survey of nightlife advertisements, drawing from flyers, radio spots and newspaper/web adverts, support this distinction. Compare adverts for dance nights on the Granville Strip (Figures 3-2 and 3-3) to an advert for an indie dance night (Figure 3-4). The two adverts for Granville Strip nightclubs, *Tonic* (2007) and *Stone Temple* (2007), while different, are uniform in the type of imagery they use. Both feature a sexy young white woman in bikini bottoms who eyes the viewer while arching her bottom. This is markedly different from Vancouver indie event flyers which most often feature abstracted drawings rather than photographs and emphasize design rather than people. An advert for an indie night at the *Columbia* on Valentine's Day (2006) consists of an abstracted painting of two people making the shape of a heart as their two bodies reach together with their arms and legs. No gender is identifiable, while they appear quite similar.

Figure 3-2. *Stone Temple Nightclub*: Advert. Granville Street, Vancouver, 2007.

Figure 3-3. *Tonic Nightclub*: Advert. Granville Street, Vancouver, 2007.
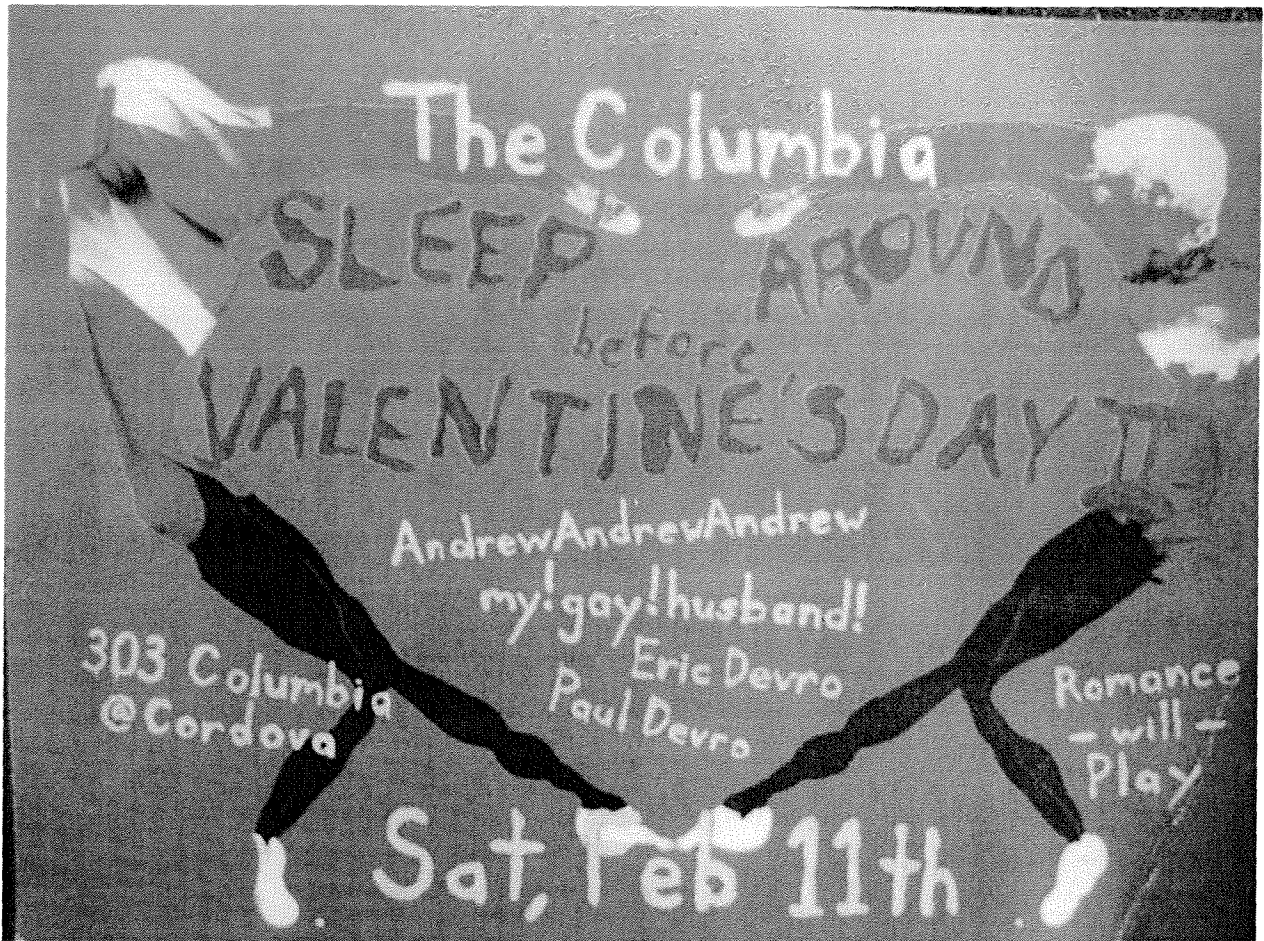
Figure 3-4. *The Columbia.* **Flyer for indie dance night, Vancouver, 2006.**

Similarly, men within the indie scene again do not seem to subscribe to more hyper masculine

and well-groomed conventions seen in the mainstream bars on the Granville Strip. Nor are

fights or overt sexually predatory behaviour common at indie events. However, men within the

indie community tend to dominate the scene financially in their capacity as DJs, promoters, and

as successful artists, thus reinforcing power-based gendered distinctions. Throughout 2006, a

few young men possessed a monopoly in terms of the organization, promotion, and D.J.ing of

the majority of dance events.[20] Their names hold status and their events are sought after, as well

as critiqued.[21]

Amidst discussions of heterosexual gender norms within the indie community, some

women noted that although sexualized representations of women evidenced in visuals,

backdrops and flyers occurred to a much lesser degree than in adverts for more mainstream

clubs, such depictions continued to exist to some extent at indie events. One dance venue, *The

Columbia*, contains a television positioned above the bar, on which it is not uncommon to

display videos of a variety of bikini-clad women advertised as 'only a telephone call away.' In

some ways it seems that the image is meant to be 'ironic,' gesturing towards the tastes of the

older (male) working-class clientele that used to frequent the bar, and still do so on different

nights. A young, white woman from East Vancouver critiques this type of 'ironic' use of

gendered visuals employed by various venues:

> I don't like the visuals there at all. Because they're just stupid harlequin-y type images
> and often the women represented are in corsets there and I really don't like it. I don't find
> it hot."
>
> *Is it supposed to be sort of camp?*
>
> Well it's the new 'we're not allowed to think images of sex aren't ok now.' And
> especially in this manipulated corseted way, it's like, I look at it as, and my girlfriends and
> I have talked about this, about when we're out there's like porn being put up as visuals
> and, that's less extreme [the harlequin images] but still it doesn't matter, we're not
> allowed to be uncomfortable with it.... I think it's a reaction [to feminism] and I find it
> really frustrating because there's no discourse that goes along with it at all, and it's
> supposed to be reclaimed but it's the same shit. So that's what I think (4-7).

She furthers her commentary by providing a more specific example of the use of

pornography as a background visual. What the interviewee finds particularly disturbing is that

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[20] This warrants further investigation. To what extent men profit in terms of monetary capital remains unknown as the study did not focus on their role.

[21] The web blog by Little Dirty Looks (2006) provides one such critique.

there is no discourse surrounding the use of pornographic visuals (which, although present, are not common within the scene). Without discussion, she perceptively argues, the images register as violent sexist and racist examples that appear to serve as a backlash against feminism rather than as 'ironic' cultural commentary:

> I was at a *Blim* party where there was porn on the walls and a lot of us were uncomfortable and it wasn't even transgressive, it was disgusting. And the weird thing about it was that it was an Asian woman and a white guy [....]Like it wasn't transgressive, it was totally racist, sexist. Anyway....It feels like there's this backlash. The third wave of feminism is supposed to be women owning their objectivity and that's what it is. It's like, we're still sexual objects but now we 'choose' to be so that's the difference. And I just am sad that there isn't more discourse because even though I'm more comfortable with less pornography, I understand that the swing that happened where it's all bad isn't a good way to go. But swinging the other way, saying it's all good and then I'm not allowed to, like there's no discourse even around it. I think it needs to be somewhere in the middle, you know (4-9).

That she herself, as a participant of indie dance parties, reflects upon and critiques oppressive imagery reveals an element of awareness and resistance present within the scene. The above response further demonstrates one of the ways in which some women make sense of and actively negotiate male dominated dance cultures. The respondent challenges rather than being complicit with the more sexist permutations, while utilizing the space to accommodate to her own (dancing) pleasures. The importance of this contradiction is articulated in Richard Dyer's (2002) study of disco, in which he points out that while disco is a commodity that may cater to capitalist modes of cultural production, the way participants (in this case gay men) 'take up', make use and/or make sense of disco does not necessarily correspond to how it is intended (Pini (2001: 57) drawing from Dyer also makes this point). Despite the critiques from within the indie scene, participants continue to find a sense of community, safety and also some digression from dominant sex and gender-roles within their dance activities that is not present in their responses to mainstream dance clubs.

Anecdotes of Vancouver's more affluent nightclubs situated on and around the Granville Strip suggest that working-class and ethnically diverse venues located in East Vancouver may offer a 'safer, less hostile environment' for indie youth to dance and socialize, particularly for women who seek to avoid the more aggressively heteronormative culture of the Granville Strip. Ross and Greenwell (2005: 146) speak to this phenomenon in relation to Black striptease women working in the East End in the early 20th century. Creatively claiming (Eastside public, private and sometimes neglected) city spaces, indie youth carve for themselves a "social and economic space that [is] unavailable in other parts of the city" (Ross & Greenwell 2005:144). They choose to avoid the violence that is naturalized as part of the Granville Strip's racialized, gendered consumer space. Nightlife crowds within the city of Vancouver are disciplined in a multitude of ways. Indie youth, affected by the city zoning and ordinances which dictate where individuals are and are not encouraged or allowed to dance, move, gather, linger, etc., resist the scopic surveillance of big-business public/private entertainment spaces.

While the city's cultural policy stresses regulation and protection of a specific entertainment district and cultural precinct, the indie dance scene is, at least in part, about Eastside mobility: about finding alternate spaces, creating new spaces and reinvigorating old places to dance. By seeking dance spaces outside of those designated by the city, many of these youth also attempt to resist the regime of sexed, gendered and class-based norms that interviewees feel are imposed within the mainstream of the entertainment district. Pini, drawing on Andrew Ross to discuss alternative dance spaces, suggests that the social dance floor which has "long provided a 'safe haven' for socially marginalized groups" has "become precisely such a place for women who now feel marginalized by traditional fictions of femininity..." (2001: 101). This seems congruent with the responses of many women interviewed for this study as

well. However, indie youths' rejection of what they consider to be the mainstream is both complex and often contradictory. While at one level indie youth participate in a somewhat oversimplified cartography of reversed elitism, they are reacting (albeit problematically) to a city form and a vision of commodified city life that they must locate in order to reject. The actively produced neoliberal city is not simply illusory, as interviewees' discussions of the Granville entertainment district disclose. The oppositional positioning of indie youth is thus one local response to aggressive heterosexuality, the dominance of corporate space and local government's attempts to both clean up the urban centre and contain the entertainment district within one primary location.

This chapter remarks upon indie youth's rejection of mainstream culture while simultaneously remaining dependant upon it in order to locate their oppositional positioning. But the dependence is mutual; dominant culture also relies on subcultures. The next chapter, "Gentrification and Playful Resistance," explores this, interrogating the ways urban development, in tandem with the regulation of youth pleasure practices, work to reconstitute spaces into sites for consumption while co-opting the counter-culture allure of alternative (punk and indie) youth. Taken together, these two chapters express the tensions and contradictions of indie youth's resistance and interconnection to dominant culture, as they remain intimately entangled within relations of power.

Fieldnote Excerpt Feb. 3, 2006, S.T.R.E.E.T.S (Hastings)

I attended the punk/metal S.T.R.E.E.T.S, Lady Hawk and Javelin Reign show last night at 156 Hastings (deemed the deathtrap by one of my interviewees due to the nature of the makeshift, warehouse space). The headliner, S.T.R.E.E.T.S is an all male "thrash fourpiece" band on an indie record label who affiliate themselves with East Vancouver and Downtown Eastside. In an interview with Nick Brown (2006: 5) on the web magazine, Happy Accidents, the band members confess: "We're just being honest about where we're coming from: East Vancouver, Downtown Eastside." Their shows are quite popular and draw a specific, yet diverse, crowd. Indeed, one band member states, "At a packed show, we could have all the hardcore punk kids, a whole bunch of art kids, the scenester indie rock kids" (ibid: 10).

The entrance to the show was in the back alley and when we arrived there was a large outside line-up to get in as well as a bunch of young people milling about the bike-lined lane. S.T.R.E.E.T.S was spray painted in black on the entrance door, with the paint dripping down the letters. The large doorman warned people to hide their beers while outside and then yelled that unless we already had a ticket, no one was getting in. The show was already fully underway as it had started at 9 p.m. and we did not get there until 11 p.m. We did not have a ticket, however, we decided to hang around anyway just in case. Two large men walked by who were clearly not there for the show. As they passed us one of them sarcastically, yet jovially, yelled "Black man coming through, don't be alarmed. Black man in the alley," suggesting common racist fears of the black Other while also emphasizing the presumed whiteness and inexperience of the indie youth in the alley. There was little response although a few people smiled.

A couple of minutes later the doorman yelled my name and unexpectedly let us in. As it turns out, my girlfriend happened to grow up next door to him in East Vancouver. Not an

uncommon turn of events for such shows (everyone knows someone). In fact, my friend and I

both worked a menial job with one of the S.T.R.E.E.T.S members in East Vancouver just after

high school. The show was $10 to get in which was more than usual for these informal types of

shows. This was one of those non-formal venues that had a similar feel to the house parties this

crowd was normally spotted at. The inside consisted of a large, open lit room, with various

kinds of scattered art on the walls including graffiti and a display of handmade paper shoes.

People were standing around drinking and talking and their dress included a mixture of scruffy

runners, heels, and skateboards. A few underage 'skater' youth were also hanging about. This

room opened into the second tightly packed, dark room where the local band Lady Hawk was

playing — although it was far too crowded to see the stage. People were moving about, mostly

swaying, bobbing and some, standing much closer to the stage, were dancing more vigorously.

In this room they were also selling beer and mixed drinks in plastic cups. Most everyone seemed

to be enjoying themselves.

Around 11:30 approximately six Vancouver police arrived and began to quietly make

their presence known. By midnight everyone had been cleared out by the police and the show

seemed to have ended without S.T.R.E.E.T.S ever getting to play. There were several shouts of

complaint but for the most part, people exited calmly, although begrudgingly. From there, the

Hastings Street back alley filled and flowed with Vancouver's hipsters. There was word that

perhaps the show was going to relocate (maybe to one of the S.T.R.E.E.T.S' member, Mapee's,

print studio, Bloodstone, on Clarke) but I did not stick around to find out. Later I was informed

that the police allowed the show to continue after half the crowd had left. Why the show was

shut down was unclear as there was no communication between the police and the crowd. The

crowd was neither 'out of control' nor violent. I believe the show organizers had a permit for

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the event so it may have been closed down due to it being overcrowded or because underage kids were present. One person grumbling outside the event mused that due to such heavy police regulation of these kind of parties, and of DTES and East Vancouver, it seems newly opened spaces are often closed down before they get going. This person has a point. The creation of alternate, non-consumer youth spaces is difficult to do when such leisure sites are often subject to police surveillance and youth are viewed as criminal.

Figure E-3. S.T.R.E.E.T.S., Alley Entrance, 2006.

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Figure E-4. Art on Display, inside *S.T.R.E.E.T.S.* show, 2006.

Figure E-5. Makeshift Bar, inside S.T.R.E.E.T.S. show, 2006.
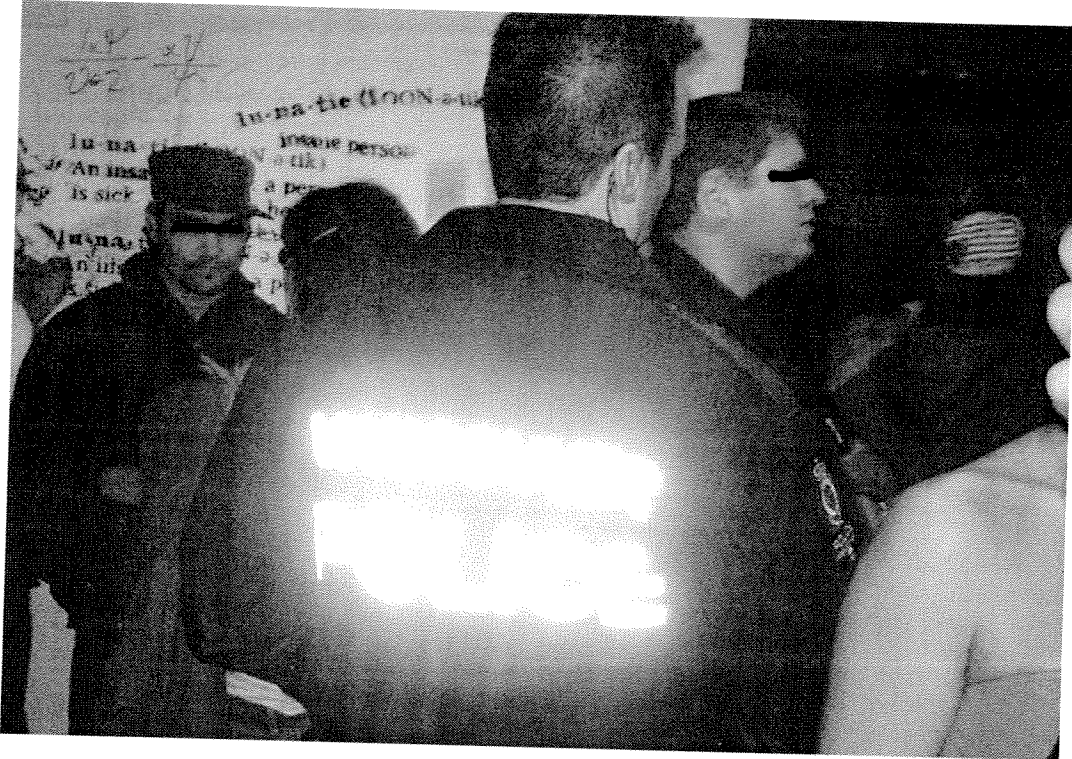
Figure E-6. Vancouver Police closing down *S.T.R.E.E.T.S.* show, 2006.

Figure E-7. Skate Boards and High Heels

CHAPTER 4

GENTRIFICATION AND PLAYFUL RESISTANCE

There presently is a process of rapid development within the city of Vancouver's urban

centre, as well as a containment and regulation of entertainment space. This chapter discusses

how one local party exemplifies larger issues related to the regulation and demonization of

youth pleasure practices (punk sub-cultures in particular, and their claims on urban space), as

well as how such claims interconnect with gentrifying processes.

We saw in the previous chapter that indie youth reject both the space and ethos of

Vancouver's Entertainment District. They also tend to make their own counter-culture pleasure

spaces. But many venues, including the *Butcher Shop*, *Misanthropy*, the *Sugar Refinery*, the

Marble Arch, the *Cobalt*, *Seamrippers*, and *Blim*, which support their "loosely spun

underground web of cross-cutting identities" (Ferrell 2001: 241) have closed down and/or

relocated over the last few years. Various accumulative factors affect such small-scale

establishments, such as: city zoning, which discourages nightlife venues located outside of the

appointed entertainment district; lack of finances (many are small-scale businesses which do not

cater to the mainstream consumer public); little financial support (to encourage one centralized

and contained entertainment district, the city provides financial incentives only for those

entertainment venues that relocate to the Entertainment District);[22] and increasingly high rental

prices due to increase in dwelling costs and the social upgrading of local areas. Partially due to a

lack of diverse entertainment venues, Eastside public spaces, community centres and house

parties have become popular sites for alternative youth. House parties have always been

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[22] See for example, City of Vancouver's 'Policy Report Licensing' (2006c) and the City of Vancouver's 'Granville Street Redesign Homepage' (2006b).

popular; nevertheless, interviewees have suggested that this shift is also a contemporary response to the commercialization of space as well as a rejection of big business dance venues.

In 2004, *Vancouver Magazine* ran an article titled "Army of Fun," which discusses the benefits of Vancouver's 'East Van' house party scene and how it differs from Vancouver's more mainstream club scene. The author, Chris Tenove, notes that in opposition to mainstream clubs, everyone at a house party is linked though a social network (2004: 16-17). The article also mentions that many people learn about parties through websites, such as the website created by a group of people called the *Party Army* that is devoted to announcing and documenting indie parties. The *Party Army* note that house parties allow for a mixing of diverse people in a way that is not experienced in other entertainment spaces. It is within this house-party context that the indie scene at times mixes with Vancouver's punk community, proving the fluidity of these subcultures. Consequently, the regulation, in terms of police surveillance and media attention, of both punk and indie youth pleasure practices, though sometimes taking different forms, resonate within and between both communities. Police interference with one community, for example, can have a direct impact on the other, and is resented by both. This chapter examines the controversies that arose about one such party and its members in order to argue that partying can be linked to larger issues related to the regulation and demonization of youth pleasure practices (punk subcultures in particular, and their claims on urban space), and that such claims interconnect with gentrifying processes. For the purpose of this close study, the chapter also draws from an analysis of Vancouver's two major daily newspapers, *The Province* and *The Vancouver Sun*,[23] for two weeks following the party.[24]

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[23] Both *The Province* and *The Vancouver Sun* are Vancouver newspapers owned by Pacific Newspaper Group, affiliated with CanWest Global Communications.

In order to contextualize this punk party, which collided with indie youth practices, I

begin with a brief description of development practices that structure Vancouver and the Mount

Pleasant/Main Street neighbourhood of East Vancouver. This is necessary to contextualize my

later observation that gentrification often works through the commodification and

mythologizing of counter-culture values, while counter-culture groups, such as indie and punk

youth, as early 'marginal gentrifiers' become simultaneously celebrated, vilified and displaced

by subsequent gentrifiers in the service of middle-class reproduction. Indeed, Neil Smith (1996)

argues that, predominately in the U.S. but also elsewhere, the meaning of gentrification is

constructed through the appropriation of the language of frontier myth (i.e. the taking of the

Wild West) (1996: 13). David Ley (1996; 2003), also alluding to the allure of 'untamed' spaces

for developers, notes that the early stages of gentrification are linked to counter-cultures. I

follow then, with a description of the 'untamed' night of the 'punk party' and the subsequent

police and media response, wherein subcultural youth are easily vilified and any political intent

within their protest (they might have had) is nullified. The chapter concludes with reflections on

the aftermath of this youth-identified counter-cultural space.

Developing Vancouver: East Van's Mount Pleasant/Main Street

While there is presently a process of rapid gentrification occurring within the city of

Vancouver, the city also has the fastest-growing homeless population in Canada (Pivot Legal

Society 2006). All levels of government have demonstrated little commitment to developing

affordable or social housing. For instance, in March 2006, the current Non-Partisan Association

(NPA) mayor, Sam Sullivan, pulled out much of the funding promised for social housing within

Vancouver (such as South East False Creek's new development and the redevelopment of the

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[24] The articles written about the party were concentrated in a two week period following the event.

infamous Woodward's building).[25] The closures of Downtown Eastside residential hotels (such

as the Pender Hotel which has recently been sold and is to be revitalized as a new boutique

hotel) are representative of Vancouver's dwindling low income housing (Woodward 23 May,

2006: S2) and real-estate developers current 'buying binge' (Paulsen 11 May, 2007). In the face

of growing critique and concerns to erase evidence of homelessness before the Vancouver

Olympics in 2010, the Provincial Liberal Government has allocated, in May 2007, an

endowment fund for supportive housing,[26] including $80 million for the purchase of 10 single-

room occupancy hotels (SRO) in and around Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (BC Housing 11

May, 2007).[27] This, however, does not account for the homelessness anticipated by Pivot Legal

Society as a cause of massive evictions leading up to the Olympics (Johal 2008).

Though current gentrification projects are changing the face of East Vancouver

neighbourhoods, economic disparity between East Vancouver and West Vancouver remains. In

general, contemporary East Vancouver neighbourhoods have a larger percentage of rentals as

well as lower annual household income than neighbourhoods on the West Side of Vancouver.[28]

The Downtown Eastside in particular, home to a large Aboriginal population, is the poorest

postal code in Canada (Robertson and Culhane 2005: 16). The average household income in the

DTES is $15,647 (City of Vancouver 2006e).

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[25] See for instance, Bula (9 Mar., 2006: B.5) on South East False Creek and for the Woodward's building compare development progress between Berningham (29 Sept., 2004: A14) and McMartin (8 Apr., 2006: B1). Significantly, much information regarding the actual amount of social housing allocated for the Woodward's building is both contradictory and elusive...including the city of Vancouver's Woodward's web page: < http://vancouver.ca/corpsvcs/realestate/woodwards/timeline.htm>. As well, see Blomley (2004) for a history of neighbourhood claims to the Woodward's building as community space.

[26] For more information on the allocation of the supportive housing endowment fund see Province of British Columbia's "Balanced Budget of 2007" (11 May, 2007).

[27] See BC Housing's Press release (12 May, 2007) for a detailed list of Vancouver Hotels purchased by the Provincial government and their purchase prices.

[28] See mapping of city income break-down Fig. 2-2 to 2-3 in Chapter Two. Vancouver's 2001 Census also has more detailed statistics (City of Vancouver 2006a).

Main Street, as part of the Mount Pleasant district and the Eastside, has been a popular location for alternative forms of youth entertainment. As the youth-based magazine *Vice* puts it in its guide to Vancouver: "Mount Pleasant is given to partying" (Bannister et al 2006: 26). Indeed, indie youth affirm, "Main Street or Commercial are considered the good party neighbourhoods" (8-1). Main Street is traditionally a working-class, ethnically diverse neighbourhood (with a large Filipino population), also occupied by students and artists. Over the last fifteen years the area has changed considerably, particularly the artist and youth dominated areas between 2nd and 29th Avenues.[29]

In the early 1970s, because of the affordability of the area, early artist live/work studios began to occupy the strip, including such venues as the not for profit artist-run media arts access centre: *Video In*, and the experimental art and performance facility, the *Western Front*. In the 1980s, the contemporary dance studio, *Main Dance*, was opened, though now has moved. This sparked the emergence of a more established youth-dominated artistic area beginning in the 1990s that includes many 'alternative' coffee shops, independent clothing stores, middle-scale independent restaurants, alternative video stores, bike shops, and small mixed-media art galleries such as *Blim*, *Anti-Social* and the *Butcher Shop* (and in fact, some people themselves are even described as having a 'Main street look' akin to hipster aesthetics). At the same time, older neighbourhood-based businesses (such as Filipino-run corner stores) have been closing down or relocating; a familiar instance of the fact that, though gentrification is multifaceted (see Lees 2000), urban restructuring often impacts racial/ethnic minorities (Smith 1996).

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[29] The north end of Main Street, below 2nd, is a significantly poorer neighbourhood and is referred to as the Main and Hastings area of the Downtown Eastside.

Several new developments cater to the hip-upwardly mobile. These include restaurants (such as the *Five Point* — owned by former members of the Westside (Kitsilano) restaurant community) and new 'artist loft' and condo developments (notably on Kingsway and 11th and Main and 12th). Commenting on Main Street's development marketing, *Vice* Magazine's *Guide to Vancouver* sarcastically states that "A bunch of clueless real estate developers have foolishly attempted to re-dub this area 'SOMA,' for South Main....They've also tried the name 'Uptown,' which happens to be slang for crack" (Bannister et al 2006: 28). This latest up-scale patronage is referred to by some as the 'Kitsification' of Main Street (Kitsilano is a Westside neighbourhood of Vancouver associated with wealth and high-end stores). For instance, a recent guide to 11 local neighbourhoods in *Vancouver Magazine* defines the area this way:

> **South Main**
> East meets west in this new neighbourhood: think funky with a young urbanite influence. There are two giant IKEA stores in the Lower Mainland, more than a dozen Gap clothing stores and nearly as many Earls Restaurants. Not that Ivar bookshelves, cargo pants and chicken wings aren't functional, fetching and delicious choices, but if you're looking for something less ubiquitous, South Main is the place to go. Part of the larger Mount Pleasant neighbourhood, South Main, which extends along Main Street from Broadway all the way to 29th Avenue, is an ethnically diverse area that has become a popular residential neighbourhood for upwardly mobile professionals. Main Street offers funky vintage clothing shops and one-of-a-kind home furnishing and accessories stores (Moore 27 Apr., 2006).

But for many, this process of gentrification is a violent act of dislocation and an ugly indication of the increasing commercialization of space. One particularly contentious development is 'Do Main living,' a commercial/housing development. 'Do Main living' stands on the same geographic location of an infamous 2004 punk youth house party, the events of which will now be described in order to illustrate how the dynamics of youth entertainment, gentrification, and spatial negotiations intersect.

The House Party

On Saturday, September 25, 2004, a large party took place in what is known as the 'punk-houses' of Watson Street near Main and 12th Avenue. The party consisted of a mixed, youthful crowd that spilled out onto the yard socializing and drinking while the local metal band *Descention* played inside one of the houses. Police arrived at 10:00 p.m. to administer a warning. They later returned around midnight to find about 200-300 young people, or 'punk-rocker/anarchists' as the media named them, inside the houses and outside on the street. The police claim that at this time officers were hit by some thrown debris and that one house was in the process of being wrecked. In response to the police presence, a few party members built a barricade out in the alley in front of the party and proceeded to set it on fire, creating a barrier between the police and the party. Approximately 120 police officers were called in (Barnholden 2005: 118-132) (See Fig.3-1 for anarchist count of Police presence), the riot act was read and the party-goers were given two minutes to clear the vicinity, after which the police lobbed teargas inside. Around this time a large fire broke out within one of the houses. The police, armed with shot guns, taser guns, tear gas, police dogs and dressed in riot gear, unified their march forward towards the house party whilst banging their shields. They also evacuated the neighbours, blocked off about a four block radius surrounding the event and arrested up to forty individuals in the area who were held in jail overnight. By the end of the event one house was half burned, property was destroyed and the crowd was dispersed by the police. The following day, however, the half burned house, along with the neighbouring 'punk' houses, were re-lit and completely burned down to the ground due to arson. Although articles in *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* state that no one was injured by the party or the fire that ensued, reporters fail to mention whether people were injured by the tear gas and the police.

POLICE PRESENCE INCLUDED:
25 District 3 Officers
33 Officers from other districts
6 officers from counterattack
5 Emergency Response Team
2 police dog Members
11 Crowd Control Unit Officers
3 Detective/Investigators
9 Additional Officers
19 Off duty Officers
TOTAL: 111 PIGS
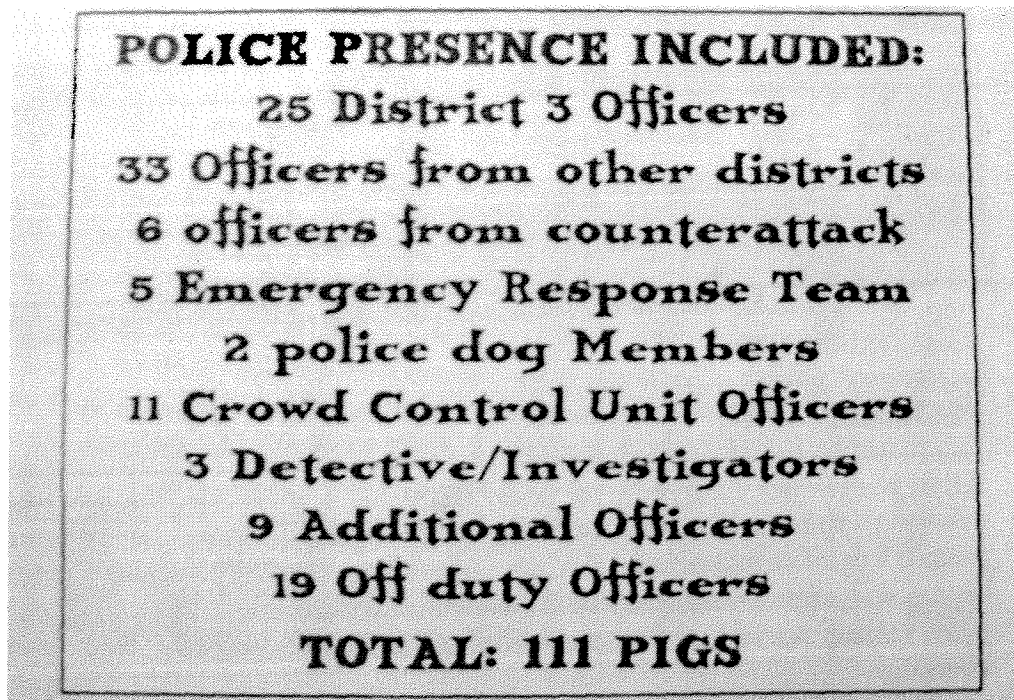
Figure 4-1. Police Presence. Local "East-Van Anarchist Zine," *Treason*, **describing the police turnout at the 2004 punk party.**

The three houses damaged by the house party on 12th Avenue and Watson Street were

long-time low-income rental properties that recently had been sold to a developer and slated for

demolition by Holborn Developments. All the residents in the homes had been served eviction

notices prior to the party. Although the party instigators had been informed that the houses were

going to be torn down, the developers (according to *The Province* (McLellan 28 Sept. 2004:

A13)) argued that they had just been informed that two of the three residences were considered

to be heritage houses, thus they were considering their preservation. (The validity of this

argument stated in the aftermath of the event seems far-fetched, especially considering the

current development that is underway there.) The party itself was encouraged by the landlord, as

the tenants who threw the 'house-wrecking' party were supplied free beer by their (then,

previous to Holborn) owner to serve at the event.

Police and Media Response to the "Punk Riot"

This one evening event and consequent action following the event resonated throughout the city of Vancouver. The police's public militaristic demonstration of force made it quite clear that their intentions were serious and punitive. However, many people, including interviewees, felt the police overreacted to the situation and the house party has evoked questions related to civil liberties (Bartoszewski 13 Nov. 2006). Several uninvolved bystanders who stumbled across the event were harassed by the police. For example, *The Tyee* (an alternative news source) published a statement from Malcolm van Delst who claims that she came across the police blockade while riding her bike home that night. Refusing to leave the area until told what was going on, Van Delst claims several officers approached her:

> One grabbed my bike and threw it so it smashed behind me; another guy held a can of pepper spray right to my face and threatened to spray unless I left immediately. Then this other woman approached with a camera and started taking pictures, so a couple of the cops left to deal with her (Bartoszewski 13 Nov. 2006).

Van Delst relates that the woman taking pictures, heath care worker Valerie Edelman, was pepper-sprayed and her camera was damaged (Bartoszewski 13 Nov. 2006). Van Delst ended up in jail, was strip searched and charged with unlawful assembly (ibid). According to *The Tyee*, the constitutional rights of people detained the night of the riot were violated:

> The strip-searching of short-term detainees at the jail has been a matter of ongoing concern for the BC Civil Liberties Association. The group has urged the Solicitor General to bring policies in line with the December 2001 Supreme Court of Canada, which states that strip searches should only be conducted if authorities had reasonable grounds to believe that the subject was hiding a weapon or evidence related to the commission of the offence that resulted in detention. A class action suit has been filed seeking damages on behalf of everyone who had their constitutional rights violated since December of 2001 (ibid.).

Following the event of the house party, Vancouver police spokesperson, Anne Drennan, is quoted in *The Vancouver Sun* (Lee 28 Sept., 2004: B4) as saying "There were a lot of people

involved in a lot of different criminal activities" and that the police were surveying video

evidence in order to further establish the identities of perpetrators. After interrogating those

taken into custody, the police discovered that some party-goers had learned about the party

through e-mail and that the party had been described as a house-wrecker on the website of the

Party Army. (It had been posted on many other websites too but the police did not seem to be

aware of this.) The *Party Army* website is an independent site set up by youth for the purpose of

informing a network of friends within the Vancouver alternative/indie community about

upcoming local house parties and music, dance, and art-based events as an alternative to more

mainstream nightlife options. They are not associated with the punk scene although they, at

times, intersect. Nevertheless, in the eyes of the police, there seems to be little distinction

between youth groups; all are suspect. After the night of the 25th, the police began to monitor

the website, unbeknownst to the website creators/users, and using information gleaned there,

proceeded to inform landlords of potential parties that were being planned and to threaten

several people, forcing them to cancel their scheduled parties. These actions curbed initiatives to

create dance parties outside of the (consumer orientated, violent, heteronormative) environment

of the Granville Street entertainment district. As part of this regulatory pre-emptive action, the

police (a month later) also forced the owners of the Downtown Eastside bar, the *Astoria*, to

cancel the show at which the punk-house affiliated band, *Descention*, was booked to play (Lucas

2004).

Needless to say, the *Party Army* creators were not happy to discover that they were non-

consensual police informants, especially because their initiative is to propagate rather than deter

parties. In response to this violation, the *Party Army* changed the location of their website for a

six month period and reduced access to the site to a minimum. One of the website members who I interviewed relates their experience of the event:

> The police got freaked out and assumed that since this party where the houses burned down had been posted on our website then any other parties were going to be crazy. So they went not only to that house and told the tenants who lived there not to have a party, they went to another party posted on our website, contacted the landlord and that party still went ahead. There was a party that was supposed to happen at the *Astoria* and it got moved, had to relocate secretly. So it was a big problem. The police were using our website as a research [tool] to pre-emptively shut down house and non-house parties.... But when that was going on it was really stressful for us, we didn't know what to do. It was really shitty to know that our website which was supposed to be *a place for people who don't like going to nightclubs to have somewhere to find out about where house parties are*. And then it was being used to shut down house parties, which really, nine times out of ten, don't harm anybody (6-5, emphasis added).

This quote highlights both police regulation and the difficulties faced by youth attempting to seek out non-corporate avenues for entertainment within the city of Vancouver. That there is little sympathy for alternative non-corporate endeavours is clearly evidenced by police investigations of the website and the following negative media response the house party event provoked.

The "punk riot" gained considerable attention in the media. It earned front-page news in the daily newspaper, *The Province*, and continued for the next few days to be news worthy in that paper as well as *The Vancouver Sun*, along with the weekly entertainment paper, *The Georgia Straight*. The event was also discussed in alternative forums such as *The Tyee*, mentioned in the youth magazine *Vice* and was included in a book, *Reading the Riot Act*, by Michael Barnholden (2005), as one of Vancouver's most recent riots. Barnholden (2005) includes the event because riot police were employed and emphasizes police aggression during the event.

Though news stories are often taken to function as objective accounts of everyday life, they are cultural products. Narrative and image work together to produce social narratives and

cultural myths. News photos are often perceived as visual 'evidence' to textual assertions and naturalized as first-hand support to media claims (Huxford 2001). They are, however, highly mediated: which photos are taken, chosen, how a photo is placed, composed, captioned, and juxtaposed, determine how we make sense of an event. Text and image work together to both denote and connote meaning, to mobilize, engage or call upon common emotions, anxieties, fears, and attitudes.

With respect to punk youth, and youth subcultures, Canada's mainstream media occupy a privileged location to inscribe meaning onto subcultures, containing "subcultural phenomena within the confines of an ordered society" (Foreman 1992). News photos and stories function inter-textually, drawing upon familiar cultural knowledge to reiterate and/or extend dominant claims about subcultural youth. Indeed mainstream media often pay little attention to subcultures until they can provide some form of shock value. This form of reporting works to ultimately reinscribe the existing social order, by positioning subcultures as Other to the general public (ibid.).

The bold heading on the front page of *The Province* on Monday September 27, 2004 reads "HOUSEWRECKER" and focuses on an angry 82 year old neighbour, Phyllis Collinson, who was evacuated from her house after a piece of furniture came through her window during the punk house party. The large photo accompanying the text shows two damaged party houses. The photo highlights the ominous spray-painted phrase 'KILL COPS' on the front of one of the houses. The article which accompanies the front-page photo has another headline which reads, "Scared for her life." Above this heading there is a picture of two men dressed in black, members of the band *Descention* who, the paper notes, were arrested by police during the party. Below this, there is another photo which depicts the phrase, 'BEWARE of PITBULL,' painted

across the front door of one of the punk houses (O'Connor, 27 Sept. 2004: A3). The article outlines responses by neighbour Phyllis Collinson, who feared that her property might be destroyed during the party. It introduces the concept of the party houses as "punk rock compound" and discusses how the police appropriately responded to the "apocalyptic" and "out of control" house party (ibid.).

The same day *The Vancouver Sun* (Lee 27 Sept., 2004: B1) printed an article titled, "House-wrecker bash turns riotous; Police and punkers clash during fiery party at low-rent 'band' houses." Again, photos accompany the article. One photo features Phyllis Collinson angrily pointing towards one of the wrecked houses. Another photo is of Andy McGhee, a young man with a Mohawk and nose ring, who is said to be the organizer of the party (ibid.). Coverage of the event between the two papers is fairly consistent. Both *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* emphasize the clash between police and youth, and the destruction of property. The following day after the two remaining damaged houses had been burned down, the articles in *The Province* and *The Vancouver Sun* read: "Houses torched day after wild party" (McLellan 28 Sept., 2004: A13) and "Fire finishes off heritage houses" (Lee 28 Sept., 2004: B1), respectively.

The September 30 article, "**House-wrecking punks should be required to build homes for others**," written by opinion journalist Jon Ferry in *The Province* newspaper (2004: A4) was the most scathing. Those who attended the 2004 house party are described by Ferry as "youth," "punk-rockers," "perpetrators of pointless destruction," "anti-establishment rabble-rousers," those with "mosh-pit-hardened butts," potential "peaceniks," "house-wrecking punks" and most poignantly, "pollutants of the environment" (30 Sept., 2004: A4). The article characterizes "house-wrecking punks" as: lazy, for "some people get on with their lives right away, some

people don't;" aimless, "…being in your twenties and not having a lot to do;" and useless to the

economy (non-productive): "they might start to learn a trade that enables them to earn a good,

long living." Rather than getting off "easy" by being "jailed or fined or slapped on the wrist" the

author recommends various punitive options: "I'd drop them on top of Mount Logan, Canada's

tallest mountain, and force them to walk home," or "[t]hey should be made to construct houses

for the poor," "a program where…they worked their mosh-pit-hardened butts off…" while

"military service might be one option" (ibid.). The easy labelling of youth in this case as 'punks,

anarchists and peaceniks' works to frame them as deviant delinquents outside the mainstream

that necessarily require surveillance, punishment and reform. Why exactly a 'peacenik' —

someone who advocates peace, is seen as deviant is a disturbing thought given this current

global climate of violence, as too is the conflation of punks, anarchists and peaceniks.

Overall, *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* frame police activity as necessary and

responsible; whereas, the punk youth are depicted by the media as homogenously dangerous,

destructive, out-of-control anarchists. The photograph on the front page of *The Province* (27

Sept., 2004) documents anti-police aggression (e.g., "kill cops") without any discussion of the

police hostility which also took place nor the circumstances which initiated the party — their

eviction due to the consequence that their homes had been sold to a development company and

slated for demolition. By locating the word 'Housewrecker' next to the picture of an elderly

woman, it can be easily assumed that it was specifically her house that was targeted by the youth

for destruction; a blatant misconstruction of the truth. No mention is made of the fact that she

too, is being evicted.

Vancouver's media coverage of the event draws upon familiar tropes whereby youth, in

this case particularly punks (but more usually racialized youth stereotypically associated with

for instance. rap. hip-hop and gang cultures), are seen in opposition to authority. a threat to the common public (in this case innocent senior citizens) and antithetical. simply by their visibility, to 'safe. clean streets' (see Ferrell's (2001) discussion of punk and anarchist cultures). In her study of homeless youth Sue Ruddick. drawing on Kasinitz. notes that with the gentrification of new urban areas, public space and street space gain new meaning — they become associated as the domain of the 'urban flâneur,' the domain of the unencumbered (male) pedestrian of leisure who explores the modern urban city as both participant and observer. rather than understood as a lived space sometimes rooted in poverty. In this new valuation of street life, those who are not acceptable to the middle classes are excluded, thus there is a celebration of 'safe diversity' rather than 'social diversity' (1996: 40). In Vancouver, the media frames punk youths' disorder as a dangerous diversity that threatens middle-class norms, justifying the criminalization of youth and the regulation of the cultural spaces they occupy. This has the effect of silencing rather than addressing power relations and social and economic factors that shape events such as the night of the house party.

Arguments that punks "should be made to construct houses for the poor" (Ferry 30 Sept., 2004: A4) become paradoxical once understood in perspective. The residents who threw the house party were living in affordable East Vancouver suites that were already in poor shape. And, due to development plans, were soon to be homeless themselves, along with the other unaffiliated residents living there, including the elderly woman Phyllis Collinson. Indeed the city of Vancouver has the least affordable housing in Canada (Demographia International Affordability Survey 2006) and their eviction (which sparked the 'riot') was part of a much larger gentrifying trend in Vancouver.

To compound the city's rapid growth of homelessness. Vancouver (along with many other American and Canadian cities) has enacted anti-homeless bylaws that. for instance. prohibit sleeping in public spaces overnight. despite the city's large homeless population and lack of social housing. This criminalizes the homeless, who are punished for having nowhere to go. while simultaneously privileging those with access to private space.[30] Writing on neo-liberal ascendancy in the United States and its war on those in poverty, Jeff Makovsky argues that:

> The basis of popular compassion and political support for the poor now rests more than ever on their ability to conform to market-based notions of consumerism, responsibility, initiative, and entrepreneurship. In the wake of welfare reform, those whose social value cannot be defined in terms of the market are vilified as "irresponsible dependants," unworthy of state largesse or even charity (2001: 470-471).

That there is a desperate need for affordable housing in Vancouver is not necessarily contested, more problematic is who is *deserving* of such housing. This echoes Makovsky's observation that, "Neoliberal market ideology has reformulated the historical division between the deserving and undeserving poor around the category of *productivity*, rather than race, gender, or morality" (ibid.: 471). The punk and indie youth who dominate Vancouver's Main Street area are, by nature of their assumed un-productivity and deviant status, vilified as the undeserving poor. Such a discourse complements up-scale developers who have an interest in the Main Street area, as youthful remonstrations, in terms of articulating both a different set of priorities and in mounting resistance to the gentrification and corporatiztion of public space, are rendered ineffective. Forman (1992: page unnumbered) speaks to this dismissal of youth culture when he states: "In essence, when the media and other social institutions encounter subcultures, there is often a tendency to write the confrontation off as another case of problem youth,

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[30] The Mayor, Sam Sullivan's 'Project Civil City' is of particular note as it criminalizes the things people do in public space. The survey that 'Project Civil City' is based upon is, itself, methodologically flawed as it pre-selects the public's issues of concern around public disorder (see City of Vancouver 2007b).

removing the potential causes for certain forms of youth expression from the social contexts which ultimately determine the scenario." Youth-based public action here is criminalized and, because it is enacted in the form of play, not recognized as protest. Although not everyone was at the party for the same reason, police and media ignore any indication of political overtones, framing the youth as homogenous participants in senseless criminal action.

Re-scripting Pointless Destruction as Playful Dissent

Punk is a diverse combination of aesthetics, style, attitude and music influenced by Dada, the beat movement, postmodernism, poverty and, to a certain extent, feminism and queer culture among other things (Colegrave and Sullivan 2001; Garrison 2000). Though realized differently by a wide-range of alternative subcultures, punks have been known to draw upon anarchist praxis to question establishment, to be deliberately confrontational (Colegrave and Sullivan 2001:18). Punks are known for their rejection of conformity and blatant defiance of authority expressed through direct action, visual markers (such as clothing) and occupation of cultural (often public) spaces (Ferrell 2001). Criminologist Jeff Ferrell (2001: 23) links anarchist principles to contemporary punk actions and identifies gutter-punks within a long history of spatial tactics deployed by anarchists and other moral and/or economic undesirables (such as the homeless and gay communities).[31] While I do not want to conflate the two, I do want to point out how one movement, anarchism, informs the other, punk. Ferrell's discussion of punks and anarchy draws upon feminist anarchist Emma Goldman's (1869-1940) doctrine of pleasure as part of politics to explain how "playful disregard [can be woven] into the serious politics of revolution" (2001: 23). This practice is embodied through Emma Goldman's famous quote "If I

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[31] The subversive tendencies Ferrell attributes to punks and anarchists is somewhat idealistic, for instance, he does not address skinheads and neo-conservative punk-culture informed by racist and sexist discourses. Nevertheless, I find his analysis of the moral, legal and ideological regulation of anarchists and punks to be particularly useful.

can't dance. I don't want to be part of your revolution." Such a stance is similar to anarchist writer Michael Bakunin's less playful articulation that "[t]he passion for destruction is a creative passion, too" (1974: 58). This Bakuninist impulse towards destruction, however, can be viewed as a masculinist discourse, a performance of masculinity used to challenge (ironically) what anarchists view as a masculinist state authority, for certainly both punk and anarchist (sub)cultures have been associated with white, male privilege and violence. Foreman (1992) argues that the media have reinscribed Canadian skinheads this way by drawing upon and extending a discourse of social threat that positions the subcultural youth as folk devils (Cohen 2002). It appears that Vancouver's newspapers drew upon this collective iconic symbolism to portray these youth as punks and in doing so, authorized a particular story of punks as social threat; the media representatives of the punks at the party were all white men, though many of the party goers were women.

Emma Goldman (1969), however, advocated anarchism as a means towards emancipatory politics for women, as a place to begin to assert women's rights, to challenge the heteronormative institution of marriage, Puritanism, and patriotism through creativity, love and the expression of the self (expressions she asserted were crushed by bureaucratic and state authority). Interestingly, a large portion of the party goers were women, a fact not made explicit in media reports. Women participants present at the party who were interviewed for this study aligned their punk aesthetic with anarchist thought, identifying destruction as a practice of necessary dissent. They describe the party as a space that allowed for a range of expressions, including a form of feminist collectivity felt to be unavailable to them outside their sub-cultural milieu. They did not experience the party solely as a masculine space, though significantly, the media and the police response seemed to construct it as such. This is not surprising as girls'

participation in subcultures has often been rendered invisible within formal accounts (McRobbie 1991). Nevertheless, women have always been present within punk scenes (though often marginalized) and have been active in advocating more radical punk praxis (such as Riot Grrrl, a feminist movement that draws upon and is part of punk culture/aesthetics/politics) (Leblanc 1999; Garrison 2000).

Key to this argument is how pleasure and carnival (and also destruction) can function as counter-culture actions to challenge order, power and normalizing discourse. What seems like senseless destruction can also be a symbolic expression of an ideological battle that challenges the "everyday authority of the social world" (Ward quoted in Ferrell 2001: 18). When asked why some people present at the party encouraged the police/youth confrontation, one interviewee, a young anarchist-identified woman stated:

> I think a lot of it is the feeling of liberation and not having to obey what they [the police] say. It's like taking your space and having your own authority over your own space. And maybe people also felt more strongly in this area because it was three punk houses and a lot of people there identified as punk. Taking that space and claiming it and saying, stay out of here — the joy of liberation (24-2).

This statement echoes Emma Goldman's claim that anarchism "stand[s] for the spirit of revolt" (1969: 63) and hints at a playful belief in constructive, direct action that builds upon the anarcha-feminism of Goldman and others. The playfulness of Vancouver's punk house party and destruction of property which accompanied it can be viewed as a challenge to corporate and conformist authority, that colonize cultural space, leaving few options for places to live and play.

Former owner of the punk houses, Nancy O'Toole, is quoted in *The Province* as saying, "We never had problems... Just because those people looked a little strange doesn't mean they weren't good people" (McLellan 28 Sept., 2004: A13). Phyllis Collinson, the elderly woman

who lived next door and was evacuated during the riot stated: "I guess they were told they could smash it all" (Barnholden 2005: 131). Given O'Toole's statement, which frames the punk tenants as generally non-disruptive, and Collinson's remark that they had received previous permission to wreck the houses, it seems highly improbable that this event was simply part of an everyday ethos of 'pointless destruction,' or that these punks were adequately represented by the media's iconic, masculinist depictions.

In fact, according to Barnholden (2005: 131), the party organizer claimed that he instigated the party because the houses had been bought by a "faceless corporation and were going to be torn down anyway" (Barnholden 2005: 131). The organizer further articulates his response, stating that, "Ten people got kicked out and I think what happened was people got fed up with the corporatization and gentrification of the neighbourhood" (ibid.). Another young woman who I interviewed acknowledged that most people knew that the houses had already been sold to a development company before attending the party, hence the house-wrecker:

> But either way, if they had been converted to heritage homes or something [rather than condos] they would have been marked up and sold for $700,000 or something so [whether the houses had been burned or not] it was part of the process of gentrification. That's something some of the punks were talking about after — they were like, 'oh no, we kind of helped gentrification.' Yeah you helped condos get built but — it was already going to happen (24-2).

These statements, absent from the mainstream press coverage, certainly speak to the political context which served to spur such an event. The 'punk riot,' then, is not simply an isolated event, as it is framed by *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province*. It must be understood within the regulation of youth and cultural space, the effects of gentrification and the search by youth for unregulated spaces away from the regulation of leisure and dominant nightlife options. The police and media response to the party can be seen together as an active ideological collusion that remakes the Olympic city into a sanitized public image of prosperity and control

evidenced by clean, safe streets, devoid of markers of social inequality and diversity and (state) violence.

Aftermath

Two years following the "punk riot", upon the gate of the fenced area where the anarchist punk houses of Main Street and 12th Ave. used to stand, a new development sign for Creekside Architects reads "Vancouver's Hippest Condo. Ever. doMainliving. Ca." The sign includes the artist's rendering of the new condo units and various storefront possibilities, which although not yet built, are already for sale. The design of the sign resembles "funky" brown and blue wallpaper with bright circular pictures of 'lifestyle' commodities such as a computer mouse, a record, and coffee cup. These cultural markers of gentrification (Ley 1996) are interspersed with a pastiche of terms that mark consumption and leisure: 'own' and 'shop' are intermingled seamlessly with 'play', 'dwell', 'chill', 'fresh', and 'mood'.

Figure 4-2. Vancouver's Hippest Condo. Ever. Corner of Main Street and 12th Ave., 2005.

Figure 4-3. Own, Shop, Chill: Consumer Leisure

This seemingly harmless mix of words serves to obscure the ways that counter-culture

allure is used to sell products, in this case property and homes. David Ley states, "[i]t is of

course no accident that the crucial early stages of gentrification are often associated with

counter-culture life-style groups, including artists, students, gays, and political activists. These

are groups who are professedly urban people, placing a premium upon the diversity, tolerance,

and stimulation of the inner-city" (Ley 1996: 114). The counter-culture atmosphere attributed to

and associated with the punk-anarchist youths who used to live at Main St. and 12th Ave., and

the art-youth who frequent the area in general, has been redeployed by property developers to

market their product.

The economic desire for geographies of diversity is reminiscent of Razack's discussion of how liminal space is used to symbolically construct dominant masculinities and femininities: "...the process by which individuals gain a sense of self in and through space, by moving from civilized to liminal and back again to civilized space" (2002: 13). However, in this case, new condo consumers gain a sense of themselves by inhabiting a representation of liminal space. These practices are linked to gentrification, privatization of public space, and urban imperialism; some might refer to the latter term as "slumming it". Smith (1996) speaks to this phenomenon in his study of the "new urban frontier." When the meeting of the cultural industry (such as arts) comes hand in hand with gentrification, Smith terms this *ultra* chic' (1996: 18). Real estate investors, Smith explains, are drawn to rundown urban areas that have been taken up by the artist community, drawing upon a certain celebrated 'rawness'. Neighbourhoods (particularly New York's lower East Side in the 1980s) represented as cultural meccas by the art industry, enable real estate investors to capitalize on the exotic appeal of urban areas considered to contain the 'savage energy' of ghetto culture spiced with only a hint of danger (ibid.). This is reminiscent of the kind of "chic" that bell hooks (1992: 21-40) refers to when she discusses dominant flirtations with the status of 'cool.'

While noting that cultural appreciation can result in a greater understanding of difference, hooks (1992: 21-40) warns that in most cases, the uncritical desire for difference manifests in cultural appropriation and the reaffirmation of white power. Such contact allows for the dominant culture to flirt with danger and to attain a status of 'cool', while remaining detached from the lived realities of marginalized others from whom they benefit. Similar to and likened with frontier language described by Smith (1996), the language of 'urban cool' also seems 'playful' and 'innocent,' while an ideology supportive of 'taming of the wild,' in this case urban

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punks, remains intact. In Vancouver gentrification can be understood as constructed through

another frontier myth. The frontier ideology discussed by Smith and the appropriation of the

'status of cool' related by hooks are powerful as they work to justify acts of gross inequality.

Smith remarks:

> Insofar as gentrification infects working-class communities, displaces poor house-holds, and converts whole neighbourhoods into bourgeois enclaves, the frontier ideology *rationalizes* social differentiation and exclusion as natural, inevitable. The poor and working-class are too easily defined as "uncivil," on the wrong side of a heroic dividing line, as savages and communists (1996: 17, italics added).

I am not suggesting that punk youth can be unproblematically conflated with the poor, as

punk youth are a politically and economically diverse group, however, it is not a far cry to

extend Smith's list of the "uncivil" to anarchists and punks in their capacity to affront middle

and upper-class narratives of 'safe diversity,' even if this affront, in the case of punk youth and

associates, is only through their style. Garrison (2000: 143) aptly articulates the complexity of

subcultural positions when she states "[f]or more and more subcultures (youth or otherwise), the

ability to intertwine politics and style is a risky and necessary tactic in a cultural-historical

period marked by 'the logic of late capitalism' in which the commodification of resistance is a

hegemonic strategy."

As a result of the rearrangement of signifiers, what the so-called 'Do Main Living' space

is made to symbolize (i.e. urban hip) rather than what the space was previously used for

(affordable housing), structures the development and revaluing of the new material

(commercial) use of space. The house party haunts the site as symbolic capital but in a safely

homogenous reconstruction, a form of Main[stream]Living. Thus the spatial practices of the

punk youth, who deviate from conventional normalized nightlife spaces and practices to occupy

more alternative arenas as a (semi-intentional) response to the regulation and corporatization of

both public and private space, subsequently become co-opted as a sign of the spaces' desirable danger and thus its marketability, and as such are informed, regulated, and scrutinized by the police and media. The result is then that only those who can afford it are invited to 'play' and 'chill' on Main Street.

Alexander Liazos (1972) critiques the history of the sociological study of deviance, in which the labelling of 'deviance' exclusively emphasises crimes of the powerless, often poor and minorities (including youth, bohemians, punks, activists, drug users, prostitutes, and homosexuals), thus obscuring the focus on more potent forms of violence stemming from positions of power, such as the violence of our political and economic system (which are rarely given the stigmatizing label (or focus) of 'deviant'). Questioning this practice Liazos asks: "But is it not as much a *social fact*, even though few of us pay much attention to it, that the corporate economy kills and maims more, is more violent than any violence committed by the poor (the usual subjects of studies of violence)?" (ibid.:110, italics in original). Although institutional violence is much more commonplace than individual violence, we remain fascinated with the latter (emphasizing more overt, individualized forms of deviance over covert and corporate forms).

Liazos further argues that, "We must recognise that people's lives are violated by the very normal and everyday working of institutions. We do not see such events as violent because they are not dramatic and predatory (ibid.:111)." Though I would argue that one of the basic principles of feminism, queer studies and post-colonial studies has been to argue this very point, Liazos' critique is relevant to contemporary studies of crime, especially within popular discourse (as evidenced in response to the punk house party). Liazos urges us to acknowledge everyday acts of social, political and economic violence. His argument is informative with

regards to the 'punk house riot.' In this case we could cite Vancouver's lack of affordable housing, as well as the city's support of commercial development and gentrification initiatives causing the dislocation of youth, the poor and minorities, as destructive acts of violence, more expansive and wide-ranging than one house party where no one was injured. Focusing on dramatic, overt forms of deviance (as both the media and the police in this case have done) obscures the more imperative realities and conditions of social inequality, systematic oppression and institutional violence faced by the power-less and emphasizes the 'lawlessness' and incivility of groups like punks.

The re-structuring of Vancouver nightlife to privilege the Granville Strip as well as the gentrification of areas such as Main Street shape youth pleasure practices. Chatterton and Hollands note that the erosion of public space coincides with increased regulation and criminalization of the socially excluded, a category in which youth are included (e.g., Canada's laws regulating squeegee kids and Ravers) (2003: 198). Vancouver's Main Street anarchist house party of September 2004, which spilled out onto the streets and initiated a considerable aggressive police response is an example of this. In his poignant critique of who has the right to the city, Mitchell (2003) locates urban public space as a site of social struggle, a place where conservative, corporate driven discourses of liberty are used to justify the policing of 'undesirables' (such as the homeless, youth, and drug dealers) for the protection of middle- and upper-class residents and visitors. For Mitchell, political representation demands space, thus the active taking of public space can serve as a means towards social justice, and can serve to resist increasing privatization, among other things. The punk party is a local example of the conflicts over the ideological meaning and active usage of social space and those who occupy it, which are currently but also historically salient. Ferrell reminds us that it is important to remember that

not only is there a long history to the regulation of space, there is also a vital history of resistance to such spatial controls (2001: 19).

The context of a particular party offers opportunities to speak of rights to use city spaces; affordable housing in light of gentrification projects; and personal leisure autonomy. The moral and legal regulation and policing of nightlife and everyday cultural spaces is not equally applied, particular subject positions and cultural practices are privileged, especially when corporate and government agendas coincide. This is an example of small magnitude that lingers on the edge of, yet is intimately interconnected with, larger, more pressing issues such as the displacement of the poor (usually women and people of colour), the feminization of poverty and the colonization and regulation of public and private space. These are the political and social dynamics occurring in Vancouver and which are also resonating (and being resisted) in other Western cities. Such struggles related to space and the vilification of youth are linked to global, national and local politics. And it is through the negotiation of this space, particularly in Vancouver's Eastside, that indie youth endeavour to live, play, and dance.

Such spatial practices are also complex however, because, as the following chapter explores, East Vancouver neighbourhoods are both romanticized and made deviant within dominant discourse. While some East Vancouver youth have (re)appropriated these stereotypes (made manifest in symbols of 'East Van' pride for example) to market their own less expensive, more accessible and community forming alternative dance parties, other middle-class youth are drawn to such spaces particularly because they connect such areas with illicit behaviour, deviance, and the exotic. The following chapter explores the ways in which spatial practices are intimately linked to identity through an analysis of the complexity of what it means to identify as an 'East Vanner' and also how East Vancouver spaces are constituted by indie participants.

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Fieldnote Excerpt September 23, 2006, The Balmoral Hotel (Main and Hastings)

While hosting an art opening for Vancouver's SWARM,[32] in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a young man handed me an envelope titled 'Madam,' scrawled by hand on the front with a red wax seal on the back. Inside there was a tea stained card (meant to represent a weathered/antique look) that indicated that I was invited to the "Salon des Bourgeoisie" at the Balmoral Hotel. Although the card did not state what it actually was all about, I knew that it was an invite to a dance party (others, less familiar with such dance parties, did not make the connection) and I was impressed with the effort taken to hand make each card. The Balmoral Hotel is located on Hastings Street, just off Main Street, in the heart of the Downtown Eastside. For the most part, the bar in the Balmoral Hotel is a medium sized beer parlour frequented mostly by First Nations people and could be described as rough for those who stumble in unawares, similar to the surrounding neighbourhood. I was intrigued to observe the goings-on of this irony-laden 'posh' dance party full of young 'hipsters' which was to take place in such an area.

I arrived at the Balmoral Hotel close to 11:30 p.m. Twenty to thirty young adults who were, judging from their stylish yet casual dress, there for the dance party were milling about outside smoking cigarettes and chatting. These youth were a marked contrast to the people also wandering by, who could be said to more regularly dominate the late night Hastings Street scene. A multitude of bicycles were lined up along the block (many indie kids rode to the event). One woman or man, it was difficult to tell, was huddled against the side of the building next

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[32] SWARM is a yearly three day event in which various art galleries on Main Street, Downtown and in East Vancouver, open their doors to the public for mass viewing. It is a free event and people tend to socialize and gallery hop throughout the evenings.

door on the ground and another presumably homeless man slept on the ground of the near-by bus stop. There seemed to be little interaction between the two groups.

The doorman for the dance party (from the local indie band 'Book of Lists' and also the same young man who had given me the invitation) was dressed in a suit and asked me if I was on the guest list (I was not). There was a friendly bouncer at the door and a woman who was taking money for cover ($8). (I suspect the high price of cover for such an event was designed, in part, to deter some of the poorer, more usual clientele. Regardless of the intent, it seemed to have that effect.) I was assured that although the entrance fee was steep, the drinks were very cheap. This turned out to be true, as drinks were extremely affordable ($5.50 for two rum and cokes — unheard of in most of Vancouver). Many of the people working the party were with the party organizers (young indie kids), but most of the bar staff were obviously regular employees of the hotel.

I could tell that the party organizers had put a bit of work into the place and it was a strange mix of new and old décor, though mostly old. For instance, catering to the bar's more regular clientele, large pillars in the middle of the room were covered with First Nations' paintings and resembled totem poles, while (on a newer note) the 'ladies' bathroom had been recently painted bright pink and was actually still slightly wet from the paint. The room itself smelled of mothballs and lacquer. At one point in the night, balloons fell from the ceiling, not a regular feature. The dance floor, although empty when I arrived, quickly became very crowded with men and women (who appeared to be mostly white but also Asian and Hispanic) ranging from ages 19-35 (24 seemed to be the average age). Soon the entire bar was dancing and packed, creating an exciting and enjoyable energy.

The style of clothing as well as the music was 1980s-influenced and also eclectic. Much of the clothing appeared second hand, homemade and also had elements of the 1950s and 1960s era thrown in. The outfits were creative but no one was particularly 'dressed up' in the way the doorman was. The music was all over the place in terms of genre and ranged from '80s pop to current hip-hop to electronic: Peter Gabriel to the Black Eyed Peas; Foreigner to Billy Joel; to a Christina Agulera remix to the Smiths. As different songs were played people would yell and scream with excitement and dance more vigorously. Sweat was pouring and people were squishing for dance space in, out and between one another all over the room. The party was forced to close around 2 p.m. when the police arrived. Everyone was still dancing at the time. As I left the police were closely examining the bar's licenses with, presumably, the owner.

When I asked the woman I was with, who does not usually attend such events, what struck her about the dance party, she noted that it felt like a private party, that everyone was interacting and were not afraid to dance, that it was very loose (people were free with their movements) and no one was sitting and watching, everyone was participating. Further, she noted that it did not seem like a big pick-up scene. I too felt these things.

It was a strange feeling to be hanging outside the Balmoral with a bunch of young hipsters while local residents and others who frequent the area were hanging outside Carnegie Hall across the street. Carnegie Hall is one place many of Vancouver's homeless, one room occupants and other individuals in the community congregate. The lack of private, affordable space in the DTES makes the street scene both visible and active. Particularly because of this disparity, the Balmoral is an important site to examine the relationship between indie youth, social economic status and identifications of place.
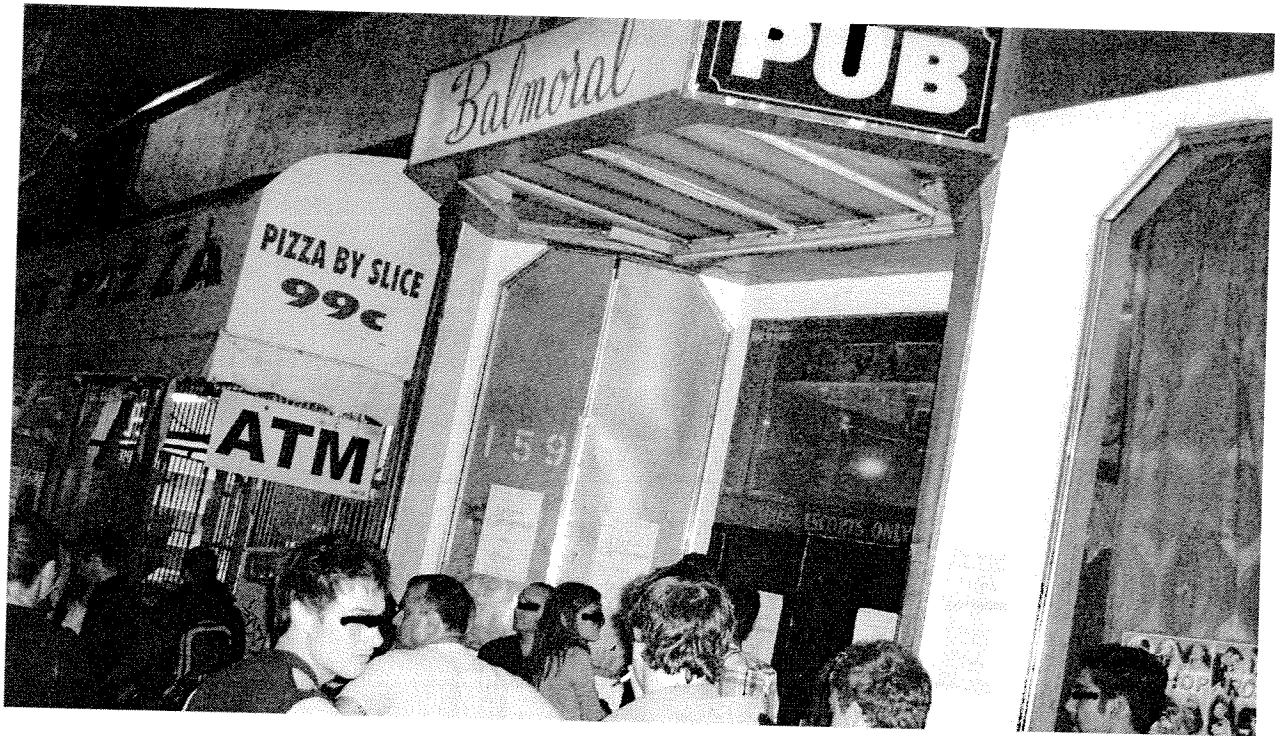
Figure E-8. Outside the *Balmoral Hotel*, 2006.

CHAPTER 5

PERFORMING EAST VAN

As we have seen from the proceeding chapters, the struggle for alternate leisure spaces outside the mainstream shapes urban nightlife in Vancouver. City policy, gentrification and police regulation shape the nightlife experiences of indie youth. An exploration into where social dancing occurs opens up some of the ambiguities of social class position and identity performance that mark Vancouver's indie community and their 'sense of place' (Rose 1995: 87-132). Claims to city spaces and the determination of who has that right is a social struggle often connected to social location (see Mitchell 2003). Though many interviewees in this study locate themselves as working-class and as strongly identified to the ethnically diverse and traditionally working-class neighbourhoods of East Vancouver, the place of residence for the majority of interviewees (68%) and the primary location of indie events, their spatial and embodied practices complicate class positioning: 52% identified as working-class, while 72% identified themselves as artists and all but one interviewee participated in the arts and culture fields. This chapter argues that while working-class status is a material reality for many within the indie community, class identity is often denied, and is also sometimes a performed and performative practice. Though performances vary, the body remains a site where membership is inscribed; various cultural practices (such as hair styles, clothing, transportation and dance styles) indicate affinity for Vancouver's indie community, indicate class membership and also signify place, East Vancouver. East Vancouver offers indie youth a sense of place, visibly enacted at indie

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events; however, this relationship is fraught with social power and infused with multiple layers of meaning.[33]

This chapter is presented in six sections. First, I review how Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has been taken up within subculture studies in relation to social class. I then propose that the concepts of performance and performativity can be useful to the study of class and spatial practices. The second section draws from interviews to relate how indie youth identities are intimately tied to East Vancouver, whilst the third section reveals that such identities, particularly class positioning, can also be performative. The fourth section examines how indie dance parities interact with class-based and racialized conceptions of place, particularly the down-market venues in the Downtown Eastside, an area represented as both 'dangerous and destitute' within popular media. In the fifth section I propose that while some geographies, in this case East Vancouver, locate class positioning, they can become a performance as much as a place and that, though there is a material reality that offers a feeling of belonging, there is also an ambiguity of class-based identities evidenced in some indie youths' inability to locate themselves (class-wise) and a marked anxiety over class 'authenticity.' The final section returns to the issue of indie youth's relationship to class in order to make sense of some of the complexities.

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[33] Of course class subjectivities are always mediated by gender, race/ethnicity and other identity markers which are constructed and experienced in relation to one another. By emphasizing class I do not mean to separate other important aspects of subjectivity from this analysis. For instance, in this study a working-class (indie) identity for women is someone who does not embody 'mainstream' femaleness, described by interviewees in Chapter Three as hyper-feminine. Interestingly, this is a stereotype usually attributed to the racialized poor against which middle-class respectability is constructed (Bettie 2000:17).

Cultural Capital

One objective central to Bourdieu's work is the examination of power and dominance. In *Distinction* (1984), Pierre Bourdieu argues that individuals occupy different positions within social space and that these positions, defined by the amount of (social, cultural and symbolic) capital possessed, determine aesthetic judgment. Social space correlates to social fields, the arena where social action takes place in the struggle for distinction and acquisition of capital. Bourdieu notes that those that dominate in the economic sphere also dominate culturally and ideologically, engaging with and imposing their own means of cultural production and symbolic systems (ibid.). Preferences in taste and style, part of the many forms of what he terms cultural capital, can be used to facilitate hierarchical differentiation. What value is placed on certain tastes, for instance, is determined by social consensus, however, it is primarily the privileged within a given society that have the power to classify, legitimize or ascribe value. Cultural capital can be converted or translated to symbolic value — wherein which status, recognition, resources and/or prestige may be accrued. This works to essentially legitimize the social order as innate or natural while reproducing social hierarchies.

Cultural capital is also embodied as a form of habitus, as bodily dispositions and practices adapted through experience of the social world (e.g., upbringing and education) and which regulate and also generate everyday practices. According to Bourdieu (1984), habitus is key to social reproduction, as it is through the embodiment of social structures that social domination becomes focused on the body; different social groups have different habitus. Habitus is also notably determined in work and leisure practices as well as in relation to taste. For instance, Bourdieu argues that people's taste in food manifests from different ideas that social groups have about the body in general, as well as the effects of food on the body (1984:190). He explains that because social groups value food for different reasons, cheap and

nutritious versus tasty and non-fattening, these ideologically-based consumption practices manifest physically, as our bodies are physically shaped by our taste. "Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, *embodied*, helps to shape the class body" (1984: 190, emphasis in original). Preferences based in perceived gender differences also shape preferences of taste. Through participation with these practices, through the incorporation of bodily know-how or habitus, social space is (re)constituted. While distinctive dispositions are embodied, often preserved across generations, they do not emerge from a central core or essence. In other words, though embodied, class taste is not innate, but rather performative, in that it repeats a fiction of (class-based) bodily truth.

Bourdieu's concepts are relevant to the study of subcultures, particularly through the application of what Thornton (1996) has termed subcultural capital. Operating in a similar manner to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, subcultural capital refers to insider cultural knowledge, a sense of 'being in the know' that has currency in terms of status. For example, this account by an interviewee in my study exemplifies the characteristics of 'being in the . know':

> I think people are more willing to talk to other people I guess in indie nights because there's like — 'Oh you knew about this place?' *It's in the know*... but then sometimes there's also the snobbery where indie rockers are like, 'Oh I'm so cool.' Whereas somebody at the *Roxy* [a mainstream nightclub] is like some yokel that likes meeting everybody. (14-4).

Such a position of subcultural power, the possession of knowledge as to how and where to act, serves to both exclude those who do not possess it, and to unify those who do. Vancouver indie youth simultaneously embody (through dance and movement) and utilize (through symbolic representational modes such as clothing and music) an indie (hipster) identity, through the application of subcultural capital. In Thornton's words, "[s]ubcultural capital is the linchpin of

an alternative hierarchy in which axes of age, gender, sexuality and race are all employed in order to keep the determinations of class, income and occupation at bay. Interestingly, the social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn't (not that I'm part of it)" (1996: 105). This corresponds with interviewees' reluctance to call themselves 'indie kids' or 'hipsters' and yet locate their identities as part of such a community by differentiating themselves, through aesthetic and spatial practices, from a mainstream. However, in her efforts to breakdown the mainstream/alternative or 'authentic' binary in youth culture ideology (as explained in Chapter Three), Thornton fails to examine participants' social class status and how this, in turn, may inform how, and by whom, such categories are determined and given value. With this in mind, therefore, this chapter examines both class status and performance, noting that the identity formations of indie youth are not only acquired negatively (in opposition), but are also positively acquired, through constitutive practices.

A few theorists, recognizing the value of Thornton's notion of subcultural capital to subcultural analyses, also caution against a theory grounded in Bourdieu that nevertheless paradoxically reverts to a theory of classlessness (i.e. Carrington and Wilson 2004; Jensen 2006). Whilst early subcultural theorists, particularly the Birmingham School (CCCS), tended to overemphasize class at the expense of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race, many contemporary theorists' attempts to compensate have resulted in under-theorizing the nuances of social inequality (Carrington and Wilson 2004). Noting this lack, Jensen (2006) maintains that because subcultural groups are also situated in a wider social world, social class should not be dismissed. Urging for more integrated subcultural analysis, he states that "it might be the case that class, in complex intersection with other relevant socio-structural factors, plays a

differentiating role inside subcultures" (Jensen 2006: 262). Jensen maintains that subcultural creativity is socially situated, that struggles over social class can emerge as a creative struggle for recognition with alternative criteria to that of the dominant social world.

The 'fantasy of classlessness' that Thornton argues operates within dance cultures seems tremendously significant for analysis of how social relations operate both inside and outside subcultures. This has implications for my study, for while it may be true that some young people are eager to avoid being classed, social class nevertheless operates as a primary signifying factor. By social class I am referring to a group of people who share experiences/perspectives arising from their economic and cultural position within a stratified society (Bourdieu 1984; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Hall 1997). Social class is materially based, yet it is also both performed and revealed as performative, as a persistent mode of distinction. In the following section I argue that performance studies, with attention to spatial analysis, has much to offer to the concept of subcultural capital and the study of class practice, together with the intersections of gender, ethnicity and race within subcultures.

Performances of Class

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, useful to an analysis of how social structures become embodied, is complementary to theories of performativity; for together, they offer a way into exploring how class enactments can both instantiate class inequality or, alternately, draw attention the fiction of the internal innateness of class difference. Judith Butler (1990), theorizing gender performativity, argues that gender is not a fixed category but is performed through normative citational processes that constitute reality. She traces the ways in which subjects are constituted in language and argues that the performance of gender pre-exists the

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performer and naturalizes gender by producing a fiction of gender authenticity (ibid.).[34] In other

words, "...acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the

essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and

sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler 1990: 136, italics in

original). To clarify, while performativity involves an unintentional citation that proceeds,

exceeds and constrains a subject (Butler 1990), performance is a contained or bounded act, an

intentional action (Jackson 2004). However, normative and/or transformative citational practices

of performativity are also always a part of performance. Beginning from the perspective of

performance, then, necessitates attention to the practice of performativity within dance practice.

This is important as what it means to be an 'indie kid' is collectively articulated, experienced

and reinforced through the embodied and spatial practice of social dancing, and in particular, the

location of dance parties.

Though concepts of performativity have been useful to understandings of gender and

sexuality, and later, racial and ethnic subjectivities (see for instance Bettie 2000; Fusco 2001;

Joseph 1999; Muñoz 1999; and Case et al.1995), it is significant to note that theorizations of

class as performative are fewer. Julie Bettie (2000), however, does just this. Bettie (2000) links

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to Butler's theory of performativity by bringing the study

of class performance to female youths' non-work identities. In doing so, she complicates the

relationship between class identity and class symbolism. Bettie argues that "[c]lass can be

conceptualised as performative in that there is no *interior* difference (innate and inferior

"intelligence" or "taste," e.g.) that is being expressed; rather institutionalized class inequality

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[34] Butler has been critiqued for her lack of spatial analysis, however, theorists have reinserted space as an important means to further understanding the performative (i.e., Nelson 1999; Rose 1999; Pratt 2004).

creates class subjects who *perform*, or display, differences in cultural capital" (ibid.:11, italics in original). She points out that though class subject positions have been a central theme within subcultural studies' analyses of youth cultures, it has often been to the exclusion of thinking about race, ethnicity and gendered subject positions,[35] and, conversely, though gender has been central within studies of performance, attention to class has been relatively minimal. Women, in particular, have not been thought about as class subjects and this is made most evident when the rubric of 'youth' culture stands in for 'male.' Thus she locates the need for a performance-based gendered analysis of class and also racial/ethnic subjectivities (something she herself does). An analysis drawing from cultural capital and performativity is relevant to this study for, as interviewee responses reveal (the majority of them female), indie youths' practice draws heavily upon subcultural capital and class-based symbolism. Vancouver's Eastside streets, houses and bars, become performative sites which enable shared enactments of cultural and class belonging, just as particular subjectivities and performances emerge through indie youth's relationship to the city spaces of East Vancouver.

'East Van' Pride and Identity

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[35] With the exception of early subcultural theorists such as Angela McRobbie, female youth, until recently, have been missing from ethnographic studies of youth subcultures, considered ulterior to traditional relations to production (a concept Joseph (1998) challenges), and thus incongruent with Marxism's working-class, white, male, blue-collar labourer (Bettie 2000).

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While conducting one of my early interviews, a young woman recommended to me that if I wanted to really be connected to Vancouver's indie scene, I must join the website, *MySpace*. *MySpace* (similar to *Facebook*) is a social networking website, where users submit profiles of themselves along with various submissions, including photos, music, blogs, groups, friends and videos which interconnect users. The website has gained enormous popularity and functions locally as a notice board for upcoming music, events, art shows and local dance parties, as a means to encounter new artistic works and as a forum for social networking. *MySpace* profiles commonly include a person's name (or what they want to be called), pictures of themselves or of something that interests them, images of their (*MySpace*) friends, as well as comments on who they would like to meet, their interests, and where they are from. What is striking is that profiles have been created for places, in particular, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and East Vancouver ('East Van'). 'East Van,' with over 764 listed friends, displays the picture of a medium sized house, a 'Vancouver Special'[36] common in East Vancouver, and begins with the personal statement: "[I]t's better here."

The Downtown Eastside profile has over 312 acquaintances, and opens to a picture of a not-so-green park and the statement: "Home of the *Astoria* and *Pat's* + MOTH RFUCK R Friday."[37] Accompanying pictures include a pigeon; a shopping cart filled with what appear to be blankets sitting on top of a mattress on a street; an anti-Olympic sign stating 'Campbell's

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[36] The term 'Vancouver Special' refers to a particular architectural style of house predominant within the city of Vancouver, particularly East Vancouver. Because such houses easily accommodate large families, as they are spacious and often contain double-suites, they have become largely associated with new Canadians. Vancouver Specials have received a considerable amount of negative public attention. See Mitchell (1997) for a discussion of zoning regulations and racial discrimination in Vancouver in relation to Vancouver Special's counterpart on the West Side, referred to as 'Monster Homes.'

[37] The *Astoria* and *Pats* are long established East Vancouver bars on Hastings Street which also have live music shows, catering to genres such as indie, rock, punk, and/or metal. The *Astoria* has also hosted some art school dance parties.

Olympic shame'; and an image of the Woodwards building spray painted with the words 'we will win.' All of the images contain strong, politically symbolic representations of the area. Comments on both DTES and Eastside profiles, and equivalent to those which also appear on *Facebook*, reveal a sense of nostalgia. For instance, some comments remark on what has become local legend within the neighbourhoods, such as the notorious smell of the chicken rendering plant, just off the streets of East Hastings and Commercial, which permeated the neighbourhood, while others write statements such as 'I miss you East Van." These profiles also publicize upcoming local shows, and express an affiliation with local music groups (many of them Vancouver indie favourites).

These social networking profiles (of which there are no West Side equivalents as of 2008), reveal the avid sense of pride that many East Vancouver-identified youth have shown for East Vancouver and Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. They are also an example of how the internet is being used as a forum for community affiliation and constitution within the indie scene. 'East Van' pride is not a relatively new phenomenon, nor is it exclusive to Vancouver's indie community, however, these emblems of pride are part and parcel of such a scene. Countering the stigma associated with East Vancouver neighbourhoods, some local youth wear tee-shirts which sport homemade scribbles of 'East Van,' while 'East Van' graffiti claim numerous park benches, bus windows and sides of buildings. Some participants in this study argue that it is mostly West Side youth, desiring East Vancouver 'status,' that engage in these identity practices — but, as the following section demonstrates, though anxieties of 'authenticity' exists, East Vancouver hipsters express a strong sense of 'East Van' pride.

Figure 5-1. East Van Pride . Photograph taken in Robson Park, Fraser Street, 2006.

Youth construct and maintain identity in, of and through city spaces. How they come to attribute particular meanings to particular social spaces is determined, in part, by a social imaginary or collective mythology (Lefebvre (1991), Barthes (1975)) — social space is not only a signifier of meaning but is also constitutive. As Ruddick (1996:12), drawing from Lefebvre and Barthes, explains, a social imaginary, produced by the discourse that surrounds it, does not simply reflect the object to which it refers but becomes something else (e.g., for indie youth, the

Granville Strip means more than a place, it has come to represent all characteristics that indie youth define themselves against, and becomes something more within their social imaginary). This social imaginary is socially constructed and imagined, as well as partial, fragmented, continually (re)negotiated and also constituted. I have already considered how hipster youth define themselves against (yet in relation to) the mainstream. But they also constitute themselves in relation to what it means to be 'in' and 'of' East Van.

When asked whether they identified themselves as an "East Vanner" many interview participants strongly affirmed that East Van was an integral part of their identity, based on their lived experiences. One white woman[38] attempted to sum it up:

> Oh my God, actually I did this test about identity in this stupid class I took and so the thing that I felt the strongest about was East Van. More than Canadian, more than from BC, more than white, more than — well woman and working-class were kind of there too but...For many years of my life I contemplated tattooing East Van on my body. For many years, whenever people ask me where I'm from I say East Van.

> *So what does that mean to you?*

> Whoa. Ok, it means a lot. It means the community that I came from, it means for me, what that meant is that it was a diverse community, and that also there is something about working-class that I hold, even though I'm going on in the future and won't be working-class, like I guess that's what that means if I have a degree? But anyways it's still my roots and I find that there's a lot more cooperation also and, oh man, I just feel more comfortable over here, you know. Sometimes, as with many things and identity, it's also what we're not. So it means I'm not from the West Side (4-5, 6).

Similarly, a Chilean-Canadian woman expressed a positive relationship to East Vancouver, linking her identification to diversity and class:

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[38] Though I draw upon the universalizing terms 'women' and 'white', neither should be perceived as 'natural,' static, or unitary concepts, as there are many possible categories embedded in social experience. Though socially constructed and performative, there is a political need for these terms in continuing to recognize and understand relationships to power (i.e., racism and sexism), and as such, they should not be dismissed. These terms continue to invoke concepts/practices which both inform and are dependent upon one another.

Yes I did [identify as an East Vanner]. For about 6 or 7 years. Because I was poor and that's the only place I could afford to live basically. But I really liked it. I liked the neighbourhood because it was really eclectic and I think East Vanners were sort of more, sort of forgiving of weirdos in general. It wasn't just young girls with diagonal haircuts and converse [She is referring to a particular style of dress associated with some indie kids] but there were all different, other sorts of people from all over different parts of the world too, and with different genders, different social standings and stuff. I liked that. I like the eclecticness of that (2-3,4).

Another white woman identified East Vancouver as a place of lower economic means, community, and as a place that is consciously less corporate and commercial than other areas of the city:

Yeah. I don't necessarily identify with everyone in East Van but I think more so than, I think just consciously and financially I couldn't afford to live on the West Side. But also I like the personality that East Van has more than say Kits [Kitsilano] or downtown. It's just lower and there's less apartments and there's less, you know, stores with tons of new things. Like I actually don't really respond to that type of stuff, like I like family owned businesses and I like restaurants that people are there because they're inspired and they're struggling too. I don't know; it's harder. It seems more like life [....] Here I just feel like people are struggling and moody and eclectic and whatever. Sometimes I think it's wonderful but half the people on this street are talking to themselves and sometimes I'm just like, I got to get out of here. But for the most part Main Street and Commercial and even Gastown and places like that, I don't really go out of there unless I'm leaving the city altogether (12-5).

The above statement reveals East Vancouver as a home and, to some degree, a place that contains a particular scale of her movement. The respondent's restricted spatial horizon is relayed when she comments that she rarely ventures out of her neighbourhood. This could be due to a positive attachment to the area, including the feeling of safety and comfort that other neighbourhoods do not afford her. Watt and Stenson (1998) refer to this spatial identification as a form of 'localism' or 'localist existence.' Also comparing East Vancouver to the wealthier neighbourhood of Kitsilano, one black woman noted that class difference was represented physically:

Yeah. I do [identify with being an 'East Vanner']. I grew up there. I live there. Because I grew up there, I feel like it does [that it is significant or makes a difference]. It makes you feel like, everyone's not as bright and shiny and clean. In Kitsilano everyone's really pretty (laughter). In East Van there's kind of a grubbier different kind of, not like people are ugly but, lower income people I think probably end up appearing a lot different than higher income people (10-4).

One working-class white man, though not born in East Vancouver, nevertheless identified as an East Vanner based on his level of comfort with the area:

Yeah. Even though I wasn't born and raised here, unlike you. I definitely do at this point. I moved into Vancouver ten years ago and lived all over and East Van definitely feels like home.

How come?

I don't know. I guess I just identify. It's like I was talking about it with the whole Granville Street scene and what makes me uncomfortable about it is I just find there are a lot more people that I identify with here [East Vancouver] and I have a lot more friends in this neighbourhood (13-3).

Note that he juxtaposes his sense of comfort felt in East Vancouver with a lack comfort experienced on the Granville Strip. Again speaking in terms of juxtaposition, the following white man envisions East Vancouver as a place for those denied access to the beach (unlike Kitsilano, for instance, where the city beach is easily accessible):

Yeah I'm East Van.

What does that mean to you?

Bike rider, artist to some degree, at one point in my life wore patchouli oil, just like under-dog, no access to the beach (14-4). [With regards to patchouli oil he is speaking tongue in cheek and is referring to the hippy culture also associated with the Commercial Drive area.]

The following interviewees did not identify directly as 'East Vanners,' however, they have lived or continue to live in East Vancouver and identify with many of the things they

believe East Vancouver represents. Their comments also reveal assumptions they hold about the West Side of Vancouver. One white man living in East Vancouver, stated:

> No, [I'm] Torontonian. No, I've lived in Vancouver since 1990 but I lived here in the 80s for a little bit but, yeah, I live in East Vancouver so I definitely associate with that but I have friends that have lived here since they were born, on the Eastside. That, I would say, would be the true East-siders. I'm just a poser.

> *So is that what East Vanner means then, living here all your life?*

> No I think it's like, you have the right to say that if you've lived here all your life. It's a different sort of feeling you know. I've lived in different neighbourhoods in this city, and [East Vancouver's] generally a little more working-class and pretty culturally diverse. It has a good feeling. People are proud of the neighbourhood, seem to be.

> *There definitely seems to be a lot of East Van pride that I don't see as much on the Westside, or it's differently expressed?*

> Spending money or flashing visa cards or something (11-3,4).

While not identifying as an East Vanner, he acknowledges the sense of pride felt by many, including himself, who identify with the neighbourhood. Similarly, another respondent, a working-class, white woman, did not identify as an East Vanner because she no longer lived in the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, she maintained an affiliation with the area:

> I don't live here anymore so and when I lived in Vancouver I lived in both the West Side and the East Side. And in terms of who I feel comfortable with and who I identify with, I feel more comfortable on the East Side but I can't really call myself an East Ender because I don't think that I lived there long enough to say that. But I think there's definitely something there in who I spend time with and who I communicate with that makes me feel more attached to that.

> *Is there a particular neighbourhood that you identify with?*

> Probably Main Street and Commercial Drive. I don't like the West Side at all, unless I'm at the dentist (1-2).

Although the interview question asked about East Vancouver in particular, many interviewees felt the need to express their understanding of place in relation to the West Side of Vancouver (a constitutive other).

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When asked if it made a difference whether an event takes place on the Eastside of Vancouver or the West Side one black woman from East Vancouver stated:

> I've never been to one [an indie event] on the West Side. Have you? I've never even thought of that before. It would make a difference. I probably wouldn't want to go. I would assume, unless I knew about the event and who was going to be there and exactly who was putting it on, I would assume that it would be people I didn't know or that have different interests that I wouldn't really want to hang out with. I sound like a snob (10-4).

Polarizing east and west, this respondent assumes that she would have nothing in common with anyone at a dance party on the West Side of Vancouver and that indie events are East Vancouver events. This is not dissimilar to other interviewees who not only avoid Granville Street, but also preferred to avoid all of the West Side of Vancouver in general, as these interviewees articulated:

> Well yeah, I have no reason to go to the West Side unless it's to go to a certain restaurant or it's to go to a movie or for an appointment of some sort. I don't really go there (19-3).

> I'm more comfortable in the East End than Kitsilano. I don't feel safe there so much. I would rather go to a place in the East End than Kitsilano (1-2).

These comments represent the West Side as a place of wealth and commerce, a professional area, and as unsafe — interviewees expressed all of these traits as negative. Along the same lines, the following young woman equates the West Side with a vacation, as not much more than a beach destination:

> [I go to] the Eastside or downtown pretty much, I don't, going to the Westside is like going on vacation. [I don't go there] because there's not really anything I'm interested in, it seems like, like I go to the beach in the summer but that's it.

> *What kind of things are you interested in that you don't find there?*

> I guess [in terms of going to bars,] I like going to bars or things that play good music, [are] relatively cheap, [and are] not full of like assholes, sorry. [I prefer] like-minded people I guess (19-1).

Similarly, another working-class, East Vancouver-identified white woman also associated the West Side of Vancouver with wealth and commercial culture. She comments on how both her style and lower-class status have been implicitly equated through ridicule and name calling (e.g., the term 'skid'). She then details her resulting frustration with the appropriation of alternative culture that, although not mentioned in this quote, was expressed within the larger discussion of dance and dance spaces:

> I guess very often I put all of West Side into Kits because I went to school there for a while and it was so negative for me, like really I was the only poor kid and they were horrible.... And it feels like they eat things up, to me, like this is so simplifying and generalizing and everything but, it's like they eat things up that people do and then commercialize it and spit it out over and over again. I was too poor to dress like them and so luckily I found punk rock which was a saving grace when I was thirteen because then I was able to, like it was my 'choice' that I didn't fit in and that I didn't dress like them. Not because I couldn't afford it. That came in [style] kind of like two years in my school after I started dying my hair and doing things like that and all the same people that made fun of me when that was un-cool and called me a skid and wouldn't talk to me and made fun of me two years later all were dying their hair a different colour, they all wanted to talk to me. It's the same thing with yoga. It's like the only, the only exercise you could do nude with nothing. You could do that with nothing and somehow they figured out a way to make it sooo commercial (4-5, 6).

She expresses the difficulties of being a poor youth in a middle-class school. She also critiques the assumption that particular clothing styles are determined solely by individual choice, as sometimes aesthetic choice is a creativeness mediated by necessity. Many indie kids who live, work and play on the Eastside of Vancouver reject an ideology of consumerism that they associate with the West Side and of aggressive heterosexuality which they conflate with the entertainment district of the Granville Strip. This east/west divide is also articulated in various Vancouver art works, the lyrics of local hip-hop artists and East Vancouver high school plays. East Vancouver pride is a means to subvert dominant negative representations about the people and the places affiliated with the area. This sense of pride is enacted, invigorated, and

reproduced through the collective sense of belonging that East Vancouver dance parties offer some indie youth, providing a context for many to reassert their own identities into the space.

Performing 'East Van'

While many youthful residents of East Vancouver strongly identified with its neighbourhoods, a few respondents thought of East Vancouver as an aesthetic or style rather than a location or place where one lives. Geographical location, thus, becomes played out on the body. When asked whether she identified as an East Vanner, one white woman (living in the Gastown area) said:

> Oh totally. Oh yeah, I used to live in East Van. I want to move back there actually.
>
> *What does that mean to you?*
>
> I guess people who have lived in East Van. That's such a trite thing to say. But yeah, just sort of that more fringe culture of Vancouver, people who are into more creative stuff. The people I know who live in East Van are people who go to art shows, they sew their own jeans, they live in places like this [shared warehouse spaces]. I don't know, it's kind of all over the place but I think it's definitely people who aren't necessarily looking to, they're very DIY [Do It Yourself] and aren't necessarily looking to make a lot of money and they are kind of happier. Not necessarily happier but a little more at ease with not working their way up the corporate ladder. I don't know how to explain it but, *East Van, it's like a vibe, it's not a description.* I guess that's my thing of East Van… people (17-5, emphasis added).

The interviewee attributes lack of money to lifestyle choice (rather than an economic reality), enacted as a form of opposition to capitalist ideals. Indeed, she understands East Vancouver as a *vibe*, rather than a material place; suggesting that East Van, as an emotional atmosphere, can be enacted. Similarly, another white woman (also living in the Gastown area) stated:

> No, no [I'm not East Van], *but I can do it.* I might have said yes like five years ago. But that was kind of… now East Van means you wear an orange scarf and you have a beard and go to Emily Carr [Vancouver's most prominent art school]. Even if you live in the West End that makes you East Van (16-5, emphasis added).
>
> *And what did it used to mean?*

It used to mean you lived in East Van. It's changed. Yeah it's fucked. it's totally fucked. Total Strathcona. Emily Carr star, Weirdo beardo, that's the other term (16-5).

The comment. 'I can do it' implies that East Vancouver is more than just a location. The statement speaks to how participants of the indie dance scene can *become* East Van by embodying the characteristics East Vancouver is attributed with. (This is comparable to how new condos can be advertised as embodying what they ultimately subsume, an edgy aesthetic for instance (see Chapter Four).) Thus those who do not actually live in East Vancouver also take on or appropriate an East Vancouver aesthetic, through (among other things) body movement, spatial leisure practice and body attire. Likewise, one young white man (moving to the East Vancouver neighbourhood of Strathcona at the time of the interview) identified an East Vanner as someone who had grown up in East Vancouver, however, he also attributed East Vancouver with aesthetic signifiers (e.g., having a 'beard'). Hence he also suggests a performative element to understandings of place:

> *Do you identify as an East Vanner?*
>
> Not really no, because I grew up all over the city. Like I'm a Vancouverite but I wouldn't call myself an East Vanner, but I also wouldn't call myself a West Van kid. I don't know. I'm probably more West Van than I am East Van if you want to get down to brass tacks but I don't know. It's not actually something I've ever thought about. I'm not a beardo. You know what I mean? (22-3).

A 'beardo' is Vancouver slang for a particular stereotype of male hipster youth. 'Beardo', someone who has a beard and/or is unshaven, is associated with a range of aesthetic signifiers, gesturing towards those who are grubby yet stylish, poor or performing poverty, potentially living in East Vancouver's Strathcona neighbourhood and can include those who fall into any number of descriptive categories including: skater, punk, art-school kid, indie-rocker, and

Strathcona hipster. A beard marks the performance of place (East Vancouver), and, as an aesthetic marker, enables statements such as 'I can do it.'

Multiple trajectories of performance studies maintain that performance allows for slippages of meaning through both normative and transgressive performances. McKenzie argues that performance genres, as theorized by anthropologists Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, have stressed notions of performative liminality; embodied performances are conceived of as potentially subversive in that they create liminal spaces, in-between temporal places, where social norms are played with and, at times, inverted. According to McKenzie (1998: 222), rather than theorizing performance as simply transgressive, Butler has been significant to performance theory because she draws from such theories of liminality and reinterprets them as normative performance. Normative performances are evidenced when, through performative citationality, social norms are repeated rather than contested (Butler 1993). Thus Butler challenges what McKenzie (1998) calls the 'liminal-norm' popularized by Turner and Schnecher (the norm being an understanding of performance as subversive) by emphasizing that most performances reinforce or re-produce cultural hegemony.[39]

Indie dance parties of East Vancouver may be seen as liminal spaces that allow for the inversion of social norms, particularly capitalist norms, through the (temporary) performance of poverty by some indie youth. Such performances are ultimately normative, however, in that despite performances of poverty, dominant class structures remain intact. The more affluent indie youth participating in performances who obtain subcultural capital through performing 'East Van,' still possess the social mobility to transgress the lived realities of East Vancouver.

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[39] It is important to note here that many performance theorists have since argued that Butler slightly misinterpreted Turner's understanding of performance; they maintain that he did not stress the subversive potential of performance (Carlson 1996: 23). Rather, Turner theorized that although the established order may be inverted through performance, the dominant structure is always ultimately reaffirmed (ibid.).

Exaggerated performances of 'being East Van' may also draw attention to the constructed

character of East Vancouver, and class norms as performative, hence the more sarcastic

enumerations of what constitutes an 'East Van' identity, put forth by some of the interviewees.

While lower-class symbolic practices are to some extent valorized, the performative

aspect of fashion and spatial practice also consequently serve to obscure the class realities of

those more economically marginalized East Vancouver youth who participate within the scene.

Thus, the numerous working-class indie youth who attend East Vancouver dance parties gain

social capital (through performances of self, as being 'of' and 'from' East Van) as well as a

sense of pride (based on an identity tied to place) — while the realities of their lower class

location are simultaneously denied, dismissed as performance rather than social location.

Echoing a sentiment expressed by a few of the other interviewees, one young white man

felt that many indie kids romanticized East Vancouver, while pretending to identify with the

area. When asked whether he identified as an 'East Vanner' he stated:

No, because I don't live in East Van.

Have you ever?

I did for many years, yes.

And did you think of yourself as an East Vanner then?

Yeah, kind of. Well I did for the most part and then near the end, when I didn't want to
live in East Van any more, I didn't.

What did that mean, East Vanner, to you?

These are piercing questions. I think maybe you're asking [about some] sort of affiliation
with something that's sort of not tangibly, but abstractly related to feeling, somehow
related to feeling some affinity for people around you or something somehow in relation
to class. But I would say in a sort of false way often.

Why false?

> Well most people that would consider themselves East Vanners, in a way that I think they would consciously associate themselves as being that, probably come from a place that's very not East Van.

Appropriating the term?

> It's somehow romantic or something (21-2,3).

The above respondent experienced considerable difficulty in articulating what the concept 'East Vanner' means to both himself and others, yet maintained some idea of what was 'not East Van.' He is most cautious of temporary (which he locates as false) affinities with the area, acknowledging that he himself possessed the mobility and means to satisfy his desire to leave the neighbourhood of East Vancouver (specifically the DTES). The following middle-class, young, white man also does not identify as an East Vanner, although he has at some point lived and worked in the DTES. He, too, problematizes the tendency of other indie kids to imitate or appropriate 'East Sider' status, though he does not do this himself:

> Nah, I've lived in the Downtown Eastside in the past, and I've worked in and around DTES for a couple of years, but that's not enough for me to claim loc [local] status. I just think it's best to be wary of affiliating with a neighbourhood too much — take Strathcona for example. People move there and a week later they might as well have been born there for the way they suddenly identify as 'one of them'. I'm over it (25-1).

The problematic of the romanticization of 'East Sider' status by some indie kids exposes the taking on of 'down and out' or 'deviant' urban spaces by those who have the spatial mobility to come and go amidst such inner city locals, as tourist and otherwise. Further, it also indicates the growing popularity and more recent commodification of East Vancouver's indie scene. However, regardless of fears about appropriation of the term and status of 'East Vanner,' all of my interviewees who identified with East Vancouver either lived in East Vancouver at the time of the interview or had at some point lived in East Vancouver over a considerable amount of

time (many had lived in East Vancouver their entire lives). I will return to a discussion of these fears of false identification later with regards to class positioning.

In terms of spatial mobility, these findings seem to be consistent with Dillabough et al.'s (2005) study of much younger (high school) youth in Ontario. Their ethnography determines that middle-class youth possess spatial mobility that working-class and poorer youth do not. The lack of mobility for some exasperates a feeling of marginalization. Through such an analogy, Dillabough et. al. delineate the interconnectedness of identity, youth subcultures and their relation to space:

> Clearly, most middle-class youth have greater spatial resources. They are often driven home in cars, live in property owned by their families or walk home through leafy neighbourhoods and have little cause to worry about the "dangers" of urban inner city life. Such early degrees of spatial mobility reinforce social advantages accorded to those who live in privileged areas of the city. Against the knowledge of such mobility, the experience of economic disadvantage and "failing schools" confirms economic disadvantaged young people's distinctiveness to others and to themselves as marginal non-citizen. In this way, place and youth sub-cultural identity are closely intertwined within the inner city. These crucial space-identity relationships are underwritten by a "geography of social difference" (Massey, 1994) which is rendered explicit through young people's phenomenologies of urban space (Dillabough et al 2005: 103-104).

Indie youth who were not from East Vancouver, but who nonetheless played in East Vancouver, possessed the mobility, sense of entitlement and desire to traverse multiple spaces within the city. The few participants who no longer lived in East Vancouver did not identify as 'East Van', including a few West Side participants. However, they enjoyed partying and dancing in East Vancouver as a temporary place of amusement, as one upper-middle-class, white man demonstrates:

> We used to have a funny motto [...], *live on the West Side, party on the East Side*. So I identify with an East-Sider in terms of what I like to do for nightlife but I'm pretty West Side in terms of a lot of other ways. Like I value having the middle-class income and being comfortable. Like I don't do well on short money. Not that I have large money. *I just kind of have the normal amount of money* (6-7, emphasis added).

Note the spatial mobility his statement alludes to: 'live on the West side, party on the East Side.' As well, what constitutes the 'normal amount of money' is itself a class-based conception, and is spatially affiliated by the respondent. Another upper-class, West Side, white woman echoes a similar sentiment while also noting that East Vancouver is romanticized for some youth:

> I think everyone probably likes everyone to think that they've had it rough and that they're from the Eastside, but I doubt it. Like I know for me I'm not from a *bad neighbourhood*. I'm from Point Grey [West Side] and I go there [East Vancouver]. So I assume if I'm going there, there must be a good portion of people who are like that too. Like most of the friends that I go there with are kind of like, they grew up in the suburbs, and they moved to the city, and now they go and *explore interesting places* (9-3, emphasis added).

The above quote suggests an ideological spatial divide between Vancouver's east and west; Eastside is represented in the negative, as a 'bad neighbourhood,' implicitly constructing the West Side as 'good.' Her comment also speaks of a performance of class positioning and the capacity for spatial mobility, while her desire to explore 'interesting places' (and by implication meet 'interesting people') resonates within the language of colonial expansionism (Hall 1997: 239) and 'frontier myths' (Smith 1996: 13), as an enactment of Othering.

In their capacity as spatial tourist, some youth ultimately differentiate themselves from poorer and more marginalized clientele who also frequent the bars and clubs of East Vancouver. Ross and Greenwell, drawing upon Kay Anderson, state "Anderson has argued that hegemonic notions of a quintessential racial Other produced and managed Chinatown [which is located adjacent to the DTES] as an ethnic neighbourhood with entangled connotations of exotic adventure, intrigue, vice, and immorality. Whether the area's supposed Oriental qualities were romanticized or condemned, they reinforced definitions of Chinatown and those within it as Others who marked the boundaries of Vancouver's imagined community" (Ross & Greenwell 2005: 144). Though Anderson's argument pertains to Chinatown, her statement bears some

semblance to notions of the DTES, and other marginalized East Vancouver neighbourhoods where indie youth live and play. Though somewhat spatially distinct. Vancouver's indie youth tend to merge discussions of the Eastside, Chinatown and the DTES together, conceptualizing the boundaries as fairly fluid. Because of the close proximity of many of these neighbourhoods, it is easy to move within, between and through these areas easily by foot, bike or bus.

Desiring Difference: Dance Parties on the East Side

On New Years Eve, 2004[...], Matt hosted a big celebration at the Balmoral [a hotel/bar in Vancouver's East End]. [....]But we must remember, a crucial component of Matt's model is that the locals (you know, the people that keep the place open the other 364 days of the year) be present only in the capacity to bring 'colour' to the event, but not so much as to make the 'desired' audience aware of just how foreign they are to the venue/neighbourhood. Let's face it, the number of people that attend these things who can really claim local status are in the minority, and they're probably not paying to get in anyway.... to be able to make the masses (i.e. mostly West End kids [meaning, I think, West Side and West End], students, etc.[...] more comfortable, such a balance is crucial.

When I got there, I could see a problem already emerging. As you know, the Balmoral is a pretty big place, and there was a rift emerging in the mix of patrons. Surrounding the venue was an assortment of locals — mostly down and out older folks, some gnarly looking dudes with jail-looking tattoos... pretty much a cross section of the DTES. In the center of the seated area, there was a very strong Native contingent pretty much keeping together except to line up for more beer. Then, in the far corner, adjacent the DJ tables, was a relatively smallish group of (mostly white) kids — presumably the ones who had gotten Matt's flyer! For the whole night, this group stuck together like glue, and while there was the aforementioned smaller group of DTES loc's [locals] in the gang (a little more at ease), it was still pretty fragmented to say the least....

I have to say, I had a blast. [....] It seemed like no one wanted to say they were uncomfortable ('cept maybe my old coworkers!) or even acknowledge that this was any different than previous events because to do so would be to announce their alien status. We belonged here, right? But really, we were all still tourists, it's just this time we failed to outnumber the locals. They didn't leave, so we were faced with the gang of people that were normally displaced by these parties. And the best part is how unfazed most of the local patrons were — I talked to people all night who were at most a bit nonplussed by all the kids, but for the most part quite unaffected — it was New Years Eve and as long as they had a beer in their hand it was pretty much ok by them. But what do I know? That was just my interpretation of things.

-Nick Brown (age 23)

The above passage by an interviewee describes a dance party held at the bar, the *Balmoral*, located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES). He introduces some of the power dynamics that underlay social interaction within the indie scene. The romanticization/condemnation of East Vancouver is intertwined with class-based and racialized conceptions of space. This is particularly apparent within Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, a popular location for indie youth dance parties, and an area that has been a key site of rapid gentrification (Blomley 2004; Smith 2000). The Downtown Eastside (DTES) is located off Main Street and intersects with Chinatown and Strathcona. While the area still hosts the majority of Vancouver's low-income single residence occupancies [SRO], Vancouver's continued, 'relentless assault' on and loss of existing low-income housing is particularly evident in the DTES, where over 400 units have disappeared since 2002 (Pivot 2006: 3). Pitman, alluding to the sociospatial impact of Vancouver's investment and development policies, calls the area "an island of dereliction in a rejuvenated centre city" (2002: 181). Compounding its status as a neighbourhood marked by poverty, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is renowned globally as a site of violence against poor and Aboriginal women (BBC International 2007) and was declared a 'public health emergency zone' due to high rates of intravenous drug use and HIV/AIDS infection rates reported in 1997 (Culhane 2008). Consequently Vancouver's inner city has gained considerable attention in emerging local, national and international debates on violence against women, intravenous drug use, and HIV/AIDS. Although a number of local writers speak to the strong sense of community on the DTES, it is characterized within the mainstream media as a homogenously 'bad neighbourhood' (of visible drug use, poverty and homelessness).[40]

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[40] The DTES and East Vancouver (as a larger extension) are areas which are obviously much more complex than conventional representations suggest (Boyd 2005; Culhane 2008; Feldman 2001; Robertson and Culhane 2005;

Although house parties persist in this area, indie youth dance parties tend more often to take place in the neighbourhood's down-market bars. Describing the indie venue the *Unicorn*, bordering both Chinatown and the DTES, *Vancouver Magazine* states:

> Add one more to the growing list of down-and-out eastside bars taken over by roving troops of indy kids. The Royal Unicorn is a dingy karaoke lounge every night of the week but Saturday, When Andrew Volk — a.k.a. andrewandrewandrew, [...] and friends spin killer dance tracks for a packed house (Philps 2007: 2).

It is this apparent 'take over' of Eastside bars that I wish to problematize: the very phrase suggests a conflict of ownership.

Different discourses serve to structure indie youth's relations to the Eastside and the DTES. For instance, constructions of the DTES as a space of vice and immorality inform decisions to "live on the West Side [and] party on the East Side." Ross and Greenwell describe the 'danger' attributed to East Vancouver in the mid-twentieth century as such:

> For some white residents, voyaging from Vancouver's West End to East End nightclubs was entangled with racialized and classed notions of 'slumming it' because the East End clubs were located not only in Chinatown, but also adjacent to the area's historic skid road, Vancouver's first so-called slum district. Inhabited by waves of immigrants, unemployed poor, and mobile male laborers — loggers, sailors, fishers, mill workers, cannery workers, and miners — the East End's skid road was dotted with cheap, single-room occupancy hotels and lodging houses dating to the early twentieth century. By the 1950s, the area was widely perceived as a dangerous and disorderly home to male addicts, criminals, alcoholics, and sex deviates who frequented nearby nightclubs and engaged in other morally suspect activities [....] Intersecting notions of gender, sexuality, race, and class thus fused the 'pathological masculinity' of skid road with the resilient imagery of Chinatown as a 'vice town,' and ensured the quasi-illicit reputation of East End clubs.... (2005: 144-145)

The illicit nature attributed to the DTES has retained its currency. *Vice*'s recent *Guide to Vancouver*, a free New York/Toronto based magazine for hipsters that (through content, sponsorship, editorial staff and readership) is loosely associated with Vancouver's indie scene,

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Smith 2000).

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primarily describes Vancouver's DTES ("skid row") in stereotypical terms: "It's hard to hang on to customers when they're dying off, turning to drugs, or turning to drugs then dying off" (Bannister et al 2006: 24). This characterizes the DTES as *only* a place of rampant drug use, while ignoring the fact that it is a diverse community. The DTES and various other sites claimed by poverty within Vancouver are constructed as spaces of exotic excess, and thus a place where partying (and perhaps undisciplined bodies — in the Foucaultian sense[41]) can be assumed a 'natural' outcome. This is ironic as it renders invisible the neighbourhoods' lack of government support through: insufficient affordable housing and employment and substandard welfare rates and violence in the area (Robertson and Culhane 2005, Pivot 2006).

That indie kids are drawn to and identify with down-market spaces is significant. The intersection of art scene sensibility as well as 'down-and out' geography, mixed with a sense of being 'in-the-know,' provides a source of subcultural capital to those involved. However, indie kids' strong affiliation with Vancouver's East Side has diverse origins: it expresses the economic reality of many involved; it is a form of slumming or sightseeing for others; and for some it is an aesthetic style. With indie youth there is a reification of downmarket places (at least as a place to dance), but there is not necessarily a greater appreciation of the (often racialized) people that live in and/or frequent the area and/or who have been long-term patrons of the bars, clubs and spaces that they popularize. The temporary influx of indie kids into places like the *Columbia* or the *Balmoral Hotel* potentially affect local clientele[42] through changes such

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[41] This means people who have failed to adhere to the standards of self-regulation, who are not subjected, practiced, 'docile' bodies (Foucault 1995: 135-195), in need of regulation (e.g. institutional discipline, normalizing judgment), and are perceived as bodies of excess.

[42] I should note that while the 'take-over' of such bars by indie youth result in a packed venue, the venues are rarely full the rest of the week. As well, because the indie scene is rather mobile, popular locations are most often fleeting — lasting a couple of weeks to a couple of months.

as line-ups, door cover, raised drink prices and a packed dance floor. Thus indie youth's

constitution of these spaces reproduces racial hierarchies, as well as class based ones.

As the opening quote to this section demonstrates, interviewees suggest a difference in

terms of indie youth who can 'claim local status' versus indie youth that cannot, and as to who

is comfortable and who is made uncomfortable by the spaces and people at dance parties. This

corresponds with those who possess subcultural capital and who do not. Indeed, there was a

divergence in interviewee responses based on their residence and self-identified class location.

On the one hand, a few interviewees explain that the presence of the more regular patrons at

indie events is necessary, as they provide a sort of edge or authenticity to parties, however, this

presence must remain minimal for purposes of comfort, and a wider commercial appeal. Such a

sentiment is expressed by one young upper-class white man who is attracted to specific venues

(*The Legion* and *Pat's Pub*) because of the presence of local patrons, without desiring

interaction with them:

> The venues you go to are often just a run down bar or something that any other day of the
> week is, I don't know... *The Legion* on Main Street is like a real Legion but if you go on
> Wednesday nights it's full of art kids. It's kind of funny. You see all the old timers there
> and you can tell that they don't really want you there. But you also know that they know
> that without this night they might have to shut down, because they wouldn't be able to
> generate the revenue to stay open (22-3).

Revealing a dismissive attitude towards (usually older) long-term regular patrons, as well their

'ownership' of bar space he further commented:

> I don't really mind it so much. I don't really have a lot of respect for the old school
> intolerant type and I don't really think there's a place for them.... The only time there's
> ever any kind of slight confrontation is if there's a line-up for beer and they're just trying
> to get past. 'Get out of my way' [my interviewee demonstrates, indicating a drunk, old
> man tone]. But that's it. Like I've never struck up a conversation with them so I can't tell
> if they're for it or against it. I don't know; it's not like they own the bar (22-3).

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By 'intolerant,' the interviewee above is suggesting that elderly people are less open to diverse displays of sexuality, a view that the interviewee disapproves of. In terms of "for it or against it," the interviewee suggests that he is not concerned with how the venue's recent large influx of art kids has affected the more elderly patrons. Another young Mexican-Canadian woman who lives in the West End and identifies as middle-class, however, has a different relationship with the regular patrons who also frequent the bars she goes to, stating:

> I think it's really cool when the crowd is mixed and there's all these young people from art school who are into indie rock and things like that and then there are the regulars who go to *Pats*, like older people who just go to watch the hockey game on Tuesday night and they just happen to be there and there's this rock show. And it's just really cool that the place mixes people like that (18-3).

Her encounters with *Pat's* regular clientele are expressed as a positive experience, though, again her comment centres around spatial interaction rather than verbal or physical interaction.

Questions with regards to levels of comfort and interaction with more regular pub patrons were not part of the interview schedule. However, it is significant to note that interviewees from East Vancouver who identified as working-class did not mention 'discomfort' primarily because, outside of age differences, they did not differentiate themselves from regular patrons. When asked about this more directly, one self-identified working-class Croatian-Canadian man from East Vancouver explained:

> Well, I mean this [Strathcona] is where I grew up so I just feel more comfortable around people like me and people in my neighbourhood. So... yeah I mean I notice when there's a dance party or something and it gets full of indie kids who are younger but I'm young so I'm good either way. So obviously I talk to regulars because like, I mean Dan and Best [it is indicated that they are long-time regular patrons of the bar], for instance, live like right on my block. So I talk to them all the time. It [the indie scene] seems pretty interactive to me, at least with the people I know (15-5).

Another young, white woman who identified as both lower-class and as an East Vanner

acknowledged that though she attempts to interact with regular bar patrons, she agrees that this

is not a common practice within her scene:

> I know that they're [indie kids] at the *Columbia* again...but I used to go there and I really
> actually liked it. [....]I think that maybe their [indie DJs/promoters/participants] intention
> of doing things at those places is supposed to be kind of ironic or something but I don't
> really find those people [regular patrons] all that ironic. Like, that's just what they do,
> every weekend, whether we [indie kids] go there or not. And they're actually pretty neat
> and a lot of them have pretty funny stories (12-1,2 emphasis added).

This respondent problematizes some indie youths' relationship to regular bar patrons,

noting that for some, they hold an ironic allure. As hooks (1992) has repeatedly asserted,

representation (for people of colour but also for others who are excluded from the dominant

norm) does not mean recognition. In the same way, while participants of indie dance parties

may be comfortable with the visibility of the more marginalized people of the DTES,

recognition and/or interaction is not assumed.[43]

The Saturday indie dance night 'Salon Des Bourgeoisie' which was responsible for the

brief popularity of Vancouver East's *Biltmore Hotel* and *Balmoral Hotel* is another prime

example of indie youth's complex relationship to East Vancouver and the DTES. Both pubs

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[43] Non-recognition is particularly evident with regard to some party-based websites. The public documentation of nightlife party activities seems to be a growing popular trend enabled by the internet. The New York-based website, lastnightsparty.com, and the L.A.-based site, thecobrasnake.com, are two sites of note. Vancouver equivalents include the *Party Army* and *kathyisyourfriend*. Through strict policing (with the help of surveillance cameras and security guards), Vancouver's mainstream clubs normally do not allow photographs to be taken inside their venues. Most indie venues, however, are less regulated and thus are easier to photograph. Party websites feature people encountered by the photographer at parties and contain images of people socializing, drinking, kissing, posing and dancing. Such sites act as sort of a documentation of "who's who" and can be particularly interesting to those who party in a city as small as Vancouver, as it is likely that many party goers will encounter a photograph of themselves on the webpage. Included on one such website, staged for irony and contrast, are some photographs of those marked by poverty. Through the act of being photographed and then displayed on the internet (without consent), the homeless and various other marginalized inhabitants the DTES become objects of amusement, 'ironic' scenery for the shabby-chic, urban hip.

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have a large Aboriginal clientele. While Salon Des Bourgeoisies' indie night includes more

Aboriginal and lower-class clientele (mainly young women) than the indie scene normally

accommodates, the habitual Saturday night crowd that used to frequent these establishments

appeared to be excluded by the 'night,' because of an increase in door cover and, perhaps, style

profiling. Its title, Salon Des Bourgeoisie, with its implicit reference to affluence and playful

suggestion of grandeur, mocks the economic and social marginality attributed to the space and

how it has been constituted by the former (and perhaps present) Saturday night regulars. The

name suggests class anxiety, ironic self-reflexivity and possibly racial tensions.[44]

Though the indie scene appears predominately Caucasian — it is not entirely: Black,

Hispanic, and Asian Canadians, for example, are also part of Vancouver's indie community.[45]

Those who frequent indie events are certainly not only 'white' (itself a construct), as a simple

glance around at a dance party reveals. However, the middle-class is often conflated with

whiteness while people of colour are over-represented among the poor (see Frankenberg 1993))

and these popular conceptions of class and race work together to frame the indie scene. Many

interviewees' initial responses to questions of ethnicity were to describe Vancouver's indie

scene as simply 'white.' As Dyer (1997) has pointed out, whiteness is a normalizing construct, a

hegemonic monolith where status and privilege are accrued. Dyer articulates, "As a product of

enterprise and imperialism, whiteness is of course always already predicated on racial

difference, interaction and domination" (1997.: 13). The surrounding area of the *Balmoral* (the

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[44] The invite also references the French criterion Peter Greenway film, *The cook, the thief, the wife & her lover* (1989). The film, rife with greed, excess and opulence, has been read as a critique of vulgar consumption and/or conservative Thatcherism, though this is speculative.

[45] The majority of the people interviewed self-identified as white or as of western European heritage (21 out of 25, 84%: see Chapter Two, Table 1-1). Though, based on participant observation, this sample does not seem fully representative of the ethnic diversity evident within Vancouver's indie community.

DTES), however, is racialized in part because of its status as a poor neighbourhood, as well as for having a large Aboriginal population. This class/race dynamic then may work to construct the 'bourgeois' dance party as a 'white space,' accounting for interviewee responses such as: "It's kind of a shame. It tends to be a pretty white crowd" (19-4). The description of indie participants as only 'white,' excludes (or erases) those people of colour who are also part of the scene. As one Chilean-Canadian woman states,

> The indie scene? I think it's pretty mixed. I don't notice it as much maybe, but I think it is. I mean, I'm Hispanic. I don't look super Latino but I am and I hung out in that scene so and I know people that are from different backgrounds that do so, yeah, it's pretty mixed (2-8).

Vancouver's indie scene, though not only 'white,' is often described as such. The overall whiteness attributed to indie events does not mean only white people attend — it may mean, though, that white people can do it with greater ease.[46]

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[46] This concept draws from Saldanha's (2007) observations of how whiteness functions in the rave scene of Goa, India. In his ethnographic study, Saldanha notes that in the context of dance parties, white bodies tend to stick together while incorporating the project of 'freaking out' (a subversion of white culture through spectacular performances of difference) more easily and readily than other bodies. This is because 'freaking,' an escapism from the normal, is part of becoming "differently white," and is a thing "whites do because it is potential to the historical-geographic construction of whiteness" (2007: 56).
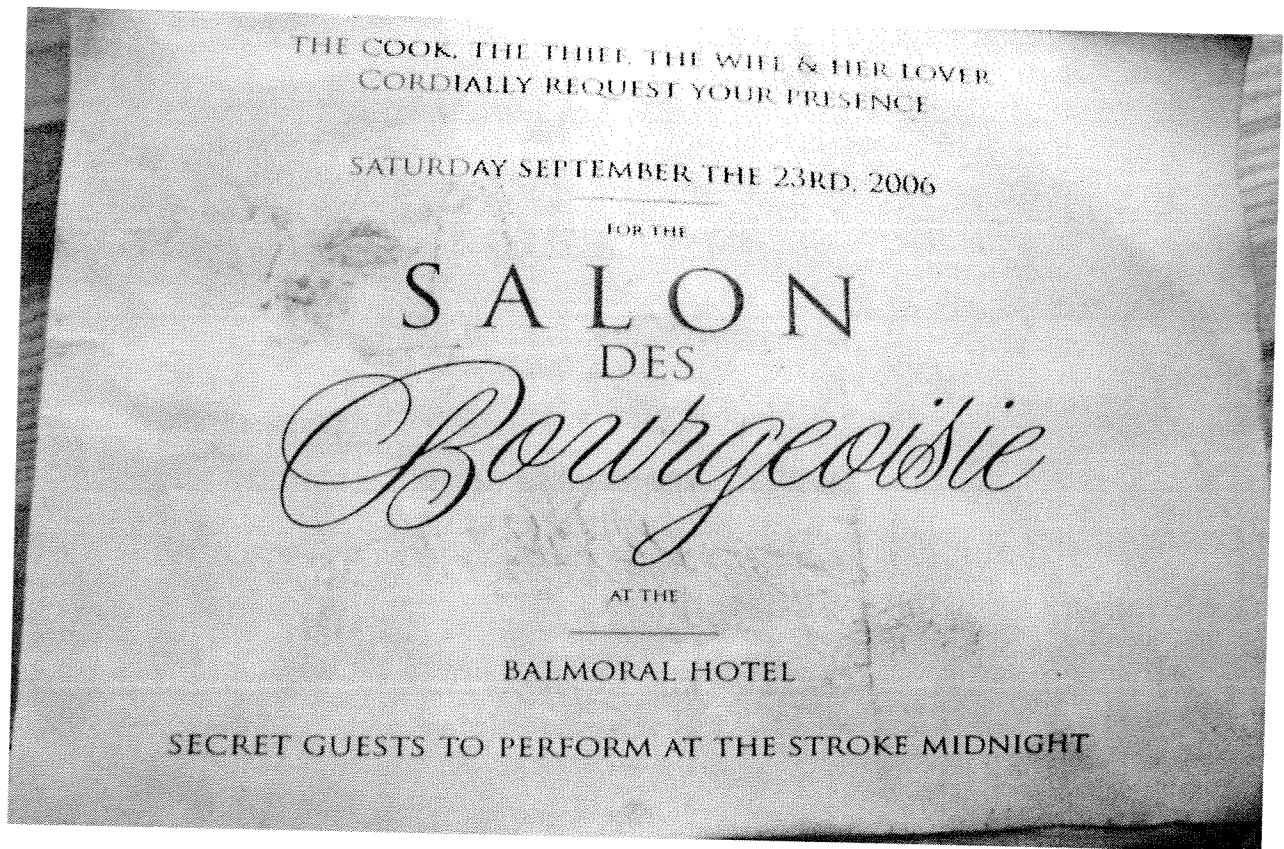
Figure 5-2. Salon Des Bourgeoisie: Invitation. Invitation to a dance party, 2006.
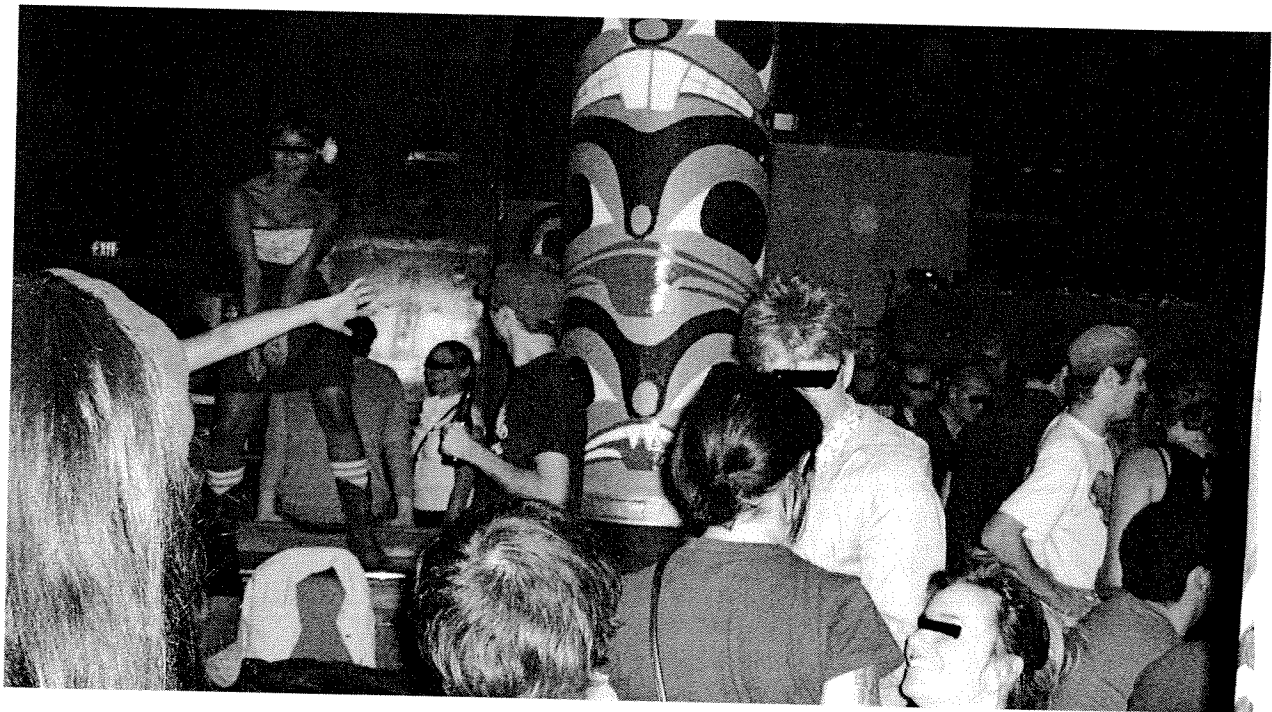

Figure 5-3. Salon Des Bourgeoisie: Totem Pole. Dance party at the *Balmoral Hotel*, 2006.

Shabby-Chic

Although all interviewees characterized East Vancouver neighbourhoods as low income, there was little consensus between interviewees and their thoughts on each other's class backgrounds. Many did not know whether there was a wide range of classes represented within the indie scene or not. According to the respondents, one factor that made it difficult to discern was the fact that there is a 'shabby-chic,'[47] or 'skid-row' style that is popularized within the scene: a mixture of ragged clothing, second hand clothing, and designer clothing (often by local designers) commonly worn. My own investigations revealed that not all indie youth were from middle-class backgrounds (as was assumed by some interviewees), in fact more than half were self-defined working-class people who participated within the scene. However, certain practices, such as the 'shabby-chic' style, guest lists and the bike-culture served to obscure such class-based nuances, while simultaneously providing an affordable aesthetic practice for those with little income.

Class within Vancouver's indie scene is rendered absent yet exists as a primary marker. Although over half of the interviewees identified as working-class, several respondents stated that they were unsure of the social-economic positioning of other indie participants but generally assumed that there must be a mixture:

> I think it's sort of diverse. It's kind of a weird thing right now because, at least in East Van, I'm sure you've noticed, skid culture is, it has been for the last couple of years big and everybody's dressing like a skid. So they could be people that have a lot of money or come from a really wealthy background but just look like a skid. So that's kind of a weird

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[47] Shabby-chic in its extreme refers to a particular form of fashion which, in its ambiguity, blurs the boundaries of distinction between someone who is a vagrant and someone who succeeds in attaining the 'fashionable' look of poverty.

question, like it's hard to judge but I think it tends to be people who are, like it's more of a working-class environment where I tend to go, rather than a young, urban, professional sort of environment (19-4).

[Class positioning] is a little harder to tell because there's that whole thing of *shabby-chic* so it's really hard I think to judge on appearance in terms of class because people, you know, they could be having really, really good jobs and, I mean maybe in places like in Yaletown you can assume safely that people have a lot of money. But I think around here it's, I think it's really tough to tell. So I'd say, I don't know (17-3, emphasis added).

Three interviewees had difficulty conceptualizing the question. When asked about her class background one woman expressed surprise that class difference still exists. She exclaimed:

Oh God, do we still have one?

While another young woman threw the question back at me (the interviewer), stating:

What do you think?

I don't know, I have no idea.

It really depends; I don't know (20).

For a third woman, the thought had never occurred to her:

Geeze, I've never thought of that but I suppose I would say I'm middle-class, right? Though right now I've been living under the poverty line so I don't know about that (23).

These quotes support Thornton's observations as to how club cultures keep discussions of class at bay. However, they also speak to the erasure or lack of acknowledgement of class-based realities that shape the lives of all indie youth, such as the privilege of being upper or middle-class or the experiences of those from working-class and poor backgrounds. This follows Bettie's (2000) observations that while class may be a dominant theme in leftist social theory, so much so that race and gender are often reduced to it, class remains invisible in U.S. popular discourse. While, within popular discourse, race and gender are assumed to be fixed, class is dismissed as temporary (ibid.: 18). In her ethnographic analysis of female high-school students

in a California town, Bettie notes that though class difference plays a dominant role in the social organization and stratification of students, it is recognised as style rather than class positioning by her interviewees; it is through 'the symbolic economy of style' wherein which class and race relations are played out (ibid.: 14). Class within popular discourse is articulated in other terms (through style preferences for instance), and it is the practice/performance that, according to Bettie, accounts for the 'presence/absence' of class identity among such youth. Like whiteness, class is naturalized and rendered invisible.

Interestingly, and contrary to the interviewees' statements above, almost all of the indie youth who were interviewed claimed that they do not actually pay to attend indie events and that one of the reasons they choose to frequent such events is that they are affordable:

> Most of my social life is centred on the Eastside, most of my friends live on the Eastside of Vancouver. And they go where the drinks are cheap. [....] I think definitely a lot of the activities that I do and my friends do are somewhat driven by how cheap they are. You know, like how cheap the drinks are, how cheap the cover is, whether or not they have the connections to slide in the door for free, that kind of thing (13-1,3).

Likewise, when asked why she preferred indie parties to more mainstream venues, this woman stated:

> Well first of all they're cheaper, the drinks are cheaper (2-1).

Another woman, describing one of her favourite places to go dancing, describes an artist space that has a sliding scale entrance fee as a means to support the collective's artistic works:

> [I like] *Seamrippers* [an artist collective], it's sliding scale, they usually do things on a sliding scale from about $5-7 dollars, I really like it because they usually have maybe five or six DJs throughout the night and every one of them is playing sort of different music. Sometimes they do have art, they did have art shows, like there would be openings but they would sort of coincide with parties.
>
> *What is the space used for when they're not having parties?*
>
> They use it for workshops and they have a bunch of different craft art: printing facility and sewing machine and surges.

And are the parties to support their work?

Yeah usually. Usually. Or just for a good time (19-4-5).

Because the indie community is so small, many people know each other and are thus able to

negotiate either some kind of free entry into an event or to be placed on the guest list. For

example, when asked whether or not they paid to get into dance parties, almost all interviewees

claimed that payment was rare:

> No. I'm usually on the guest list (22-3).
>
> I'm prepared to [pay] and because I don't go out that much anymore I can't really pull rank but I haven't recently. I don't know, for some reason they just go 'you're in' (16-1,2).
>
> People do pay when they go in right [Asks roommate]? We don't pay! (9-3).
>
> Occasionally. Often times someone will put me on the guest list (21-1).
>
> ...we try to avoid pay parties although sometimes we do go to the pay parties (8-3,4).
>
> ...he [the party organizer] always lets the older heads in for free and usually gives them drink tickets as well (25-1.2).

Thus, through dance parties, spaces are created for some people of lower economic means to

socialize with one another. This is quite different from the Granville Strip, where there is no

flexibility for pricey door covers and drinks (as prices are fixed), thus curbing access for those

with little money. Indeed house parties, outdoor parties and often art parties are all free while

indie dance parties at bars and alternative spaces tend to cost anywhere between $3 -$12, with

$5 being the most common price. This is significantly different from more mainstream clubs

which tend to charge anywhere from $10 to $25 to dance (and considerably more to see live

music), with $15 being the most common price.

In many ways indie kids have managed to persevere against commercial forces, creating

spaces that are cheap where consumerism is not the focus. (The indie scene's prominent bike

culture as the primary means for transportation is another example of this, see figure 5-4). The following quote delineates the interconnectedness of the economic and social dynamics within the indie scene. The respondent recounts the ways indie participants who like to dance not only avoid expenses through the use of guest lists, social networking, and a bike culture, but more importantly, feel (or assume an ideology) that non-payment is a right:

> At the beginning, Matt [DJ/Promoter] was kind of the catalyst or figurehead for the early DTES parties. He started using the *Columbia* (different name at the time, but memory fails — 303 Columbia St. @ Cordova I think) to stage parties that happened more or less on a monthly basis. They usually had themes — the first one I remember was called "Makeout Party" — a lot of them would appeal to nostalgia, which is a funny thing considering how young most of the patrons were! *We would get there by bike, and we would never pay. There were even times when we couldn't get our guest lists sorted out, and we would always sneak in even though we knew the promoters. We just didn't want to justify paying to dance — as far as we were concerned, we were bringing the entertainment, gracing the party with our presences! Sounds arrogant, but mostly it was just a sense of humour and a belief that if you didn't want to pay, you shouldn't have to.* (25-1, emphasis added).

Figure 5-4. Bike Culture, *S.T.R.E.E.T.S.* Alley Entrance, 2006.

The respondent speaks to the ways in which the scene's earlier social and economic dynamics based on a free culture continue despite its growing popularity and consequent movement towards commercialization. While more people are expected to pay entry into dance parties, the respondent himself (along with most everyone else that was interviewed) admits that he still does not pay for entrance or for drinks. Nevertheless, interviewees remained wary of this entrepreneurial shift, especially in terms of attracting newcomers. As the above respondent also commented: "The scene now seems to draw folks more from the West End and the kids are way more fashion-oriented and seem more affluent" (25-1). Partly because of the so-called shabby-chic style, there is an assumption by some that many youth are in fact performing poverty, as was discussed earlier in relation to respondent's identifications with East Vancouver. Poverty has become a style, a performance, and/or or something to aspire to. It is not surprising then, that bars along Vancouver's DTES such as the *Balmoral* have become popular with indie youth. Echoing such previously expressed sentiments, one interviewee claimed that the indie scene is comprised of:

Some middle-class kids pretending to be poor because it's cool (7-1).

Another interviewee linked economic status to city location, stating that it is West Side kids that aspire to be from East Vancouver, thus inverting dominant capitalist values. She stated that the indie scene was comprised of:

> Like upper-middle-class or sort of like East Van middle-class…. but I think we're at an age where it's kind of levelled out a bit. It's not really about how much money your parents had or where you grew up but, I mean it's the kids who grew up on the West Side that are trying so hard to be East Van anyway.
>
> *Why do you think that is?*
>
> I don't know (16-5).

The romantic performance of poverty (to be cool, dangerous, edgy, and exotic) certainly exists, however, what is not acknowledged by these respondents is that the fashion of poverty is also based on the actuality that many key Vancouver indie persons who hold significant subcultural capital (through, for instance, their artistic abilities) are themselves of lower socio-economic status, and live in poorer neighbourhoods due to necessity. Bettie (2000:11) suggests there is an anxiety felt by those who participate in 'class passing,' meaning those who acquire the social characteristics to enable upward mobility. Many of the interviewees' statements in this chapter indicate that there is also a different form of anxiety in relation to class-passing, an anxiety that those who represent themselves as lower-class are often enacting a class-passing in the reverse (enacting down-ward mobility). As Goode and Maskovsky (2001) have expressed, in conjunction with neoliberal discourses, people are increasingly stigmatized and blamed for living in poverty; while the actuality of poverty is seen as a *lifestyle choice*. Poor and working-class people from East Vancouver must also deal with such stereotypes. So entrenched (on an individual, societal and academic level) is this neoliberal rhetoric that within Vancouver's indie scene itself, such stereotypes (poverty as choice) persist. Consequently many indie youth interviewed for this study, who are not pretending to be poor, also have to negotiate with and often challenge disavowing discourse on a day-to-day basis.

Further, this individualization of 'lifestyle choices,' present in interviewee responses and neoliberal rhetoric begins to sound similar (perhaps unwittingly) to some contemporary subcultural accounts. For instance, Bennett's (1999) study of urban dance-music cultures notes the fluidity of the associations between contemporary young people and their consumer choices, locating what he terms 'neo-tribal formations' to a matter of individual choice rather than to affinities of race, class or gender. Carrington and Wilson, though acknowledging Bennett's

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attempt to shift away from traditional youth studies' tendency to link subcultural participation as response to collective marginalization, point out that the concept of choice itself is always implicated in social class (as Bourdieu maintains):

> [O]ne of the key omissions from such accounts is any extended discussion of social class and its relevance in framing the taste cultures that consumption allows. In other words, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact that 'consumer choice is highly constructed' (Tomlinson, 1990, p.13). Not everybody is 'free to choose' their neo-tribal identities in the same way, and those very 'choices' are often determined in a complex way by forms of social capital in the first instance, which in turn reveal patterns that can be traced back to broader (structurally conditioned) identities. (2004: 70)

The performance of class (through spatial and embodied practice) does several things. It works to obscure class-based social realities; for if class is assumed to be a performance, then it can be dismissed as a matter of choice rather than circumstance. The performance of class, however, can help to conceptualize class as performative. As previously mentioned in relation to Bourdieu, institutionalized inequality creates classed subjects that are expected to perform accordingly, through a stylized repetition of acts that are reiterative and constitutive of the subject.[48] This citation is dependant upon social relations that give it cultural authority through shared understanding. However, when authority is shifted, when the performance of class is obviously mimicked, class-based norms have the potential to be displaced, to be understood as something that is not internal or innate, but rather structural. By parodying dominant norms, norms (likened to habitus) can become ultimately revealed as conventions, as socially constituted. This is not to say that "white flirtations with alterity" (Saldahna 2007: 17) are subversive — rather, that it ultimately works to reaffirm power structures while simultaneously revealing the conscious project of reinventing oneself (e.g., the work of becoming: white, bourgeois). Theorizing class as performative, however, should not be conflated with

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[48] This can be likened to Bourdieu's analysis of class-based preferences for food, which constitute the subject by producing the body as classed.

voluntarism. For many indie youth from East Vancouver, dance parties are playful spaces that allow participants to create and define for themselves what it means to be from East Vancouver (rather than have it/them be determined primarily from without) and to reveal a sense of pride in a stigmatized area of the city.

Though subcultural capital is inverted within Vancouver's indie scene in terms of status (familiarity with spaces and some visual markers associated with the lower-classes are more esteemed than familiarity with markers associated with dominant and/or the upper classes), this subcultural capital does not necessarily translate into symbolic or economic capital within the larger culture. Indie youth remain situated in Canada's social order whereby the social privilege of the dominant culture is preserved and legitimized. For example, mobile and middle-class youth can perform poverty in a different way than those restricted by the materiality of it and are able to leave the East Side of Vancouver with ease.

As previously noted, though some participants expressed a marked ambivalence with regards to the topic of social class in general, more than half of the interviewees in this study identified as working-class. With Vancouver's indie scene becoming more visible and commercialized, these demographics, of course, remain in flux; while such processes may, in part, account for some youths' fears of others 'pretending to poor.' There is a strong sentiment that entertainment spaces which have been adopted by indie youth too often or too quickly become "taken over" by an 'outside' crowd: younger generations, the mainstream, or the "bridge and tunnel" (people from the suburbs). This is in some ways ironic as there is little acknowledgement of or connection to how indie youth's own activities may displace long-term

patrons from the bars they frequent.[49] As the interview responses on East Vancouver identities indicate, the symbolic meanings of space are multiple, rather than singular. East Vancouver is represented by interviewees as a classed space, a space that is simultaneously working-class and part of a middle- and upper-class performance. That East Vancouver is also racialized is left unacknowledged by interviewees.

Indie youths' relationships to city spaces are developed through, among other things, the act of social dancing. Indeed, this spatial and embodied practice shapes participants' understanding of 'East Van.' The everyday practice of dancing within the city of Vancouver is multifaceted and contradictory. Through dancing, indie youth perform what it means to them to be "East Van," and through their spatial practice they reconstitute the spaces they occupy. East Vancouver becomes both a social signifier and a performative, while the practice of social dancing becomes a way to embody place, and city space. The following chapter, "Dancing out of Place," explores the importance embodied experiences hold for Vancouver's indie youth. Interviewees relate their own relationship to the practice of dancing — in East Vancouver and outside of Vancouver's entertainment district.

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[49] This is a larger issue that exceeds the parameters of this study. While indie youth may participate in displacement, this warrants further investigation against the backdrop of larger structural factors, including gentrification.

Fieldnote Excerpt Saturday Night, January 2006, House Dance Party off Main Street

I heard about a house party in East Vancouver, through both a friend and an interviewee. The DJs organizing it were the two young men (the Kids) who, at this point, seem to have a monopoly on Vancouver's indie dance scene, so I knew it would be well attended. I arrived at the medium sized, average looking house in a well-kept neighbourhood near Main Street and 20th Ave. around 11 pm and casually made my way inside.

On the main floor a few people were dancing in the living room (which, like the rest of the house, had little furniture). The music was loud and the room smelled a little like sweat mixed with a faint scent of smoke. Most of the dancers were young women dancing with one another casually while one young man danced with large, expressive, jolting movements alone in the centre of the room. My presence went relatively unnoticed. Most people (what appeared to be a lot of 'white kids' and also a cross-mix of Asian, Aboriginal, black, and South Asian) were scattered throughout the two floors of the house and out on the back lawn socializing, drinking and smoking.

Drinks (beer and vodka high-balls) were being served out of small plastic cups in the neon lighted basement for $4, though it was fine to bring your own as well. People were standing around this room chatting and in this relaxed atmosphere I took the opportunity to look around. Many of the young women were dressed informally in somewhat disheveled t-shirts, off-the-shoulder shirts, ruffled (likely second-hand) blouses, and layered tank tops, with cut off jean shorts or tight-tapered jeans tucked into wrinkly leather boots, or runners. Many of the young men and women sported messy long, shaggy hair. The men's clothing consisted of mainly well-worn jeans, t-shirts and runners with a few blazers or button down shirts and/or sweat headbands thrown in. Very casual. There were also a few 'hiphop' kids in baggy pants

and shirts and (oddly) trucker hats (this crew seemed younger than the rest, perhaps late teens while the majority of those present seemed to be in their early to mid twenties, and a few in their thirties). Overall there was less of a 'rock' crowd than some other parties I had attended previously, perhaps because this party was located closer to the West Side. Everyone seemed friendly and I spotted many regulars from similar dance parties. At this point the party very quickly became packed.

The living room, in particular, became so crowded with dancers that I could hardly move and had to dance squished up against the wall until the momentum of an impromptu moshpitt (amusingly retro with this crowd) led me without will to the middle of the room. Despite my distaste for moshing, I couldn't help but laugh at my inability to control my actions due to the crowd's momentum — everyone else seemed to be laughing too. Though squished, I did not feel physically threatened (i.e. at risk of being groped or pinched). This was much different than my experiences the previous week in the downtown dance club, the Stone Temple, where I had had to literally guard my body and my person (unsuccessfully) from unwanted advances.

The sweaty young woman (or teenager?) I was squished up against kept yelling to her girlfriends to join her and then turning to me and smiling. This lasted for about 15 minutes until the music changed from 'thrash' rifts to 'hiphop.' At this point everyone began dancing on the spot with attention to the syncopated beats and rhythm of their body movement isolations rather than jumping in a wild clump (as they were doing previously). This new dancing style consisted of much less contact with other dancers, although a few dancers did begin to 'grind' with one another (mostly men with women but also a couple of women with women). Shortly after this,

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the police arrived (around 1:30 am) to break up the party. Everyone, including myself, quickly dispersed by means of foot, skateboard or bicycle.

By way of the house party these young people have created their own free space, a space that affords some a safe means to temporarily lose/revisit themselves through bodies, sounds, rhythms, spaces, lights, pleasures, play...dancing. One can understand the dancing at this house party as offering a temporary form of deviation from the reiteration of the norm (through bodily pleasures) or perhaps, conversely as simultaneously reinscribing normative power relations. This is complex, as the mobile body tells us something, through bodily sensation, about identity and place that the eye does not—and vice versa.

CHAPTER 6

DANCING OUT OF PLACE

This body, visceral matter as well as socio-political agent, discontinuous with itself, moving in the folds of time, dissident of time, manifests its agency through the many ways it eventually smuggles its materiality into a charged presence that defies subjection. Dance as critical theory and critical praxis proposes a body that is less an empty signifier (executing preordained steps as it obeys blindly to structures of command) than a material, socially inscribed agent, a non-univocal body, an open potentiality, a force-field constantly negotiating its position in the powerful struggle for its appropriation and control.

André Lepecki (2004: 6)

In an article on dance, Andrew Ward (1997) reflects on how a common walk through the city reveals residues of a multitude of artistic activities; including sounds of music, evidence of drawings and paintings on buildings. Signs of dance, however, remain absent from such an everyday observation of the urban environment: "[D]espite being 'pervasive and intrinsic' to modern industrial societies dance largely remains, or is made invisible," thus dance is 'everywhere yet nowhere' (1997: 3-4). "This means that in coming to terms with dance in the city or anywhere else today we should not be surprised to encounter a deep-rooted reluctance (or inability) to bring dance to focus, even if at the same time 'dance mania' may be 'sweeping the country'" (ibid: 4). It is for this reason that Ward argues that scholarly attention should be directed towards dance in general, and *social dance* in particular, rather than what he terms 'performance dance' or 'anthropological dance,' primarily because of its *accessibility* as a practice.

Further, Ward (1997) asserts that *all* forms of social dance are important. Even though some forms of social dance may seem richer in terms of choreography and inherent meaning, it should not be assumed that other forms have no significance. (He uses break dancing and the phenomenon of drunken uncles dancing at weddings as comparative examples.) What is important about his observation is his insistence that in order to recognize the significance of social dance activities, we have to look beyond analyses which simply attempt to extract narrative meaning out of dance, instead, "we have to begin to think about dance not just as an activity but as a form of life or as a way of being" (ibid.: 18).

Ward locates social dance as a cultural practice that permeates and shapes the city, and is also shaped *by* the city. One reason that the practice of dancing is both complex and significant is because it is through the connection of bodies to space that some identities are constituted. This means that dancing is an experience/practice that is both an internal and external one, subjective and social — that it offers the potential to change both the subject and the spaces we occupy. The experience of dancing participates in a process of becoming (a 'charged presence') which allows for the opening up of new understandings of the world and of one's self.

Not surprisingly, dance and performance have often been attributed utopian and/or romantic qualities (as Mackenrick 2003, McKenzie 1998, and Pratt 2004 point out). Utopic claims have been tempered by discussions of how performance also participates in normative enactments of power (see Butler 1990; McKenzie 1998 & 2000;Vertinsky 1994). Theories of performance and performativity reveal normative as well as transformative enactments of power, exposing dance as a practice that can substantiate and reiterate normative gendered, racialized, class-based and sexualized conventions. However, dance is also an activity that has been used to challenge such social relations, as Turner (1982), Phelan (1993), Desmond (1997,

2000), Muñoz (1997), Foster (1998) and Schechner (2002), to name but a few, have demonstrated. Dance theorists argue that the study of performance and performativity is most useful when rooted in material historical locations. Dance's association with the body risks and invokes discussions of essentialist body claims, yet as dance and performance artists have pointed out, dance performance (as well other performative body practices) can also create a heightened awareness of discriminations located on the body. As an art form, dance does not simply reflect social structures but can also shape them (Novack 1995: 182).

Though the dancer's body is socially inscribed — a dancers' relationship to her/his own body (in space) also opens potential for agency. This is the peculiarity of dance that makes dance both powerful and intriguing: first, it is a bodily practice that is elusive (in its temporality) and also playfully creative. And second, it is a grounded practice that engages with senses typically ignored by scholars, and this allows for a privileging of new forms of knowledge, such as how movement and sense inform our perceptions of place. It is these inter-related qualities that I want to touch upon to explain how, together, they enable dance's 'slippage of containment.' Though I consciously risk being overly romantic, I argue that dancing does have subversive potential, particularly because it is expressed through the body, and bodily pleasure, and because of the peculiarities of the practice. In other words, dance (similar to theatre) can provide some space for deviations from the reiteration of the norm, to challenge cultural mores around race, ethnicity, class, and in this case, sexuality and gender in particular.

Discussions of the tensions of body and presence (temporality) occupy present scholarship on dance and performance studies[50] and draw upon previous works by Derrida and Foucault. In his introduction to his edited book, *Of the Presence of the Body*, André Lepecki (2004) asks:

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[50] See for example: Auslander (1992); Franko (1998); Lepecki (2004); and Phelan (1993).

How does one begin to discuss the visible dancing body (and also the sensual, kinaesthetic body) when its performance (and presence) is always fading into the past? Because in dance, the dancing body is always only temporary, as the performance always ends, the performance is experienced alongside impending absence. Thus there is a marked tension between the body and presence, and how this absence of presence is (re)presented and documented (using various techniques such as coding, photography, film and, in this case, written descriptive accounts). This characteristic, this slippage from containment, is dance's ephemerality — what Lepecki calls: "dance's vanishing presence from the field of representation" (2004: 127).

This elusive quality of dance bears a strong resemblance to the creativeness that Nigel Thrift attributes to dance's unique relation to power. Thrift (1997) argues for the playfulness of dance, stating that such a quality accounts for dance's ability to elude power by neither subverting or confronting axes of control (referenced in Nash 2000: 656). Dance is of interest because it exemplifies a creative aspect of social life. Nash critiques Thrift's stance and rightly so, for, as Foucault (1995) makes plain, the body is always implicated within regimes of power. Yet, what Nash does not address, and what I think is crucial, is that while the *feeling* of freedom and playfulness that dancing can provide, at least temporarily, does not in itself overturn power structures, it can nevertheless be *felt* as a spontaneous act of resistance. As such, it affects individuals and can become part of their sense of self. This feeling, then, attests to the multiple and complex trajectories of power and power relations that Faith (1994), drawing from Foucault, describes, whereby small spontaneous acts of resistance (benign or productive) are enacted simultaneously with acts of power.

The body has been a primary site to think through feminist concerns of 'difference, domination and subversion' (Davis 1997). Offering the dancing body as a specific bodily

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practice in order to more concretely locate their investigations, authors such as Aalten (2004), Desmond (1998; 2001), and Foster (1997) attempt to complicate and, in a sense, transgress more simplistic internal/external bodily binaries. They note the ways that bodies explode these binaries and investigate the social implications of this fluid defiance of hegemonic epistemologies. Detailing the limitations of the tradition of focusing more on the representation of bodies than on actual experiential, material bodies, these authors draw attention to dance as a rich site for body analysis because it is both a material and representational practice. Much recent writings on dance stress that the practice of dancing is one that challenges mind/body divides with 'thinking bodies,' and the examination of dance as a place to integrate body theory has been adopted by some disciplines, particularly performance studies.

We experience the world in, through and with bodies that are ever in motion. Hence movement and movement practices inform our experience of and relationship to place. Place, and ourselves in space, come to be understood through bodily sensation, among other things. Approaching expressions of identity and belonging in East Vancouver through the active and mobile practice of dancing allows for alternate conceptualizations of space, illuminating subjective voices, physical practices and some power dynamics absent from previous analyses of the area. Spinney (2006) supports this view, arguing that though much research has been done on the meaning of place and on the mobile subject, such theorizations tend to be static. Consequently, Spinney calls for a geography of place that emphasizes embodied, active engagements with the landscape and the spatialities that the mobile body generates:

> [T]he focus on 'doing and acting' – the practice of movement and the movement of practice – opens up a space by which to understand how meanings are constructed through and within mobile practice. I contend that the experiences of movement can be seen as constitutive of the meaning and character of a place because of an ongoing dialectic between body and place. Cultures of mobility and ways of being mobile thus become as

constitutive of identity and belonging as any historical and fixed notion of dwelling (Spinney 2006: 5).

A focus on experiences of mobility, in this case dancing, is important because it supersedes western obsessions with the scopic, a privileging of the visual realm. As Luce Irigaray argues, the privileging of sight is part of a masculinist denial of the tactile, and of all other senses (Price and Shildrick 1999: 10). She states: "more than other senses, the eye objectifies and masters. It sets at distance and maintains at a distance" (Irigaray 1978, quoted in Spinney 2006: 14). While indie youths' descriptions of their own dancing experiences do touch on scopic and representational practices, they also privilege alternate experiences of being in the world, that is, embodied ways of knowing and kinaesthetic sensibilities. Kaja Silverman, expanding upon and critiquing Lacanian psychoanalysis, argues that it is not only the assemblage of visual images which shape one's understanding of oneself but also bodily feeling (1996: 14). Bodily sensation, Silverman contends, more social than physiological, is experienced both internally (e.g., muscular sensations) and as a body extended in space (including surface sensations of the skin, i.e. cutaneous). A subject's body comes to be both visually and 'sensationally marked by gender, race, and sexual preference' (ibid.:16-17).

As is outlined in the previous chapter, upon asking interviewees about East Vancouver within the context of social dance, rather than articulating disembodied descriptors of the landscape or neighbourhood, many respondents alluded to embodied experiences of East Vancouver, describing place as something that can be done, qualified by statements such as "I can do it." This is comparable to Spinney's account of mountain biker's enthusiasm for 'doing Mount Verneaux.' Place (the mountain) in Spinney's ethnography, is understood through the process of physical sensation, as something to be done (through bike riding). Understanding indie youth's active participation with the landscape, through dancing, provides an additional

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lens to contemplate how both East Vancouver and indie youth are mutually constituted through physical consciousness.

Though dancing involves the material act of moving in space and time, the creative body in motion remains difficult to capture, as Lepecki (2004) has emphasized. I acknowledge this vanishing presence, 'dance's self-erasure,' as a possibility rather than view this material ephemerality as a lack (as do Franko (1998), Lepecki (2004), and Phelan (1993) among others). Compounding dance's association with ephemerality, dancers often comment that dancing serves to express that which words cannot (Lynch 2005). And this feeling can be exacerbated in the sentiment that something is always lost in the translation from actual dancing to the process of writing about dance. Our bodies (as many dance scholars are quick to point out) are not static, but rather, remain in constant motion. This makes them slippery as they resist 'easy translation into written texts' (Thomas 2003: 153). However, rather than mourn the gap between writing and dance (as Phelan (1993) alludes), and the difficulty of bringing the descriptive sensation and experience of dance to the written page, I want to revel in dance's proposed ability to "resist scopic control in its temporality" (Lepecki 2004: 128), and attempt to write along with this ephemeral trait rather than against it, as Lepecki suggests (ibid: 132). Grossberg articulates that descriptive translations of dancing are necessary:

> if we are to understand the importance of dancing to rock and roll fans (for many fans, the need to dance is as powerful as the music itself, and someone who does not dance, or at least move with the music, is prima facie not a fan), and the real sense of power that it gives them (Pete Townshend of the Who is purported to have said once that while rock and roll won't get rid of your blues, it will let you dance all over them), we must find ways of describing its affective empowering relations to the fans (1997: 87).

I have dealt with this difficult though necessary task of translation by drawing primarily upon dancers' verbal responses to dancing, in an effort to capture interviewees' sensory knowledge, as they understand it. I have supplemented this to a lesser extent with my own

participant observation and the inclusion of some visual materials throughout the thesis as a whole. For Phelan (1993), performance indicates the possibility of re-evaluating emptiness (exploring something which is gone, which occurs in the present only to exist in the past). Thus the performative variability of memory, sight and experience can also be a strength rather than a fault. It is not the presence/action of dancing itself that is remembered by participants in this study, nor that I am necessarily concerned with, but their re-evaluation of their experiences. Although in what follows I provide some description of dancing, the visuality of dance is not entirely my focus, rather, I am concerned with what dancing means to those involved. This remains a documentation of dancing, a trace, as it were, of bodies in time and space.

Ward (1997) urges us to not ask what this social dance or dancing means, as such a question isolates the dance from its context and mistakenly characterizes meaning as both static and stable. Instead, he contends that "…social dance meaning resides not so much in this or that dance as in dancing *per se*" (ibid.: 18-19) and therefore, "We have to try to grasp what dance means from those who are at the sites of this meaning" (ibid.: 19). This is a subjective perspective, he claims, that is too often absent in sociological and cultural analysis. I aim to address this absence by privileging indie participants' own experiences of dancing. Cultural geographer, Catherine Nash (2000), warns that attempts to rethink the body (only) through experiential accounts of dancing risk falling prey to depoliticized, individualist and/or overly romantic tropes. Indeed, dance is culturally learned and located, as Nash (2000) and dance theorists such as Desmond (1997), Foster (1998), and Savigliano (1995) remind us. And though social dancing may feel or be expressed as spontaneous movement or unfettered expression, it is a highly stylized, codified, historically specific and learned aesthetic. For instance, as previous chapters have related, coming to (the) dance (party) requires the ability to be 'in the know,' a

certain amount of (sub)cultural capital, and a certain adherence and/or subscription to collective codes (both social and physical). Dance movement within the indie scene also follows certain flows, trends and styles, such as what was described by interviewees as a 'nihilistic' dance trend in the early stages of this study.

In what follows, I begin with a brief description of the dance styles popular at hipster dance parties during the outset of this study in order to provide some sense of the dancing image in the mind's eye. Moving from external to the internal (while recognizing the permeability of these borders), interviewees relate their feeling of competence, skill and mobility that dance provides for them. It is through the experience of these characteristics, I argue, that dancers have the potential to gain a stronger sense of self, particularly for women whose bodies, in western history, have been represented physically as both overflowing in crude materiality and as lacking (in relation to male bodies). In other words, in an effort to intertwine self and other, the woman dancer struggles against a culturally imposed identity of "all-body or no-body" (Brown 1997: 133). Dance, I then maintain, as non-discursive communicative expression and as a non-dualistic thinking and active bodily practice, has the potential to build community and belonging through kinaesthetic sensibilities. This sentiment is tempered by an interrogation of interviewees' experience of various social constraints placed upon them as social dancers and the familiarity, for example, of the heteronormative gaze — referencing earlier chapters and essentially bringing the study full circle. However, though bodies are inscribed by various oppressive social practices, they are rarely simply passive receptors of such structures. Women interviewees, in particular, stress that though there may be an (implied) audience that constitutes their performance, they ultimately dance for themselves, and feel empowered by this practice.

Dance theorist Ann Albright relates two specific ways in which the dancing body produces meaning:

> ...[D]ance comprises what I see as a double movement of representation in which bodies are both producing and being produced by cultural discourses of gender, race, ability, sexuality, and age. I argue that this double movement allows for a slippage between what I call somatic identity (the experience of one's physicality) and a cultural one (how one's body renders meaning in society) (Albright 1997: xxiii).

Meaning produced for and by Albright's dancing body remains in a state of flux, in tension between the representational and embodied, and this slippage is an indication of dance's 'open potentiality'. Because "[d]ancing bodies simultaneously produce and are produced by their own dancing," the body is always in a process of becoming (ibid: 3). Drawing attention to the significance of the ambiguities of everyday dance practices, this text aims to make visible the act of dancing as a playful, creative and joyful activity that permeates a neighbourhood, East Vancouver, more often defined in negative terms. Interviewees' experiences with both dancing itself and the activity of coming to dance suggest a 'geography of embodiment, performativity and play' (Nash 2000: 656).
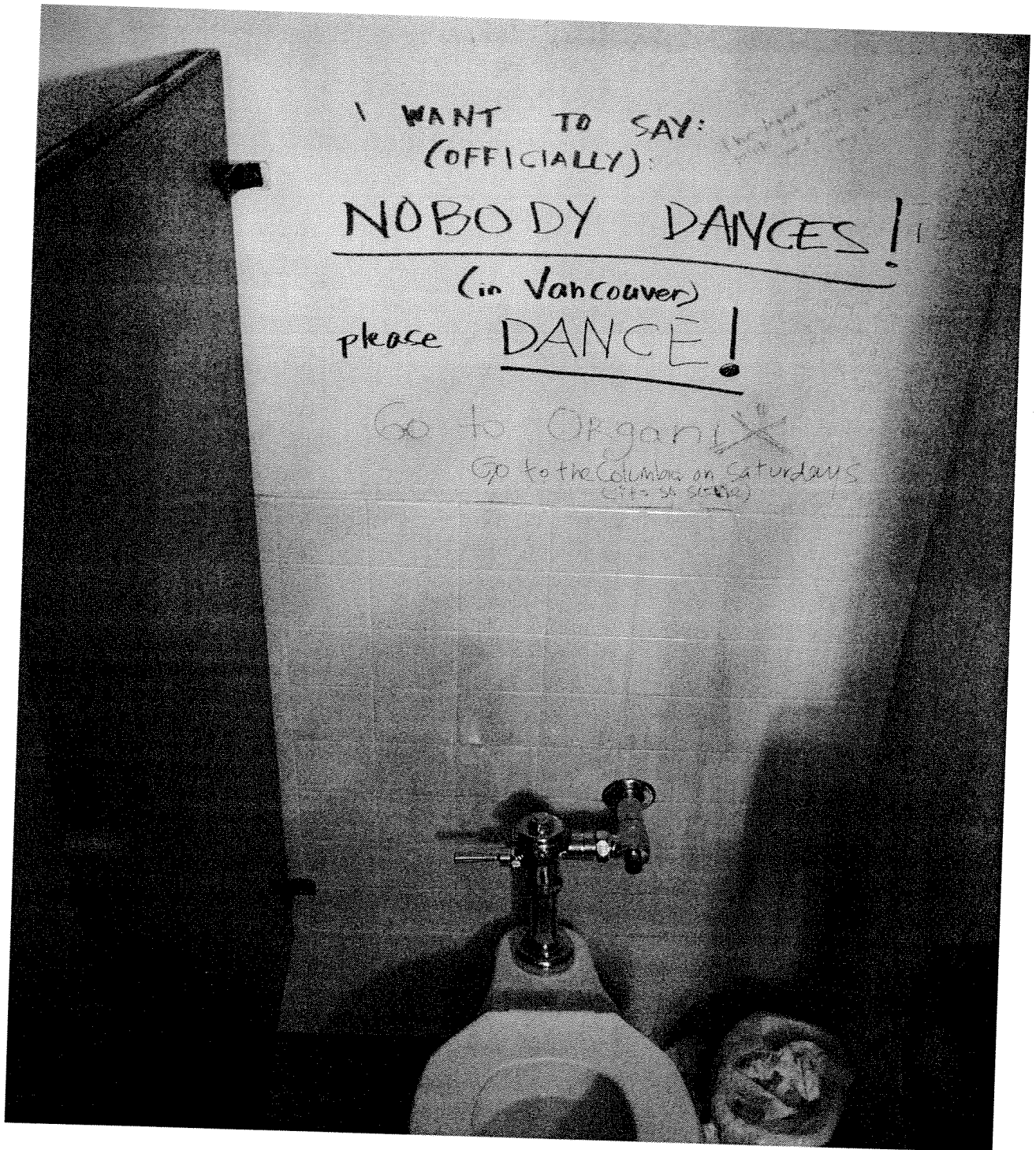
Figure 6-1. Nobody Dances! (in Vancouver). Go to *The Columbia* on Saturdays (it's so scene), the *Media Club*, 2006.

'That was very much a room full of seizures'

Unlike the graffiti scrawled on the club wall of a women's washroom in Figure 6-1, which publicly laments that "nobody dances in Vancouver." dancing remains a dominant nightlife practice for young adult women and men in the indie scene. Looking closely below this statement, someone has acknowledged this plea for a dancing community ("please dance!") and made a counter reply: "Go to the Columbia on Saturdays (it's so scene)." Dancing does happen, but one needs to know where it takes place and exactly when. One needs to be 'in the know.' At the time that the photograph is taken, the *Columbia*, this East Vancouver bar, is not 'happening' on other nights, at least not for the indie community, though it certainly remains open for its other, more regular and often more marginalized patrons during the rest of the week. The bracketed addition advises (or rather cautions) that, if wanting to dance, one must know how to come to, and be in, the dance party. It suggests that social dancing and all other conduct associated with it, is highly stylized and, as part of a 'scene,' is perhaps not the unconstrained free-wheeling practice that the initial commentator appears to desire, a desire that remains intimately entwined with dance.

When this study began, one popular style of social dancing within the indie scene could be characterized as slightly nihilistic (if one were to generalize). Black was the dominant clothing colour and long shaggy hair on both men and women was tossed about the dirty dance floor with dramatic rapid shakes, following the trajectories of their shaking, jumping bodies. Though this movement trend later shifted, the dance floor for a time was dominated by awkward, pointy, quick and jerky movements enacted by both men and women — performed perhaps as a tribute to early post-punk aesthetics. By employing the term nihilistic I am referring to body movement and attitude that gestures towards the rejection of safe stable movement; I am also referring to a

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particular way of being in the world, and where no specific physical action seems preferable to any other. [51] Interestingly, while this dance style allows for a particular form of 'freedom' in terms of non-conventional movement, it also paradoxically confines or restricts movement choices, as one must adhere to this particular dance style if they want to participate within this movement trend.

One young woman described her own style of dancing as influenced by both British new-wave/glam/punk/pop icon, David Bowie, in a 1986 film, and a particular style of 'seizure' dancing that was briefly popularized in Vancouver's indie scene, stating:

> My dancing? You know how David Bowie dances in *Labyrinth* [1986]? [laughter] You like how I actually thought about it? Yeah probably, that's definitely the origin of it. Oh there's a little bit of weird seizure dance that hipsters do only because, you know when you're around someone for long enough you pick up their mannerisms…. That whole hipster seizure thing was, it's not so much anymore but for a while it was like, really entertaining to watch. Yeah, like "No Disco" [a Vancouver dance night]. Do you remember that…? That was very much a room full of seizures (16-2).

When asked how she would describe her dancing another young woman laughed and simply stated,

> Wild…. Like I would have a camera with me and I would just be going crazy just bumping into people and stuff (20-3).

Similarly, in a useful comparison between folk dance and indie dance, another woman linked the latter with 80's new-wave culture and characterized the movement as one of abandon, but more recently executed as abandonment with an edge:

> Well at *The Columbia* people seem to just throw themselves around. But I think some people try to be more new-wave now-a-days, like what used to be new-wave in the '80s. It's definitely a contrast to, say, something you'd imagine as folk dancing, like someone dancing at a folk festival or something, you know, where they're free and their arms are going and that kind of thing and it's no big deal, they're not worried about whose

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[51] One Vancouver indie dance party was actually named Nihilist Party 2006.

watching. This is definitely more, there's more thought in it, in their moves, how they're executed, they're more precise I would say. Less 'flowy,' for sure. Definitely trying to have an edge to it (23).

A male participant also links indie dance style with an aesthetic of abandon. He explains:

> Common dance styles? Ermmm... regardless of style, I think "deliberately unselfconsciousness" would be a good way to characterize it. Lots of flailing, "creative" moves, hehehe. I'm not trying to say people aren't self conscious, probably quite the opposite— it's more that they want to seem like they don't give a fuck. Devil may care, you know? Plus there's some heavy boozing that factors in, so a lack of self-awareness is going to stem from that as well (25-1).

Another young woman prefers to emanate a sense of cool when dancing rather than flail about as some of the other respondents describe:

> Oh my Goodness. Um, [I dance] aloof, probably now. Yeah definitely aloof and not too, I just like close confinement, like my arms aren't out all over the place, I just try not to bump into a lot of people so I kind of just kinda keep to my own personal space I guess and it's pretty, yeah it's pretty aloof (17-3).

The following male participant described his dancing technique in relation to the cultural trend of mod (dance/music/style), stating:

> Sort of inspired by a sixties old man sort of dancing or mod sort of stuff. Real simple, sort of short little quick steps and then not too much motion like flailing around or anything, pretty reserved. But I try to look stylish and stay to the beat, you know. Or move to the offbeat when it's appropriate (11-2).

One woman recounts the way her dancing style has changed over time and according to what music is most dominant. She notes that her dance style has moved from more of a mod aesthetic (similar to the above statement), to a more flamboyant expression to currently a more reserved style of movement:

> It's actually really changed in the last little bit. I've always come from more of a mod side of things. When I first started going out as a young person, younger than I am now, it was always to more of a mod scene, sixties northern soul, Motown, British pop all of that stuff. So that style of dancing is a lot different than say dancing to electronica or something.

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More I guess two-step and it's a little more reserved, it's not as flamboyant, more simple keeping of the rhythm with say a snap of the finger on the side of your leg or something like that. And so I'd say like a year ago my dancing would be more flamboyant, a little more outrageous like I was talking about earlier but lately I seem to just kind of do whatever it is I want. I'm not too worried. I'm definitely not trying to look like other people. And maybe it's because I haven't really gotten my dance on in a long time like I used to but, yeah probably a little bit more reserved now, not as out there with it or getting into it as I used to (23-2.3).

Her connection between electronic music and a more flamboyant dance movement is a reference to the electro clash music that was briefly popularized in Vancouver and spearheaded the more nihilistic (seizure) style of dancing which was referred to earlier.

Another woman describes popular body movement but links it also to a popular indie hairstyle consisting of long shaggy bangs — suggesting that fashion and attitude influence the dance. She states:

It's all like indie rock, like heel tapping, knee bending, all from like the mid and a lot of 'we all have big long bangs and we're flipping them around' and it works with being sweaty and whatever (12-6).

The dancing body here (similar to the rock and roll body described by Grossberg (1997: 52)) is a site for the inscription of subcultural difference through bodily practices such as attitude, clothing and style.

Gaining a sense of self through competence, skill and mobility

Dancing is an embodied experience and involves thinking/moving bodies. When asked why they danced, most interviewees claimed that they danced for enjoyment. Upon further enquiry about what it was that they enjoyed about dancing, a variety of responses ensued. One young woman comments,

Yes I enjoy the dancing.... It makes me feel freeeee! And I'm really good at it (laughter). It's one of the only things I really like doing.

Why do you like doing it?

> I like it for the exercise, and I really like music and I like the way it makes you feel: like when you like dancing and you know how to do it it's really easy and makes you feel happy.... Because since I was little it was the one thing that always made me feel really good (10-2).

The above quote reveals not only one woman's strong sense of self, based on her dancing skill,

but also expresses her pleasure with her own body movement. Similarly, another woman

expresses a sense of physical confidence through dancing. She states,

> Yes, I love going out dancing. Dancing is one of the few things that I can do that doesn't make me feel shy or closed down and I feel like, I feel energized by it. I find exercise really hard but dancing is a form of exercise that just feels like very natural (1-1,2).

Many interviewees, such as the following woman, enjoyed dancing and expressed that they

considered themselves to be good dancers:

> Yeah [I'm a good dancer]. I don't know. Cause I like doing it. I do it whether there're people there or not. I dance at home a lot as well and that's kind of how I have a good time. And I trained in dance for a long time but I don't know if that had anything to do with it at this point. It's just having a sense of humour about it (12-3).

In determining her dancing ability, one young woman acknowledged that how others perceived

her was a factor, but emphasized that she based her skill on her own level of enjoyment. She

stated:

> Yeah I think so [I'm a good dancer].

> *Why?*

> I guess because people say that, like I've been told that. But also I think that a good dancer is just someone who is enjoying themselves when they dance, that comes across. (18-2).

Similarly, many young men revealed a sense of pride in their dancing ability:

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I don't know, I didn't take lessons or learn any steps so I guess it's kind of free-form. It's not like wild and crazy or anything but I don't know. I mean I've been a musician for a long time, I definitely have rhythm so, I think I dance fairly well for somebody who hasn't paid that much attention to technique (13-2).

When asked how he danced another young man exclaimed that he was an excellent dancer. His statement also reveals that his personal experience of dancing is also mediated by the expectations and value structures of his social context — he is interested in how other people perceive him, and thus turns the question around to myself (in my capacity as a dancer):

> Excellent! [Long pause]. How would you describe my dancing? I saw [Vancouver-based visual artist] Derek Root the other day and he said I was electric on the dance floor (21-2).

A different young man suggests that he is also confident in his movement ability. He discusses actual body parts when commenting on his dancing skill, something few interviewees did. Being a bit tongue in cheek he states,

> I think I'm pretty good. I think I'm about seven and a half out of ten.
>
> *And what makes you say that?*
>
> Well I've got some Latin type moves, the shoulders and I don't know, I think I'm a pretty musical person. I can understand the basics of music, rhythm and melody and all that (14-2,3).

Not surprisingly, there is a strong consensus on the fact that the activity of dancing is fun. One aspect that marks dancing as a fun activity is the element of performing a skill. Through the use of their skill, dancers are empowered. Female respondents revealed satisfaction with their body movement capabilities and seemed secure with their dance ability. Geraldine Pratt (2003: 19-26) (expanding upon Butler's theory of bounded corporeality to include a spatial analysis grounded in materiality) outlines some of the gendered differences in environmental experience, spatial relationships, and bodily practices that are maintained through the reiteration of gender

norms. Aligning herself with Iris Marion Young (1990), Pratt contends that the socialization of women and girls to adhere to gendered norms of bodily comportment affects their sense of physical competence and ability. As noted above, women interviewees express confidence in their dance skill and expansive comportment. Therefore, while the every day practice of social dancing is a corporeal practice that enacts reiterations of gendered spatial norms, it also offers, in this case, a gap in which to destabilize some of these reiterations, providing some women with a spatial freedom, and mobility, typically demonstrated by boys and men.

Significantly, some women in this study connect their sense of physical competence to their use of space and mobility. One woman stated:

> Sometimes I really like being the only person on the dance floor if I feel like, not like showing off, but, I don't mind that everyone's going to be looking at me and other times you just want to blend in and just like, but if it's too crowded probably not because *there's no room for your big moves* (10-2, emphasis added).

In the same way, another young woman alluded to the usage of large amounts of space as part of her dance practice:

> It depends on the mood I'm in. Sometimes I've felt like not dancing at all and thinking that I've wanted to because it just feels completely uncomfortable and boring and because I, because it's not really about coordination but it's about caring about something, or having some hang up about people seeing you dancing. *And then other nights I just totally want to pick up a hundred feet of space and do knee slides.* So I think a lot of it depends on mood (12-3, emphasis added).

Both of the above interviewees reveal a desire for and a confidence in the action of expansive movement in their dance: with 'big moves,' using 'a 'hundred feet of space,' and by doing 'knee slides,' traits more commonly associated with masculine postures (Pratt 2003: 23). Exploring feminine body experience and bodily comportment, Iris Marion Young argued that women, in their 'ordinary purposive orientation,' tend to use less space than that which is available to them (1990: 143). Young noted that women's and girl's perceptions of their bodies

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and space were due to cultural conditioning (contingent upon contemporary notions of what it means to be feminine) rather than to physical restraints or strength. Because women are always made aware of their bodies (as a fragmented object), they are less likely to use their full bodies, to move through their bodies or to get lost in their movement the way men do. Situating her analysis in ˈcontemporary advanced industrial, urban, and commercial societyˈ, she also cautions that gender norms which structure femininity do not encompass all women, her focus is the ˈfeminine existenceˈ outside of which many women fall; this includes working-class woman, poor women and women of colour who have historically used their bodies for labour as women whose movement does not conform to norms of bourgeois femininity. Limited uses of space, mobility and comportment evidenced in the purposive actions of women also were not expressly experienced by the women in this study when dancing. Rather, most women interviewees in my study testified that they *did* tend to ˈlose themselvesˈ while dancing and also indicated confidence in their own physical skill and utilizations of space and mobility.

Dance as communication and expression

While numerous interviewees revealed a strong sense of pride in their dancing ability, respondents also commented that one pleasurable aspect of dance is that it is an alternative medium for communication and expression. Although they characterize (and appreciate) the activity of dancing as non-verbal, they do not characterize dance as a medium for an unthinking body. One woman stated,

> It just feels good to move to the music and it's a release and it's exercise and it's just a fun way to express yourself when you're enthusiastic about something (11-1).

Another woman noted that dancing allows for an alternative form of social engagement and communication,

Sometimes it feels a little awkward because I'm, when I was younger I used to be able to go out and dance the night away and I find now I have a really hard time doing it. Like I feel really awkward and kind of like... but sometimes when I do it, it just feels really fun and free and just like, you know if you're with friends you're engaging with friends in a different way rather than talking with them or like drinking with them. You're engaging with them in a different way, which is kind of cool. And, yeah it's fun, and you know, if the music's good it's a way to kind of I guess articulate how much you like the music (17-2).

Dance is always grounded in history and experienced in relation to the cultural, geographic, social and political environment. The following woman, for example, described dancing as a form of musical expression, while also linking her enjoyment of dancing to an early 1980s dance film, acknowledging that her dance style is rooted in contemporary western popular culture:

What do I like [about dancing]? I just had this moment of *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun* and Sara Jessica Parker is dancing. Have you seen that? Oh obviously, sorry.... Sara Jessica Parker is standing in front of the class and she takes off her shoe and she's like 'I love to dance!' So it just reminded me of that. *I like dancing because it's my musical expression.* I don't have any other musical expression. I can't sing at all, I can't play instruments, although I haven't tried really hard but I don't have an aptitude. And, to be honest, I don't even like listening to music when it's not the point. I don't like it as background, I have to dance to it or watch someone perform or listen to it as the point. So it's my musical expression. And it makes me so happy, I don't know! (4-2, emphasis added).

Significantly she points out that dancing provides her with a needed form of musical expression and, importantly, this makes her feel happy. One man noted that dancing offered him a medium to communicate things which he found inexpressible in linguistic terms:

Oh it's [dancing's] really fun. It's, I don't want to say cathartic but it's, you know when you're in a really good mood or a really bad mood nothing can kind of, it really helps I guess to just go out and let loose and get kind of crazy and probably not really be a big deal and everyone's having fun and everyone's there for pretty much the same reason which is just to have fun and stuff. It's just really good, I've always liked it.

Why?

Dancing? I don't know. I guess maybe it's like *you can't always express yourself verbally all the time so you just have to do it physically.* I don't want to say it's like a last resort,

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but it's a really nice resort when you're feeling either really good or really bad, in my case anyway (17-2, emphasis added).

For many of the interviewees, dance was expressed as a form of non-verbal communication. However, the following woman enjoyed dancing for a wide range of reasons; she found dancing to be both sensual and expressive. Interestingly, dancing for her also falls outside of consumer culture:

> I love moving to music. I like a variety of music so I like moving my body differently to different kinds of music. And it feels good, it's a good release. *It can feel sensual or it can feel like ridiculous or it can feel elegant... There's just such a range of emotions you can convey through movement* and it's always changing. Like even if you're moving to the same music all night you can kind of change the way you're moving to it and it's just a great way to express yourself without...you don't need the aid of anything other than just the music. *You don't need to buy anything, you don't need to consume anything, you're just being in the moment* (3-2 emphasis added).

This comment, which positions pleasure and dance as apart from consumer culture and as a temporal enactment, as 'being in the moment,' gestures towards Peggy Phelan's articulations of dance and performance as non-reproductive. Peggy Phelan argues that no two performances are the same; that "performance in a strict ontological sense is non-reproductive" (1993: 148). According to Phelan, because performance exists only in the present, it is difficult for it to be part of the reproductive economy, thus somewhat accounting for performance's general low status. Performance becomes itself through disappearance, through its shift from a presence to an absence. Thus it elides reproduction's discursive claims of validity and accuracy (Phelan 1993: 147). "The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance; it rehearses and repeats the disappearance of the subject who always longs to be remembered" (ibid.: 147). This non-reproducible quality that marks performance as independent from circulations of capital (and the reproduction of technology) is, according to Phelan, performance's greatest strength (ibid.: 149). Although McKenzie (1998) argues that such an interpretation has the potential to be

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overly romantic and Chatterton and Hollands (2003) highlight how dance establishments

participate in the nightlife economy, comments made by interviewees seem to support Phelan's

analysis.

While for many interviewees, dance is understood as communicative, other respondents

paradoxically described dancing as a form of withdrawal from communication. One man

commented that the context (the lights and music etc.) help to create a desired mood of

anonymity,

> I guess it's a release, physical release and I don't know, it's just fun, the loud music, the
> lights and whatnot and you're kind of anonymous, you don't look awkward dancing. You
> look more awkward not dancing (14-2).

There is a sense of anonymity in the practice of social dancing, which certainly plays with

visual/sexualized understandings of dance. Another woman stated dance allowed her to gain a

sense of freedom without the efforts of verbal expression,

> It's [dancing's] euphoric. I think it does make you feel good, like doing exercise, I think if
> you dance a lot you get that same feeling and that's what I really love about it. And I love
> music so I love to dance to music.... And I think it has to do with endorphins or whatever
> that you get if you were exercising but I think that's why people enjoy it. Like a lot of
> people like dancing. And also when you are at a bar or a club sometimes the music's so
> loud you just don't want to talk to people and those people that you're sitting with you've
> known for ten years, so why not just go and dance. *And then you won't have to talk to
> anybody, just go and let loose* (2-2, emphasis added).

She describes a feeling of freedom in her dance, a form of 'letting loose' that other interviewees

describe as 'escapist.' Rather than referring to a negative experience, escapism here is described

by interviewees as a means of being in the moment, as being content with oneself at one time

and place, no longer concerned with how one is perceived by outside observers, hence gaining a

sense of self ... through the intimacy of anonymity and pleasure. Significantly, escapism is

described as grounded in the body, through the dance, rather than as an ephemeral activity. In a

similar vein, another woman attributes an escapist element to dance, comparing it to the escapism of drug use:

> It's escapist. It's like drugs. 'Cause dancing's no fun when you're thinking about it. You know when you're dancing and your like 'ahh I look like a dork' or when you're not quite on the rhythm or.... it's like if you smoke weed and go dancing you can get a little too, not lost in it, a little too analytical. But I love the fact that you can forget that you're like basically doing aerobic exercise for hours on end and your feet don't hurt until you walk out of the bar and all of a sudden you realise that 'my feet are fuckin' killing me' and they have been for an hour but *it's just a complete vacation.*
>
> *And do you usually dance alone, with a partner, or in a group?*
>
> Either. I've been known to just disappear (16-2).

This interviewee and others are 'lost' in the motion; they inhabit the present through their emotions and senses. As part of her representational and embodied approach to dance, Anna Aalten (2004) includes emotion, "the moment when it all comes together" (as her essay is appropriately titled), as something that should be accounted for in the study of the dancing body. This, I think, is a necessary and poignant inclusion as it gestures towards the ability, that Albright (1997) emphasizes: some women dancers find through dance other means of empowerment and strength within their own subjective bodies regardless of their participation in objectifying, oppressive modes of dance. The seemingly different, yet congruous emotions of 'being in the moment' and on 'complete vacation' are also described as a form of clarity of thought, akin to reason.

Significantly, the following quote integrates the concept escapism with clarity of thought. This is particularly interesting because the interviewee challenges a mind/body dichotomy by suggesting a thinking body. She states,

> I guess it's [dancing's] fun, it feels good, feels good to do something physical, *your mind can wander a little bit, and you can think*, sometimes you can have nice clarity of thought in a weird kind of way. You can check out other people and look at other people, see what they're doing, I don't know (8-2, emphasis added).

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Thus escapism can simultaneously be part of an absence/presence, embodied physically, mentally and sensually. While many interviewees found that dancing itself provided a necessary form of communication, emotion and escapism, others, less commonly, needed the influence of alcohol to counter their reserve. One woman expressed the fact that she needed a couple of drinks in order to feel comfortable enough to dance and finds people who interfere with her dancing disruptive:

Yeah. Sometimes there's a three-drink minimum before I hit the dance floor.

When you enjoy dancing, why do you enjoy it?

Good music and good atmosphere and you know, like a party a house party or in a bar.

And what makes you not enjoy dancing?

Well…I don't know. I guess because of people that are being obtrusive or I don't know, or the atmosphere is not good I guess (19-2).

Though my question was meant to refer to movement, the above respondent immediately interpreted it as referring to environment and equated her enjoyment of dancing to a place rather than motion. In general, the indie community with whom she dances provides her with a pleasurable environment for dancing precisely because is it safe from 'obtrusive' people associated more with the Granville Strip, as was discussed in Chapter Three. Although a simple misunderstanding, her comment also reveals the difficulty of talking about the sensations of movement. Thus alcohol may provide her with the means to enjoy her physical self, in a way from which she is perhaps otherwise dissociated. Conversely, the following woman seems to use alcohol as an enhancement to her dancing ability rather than as an un-inhibitor. When asked what dancing felt like, the young woman stated:

Depends how drunk I am or who I'm dancing with too.

Can you say more?

Sweatyyyyy. [laughter- draws the word out]. Pretty much just fun, you know (20-1).

This is interesting as 'breaking a sweat' is not commonly attributed to contemporary forms of normative femininity. Though Bordo (1995) draws attention to the phenomenon of contemporary work-out culture in which sweat can signify progress towards some women's desires for thin and disciplined bodies, this interviewee's reference to sweatiness seems more to coincide with a desire to represent herself as unrestrained and boundless rather than as physically disciplined.

Kinaesthetic energy and community

While some interviewees associated drinking with the activity of dancing, many people also stated that they do not drink at all at dance parties; instead, they indicated that it was the 'vibe' felt from the crowd that loosened their inhibitions to dance. One man acknowledged that drinking alcohol can be an expectation but chooses to play with such assumptions. He also describes the kinaesthetic energy that one can feel when dancing around other people. When asked why he enjoyed dancing he stated,

> I don't know, because it's fun. It's good, it feels good. It is a hard one. Well I used to think that in order for me to dance I would have to be really drunk but that led to a bunch of really nasty hangovers. So I started going out and dancing and not drinking and everybody just assumes you're drinking. 'Wow, he's having an awesome time, he must be shit-faced.' But the more fun you have, the more fun everyone else has around you. Like I can go out and if other people aren't dancing I'm not about to start dancing.

> *You vibe off each other?*

> Yeah, yeah for sure. Any dance floor you go on you're influenced by everyone around you (22-2).

Obviously, social dancing is a social activity. Like the previous respondent, many interviewees found dancing with others particularly encouraging and enjoyed feeding off of the kinaesthetic

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energy dancing together produces. Kinaesthetic energy creates an ad hoc and temporary

affiliation with other dancers.

One woman was very surprised (and even a bit resistant to comment) when asked what

dancing feels like. She exclaimed,

> What does it feel like? Good? No it's good, it's kind of one of those feelings where you're
> like, if it's good you know you're at a house party or something and everyone's dancing
> and singing along to 'Total Eclipse of the Heart' or whatever. And you feel on top of the
> world, you know (19-2).

The respondent implies more than she says here, for example, the use of the word 'everyone'

speaks to a sense of communal/mutual synergistic enjoyment as well as a sense of kinaesthetic

connection. The following woman also relates her own feelings of dance to those around her:

> It's [dancing's] like when you go, when I ride my bicycle or when I work out, I guess
> your body releases something when you move right and so it just feels good. And I love
> music so.... And I really like it when, I have a couple friends who will totally go off on
> the dance floor with me and I love it when they come out because it's encouraging.
> Because sometimes I just want to do the same but no one's dancing that much (18-2).

Similarly, when asked whether she usually dances by herself or in a group, this young woman

noted that it is nice to have a community of friends to dance with. She comments,

> It really depends on the scenario. If I'm somewhere with a bunch of friends then you tend
> to gravitate towards the people you know. It's nice to see all of the people that you know
> and like enjoying themselves, smiles on their faces, you know (18-2).

Thus dancing together with people can build a sense of community. In this case, a sense of

community is expressed within the context of what it means to be 'East Van,' explored in

Chapter Five. For some people, however, with community come social restraints.

Social Constraints

Some interviewees discussed a few of the social and sexual constraints that can

complicate dancing. For instance, several interviewees expressed a preference for going out

dancing with friends rather than lovers. The following woman finds dancing a freeing activity and prefers to dance with woman friends or alone rather than with her male counterparts:

> Yeah I used to go out dancing but I didn't actually like talking to people and I'd have a really good time and I'd have my hair in my face and then I'd look up and people are watching or they're, I don't know. And some of the best friends I have I met out dancing because they were just doing their own thing and not necessarily, or just being funny, like it's just funny. You can joke around.

> *Is that why you like it?*

> Yeah, that's why I like it. Some of my dancing friends have left and I haven't really picked up new ones. It's fun to go out with your friends when you're single too. I've never had that much fun going out with a boyfriend and feeling like we have to keep an eye on each other or only dance with each other or that type of thing. I don't pick people up but there is a freedom.

> *So you prefer to go out dancing with women?*

> Yeah. Not to find men but just to be relaxed (12-2,3).

Another woman also stated a preference for dancing with other women:

> I definitely will dance by myself if I go out and the person I'm with doesn't want to dance, I will go dance by myself without any problem. But I like having a group of friends to dance with. One-on-one dancing is, I mean I don't dance with somebody like holding them and having them lead me and stuff. It's really rare that something like that will happen so for the most part it's either by myself or in a group with two or three people, girls usually (3-2).

When asked who she prefers to dance with another woman states,

> Girlfriends, friends my age. Not usually with my boyfriend but other girlfriends or platonic boyfriends.

> *Why not your boyfriend?*

> Because I don't like to go to a place to go dancing where I have to be with one person the entire time. Because you don't want to have to dance with somebody or check where they are or anything. When you're just with friends you're easily involved by yourself (10-2).

Similarly, this man prefers dancing with other men. He states,

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It [dancing] feels really good. Like if your, I don't know, I actually have way more fun dancing with my guy friends then I do dancing with girls. Like it's got to be a good guy friend but it's just, it's like there's no, it's just about fun. You know what I mean? And there's no underlying sexual pretence to it. It's just fun and it's funny and it's like we make each other laugh (22-2).

The former quote speaks to some of the physical restraints heterosexual expectations and relationships can put on women and men. By dancing with friends, these interviewees feel less constrained by gender mores and do not seem concerned about homophobic comments. The environment also facilitates respondents' levels of comfort with regards to dancing with same sex partners, as it is not everywhere that men can dance with each other outside of a gay club. As covered in Chapter Three, interviewees find indie events more receptive to alternatives to heteronormative articulations of sexuality common at more mainstream venues.

A few of the women interviewed mentioned that one reason they prefer to dance with other women is that their boyfriends do not dance. This is significant since, although both men and women dance, it is ultimately more socially acceptable, in western culture, for women to dance, as dancing is a feminized activity. Men at indie events tend to be more often involved in the act of making or playing music. One woman comments,

But like, my boyfriend will not dance. You know Johnny? He's kind of does this [acts out a simple, stiff stepping movement from side to side with a clap] because he's Italian (16-3).

While noting that her boyfriend does not dance, the (above) woman also suggests that, for her, dance style is also linked to ethnic stereotypes. (Although being Italian may have nothing to do with her boyfriend's lack of dancing ability.) Another respondent provides a fuller analysis of why her boyfriend does not dance. She states,

For the most part I usually plan to go with a group of girls or a group of women but it seems that in the last two years it's me and one friend and then my boyfriend. And the boyfriend doesn't dance so me and that girl will dance together.... He is too shy to dance I

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think. He plays music so he has rhythm but he doesn't have practice dancing. I don't think he was one of those guys that danced at school dances or ever got a feel for dancing. I've only seen him dance once, and it was pretty cute. Like he put an effort in but, he's just too shy. He doesn't want to make a fool of himself (3-2).

Due to gender norms and stereotypes, some men may have less practice using their bodies in communicative and expressive, dance-based motion.

Although men within the indie community perhaps dance less than women, many men, as this study reveals, continue to enjoy dancing. One man described his dance aesthetic as "Post rave indie rocker" (14-2), while another avid male dancer (too young to have experienced the early rave scene) came to dancing through the indie community and at a later age. He stated:

> No. I used to hate dancing. I think when I went to university, or if you go to any university that's not populated by people that you went to school with, you kind of have a clean slate in a way and that's kind of when it started. In my first year of university I was like, none of these people really know me, and it's not that you're being a different person, you're just allowing different aspects of yourself come out that you wouldn't have before for fear of embarrassment. *It might be a guy/girl thing? I really liked dancing in high school; I just didn't do it.* But I had a few friends who were break-dancers and I would go and watch them compete and that was really super impressive to me and I envied them so much but I was a bit of a gangly kid. It was a lost cause for me (22-2,3, emphasis added).

This particular respondent is over six feet and very thin. Fittingly, he describes his dancing (with humour) as: "Like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. I don't know, pointy. Pointy" (22-2). His comments bring to the forefront how youth, gender and conceptions of one's body shape dance experience.

The heteronormative gaze

Dance has historically been feminized because of its association with the body (Banes 1997; Summers-Bremner 2000) and also, because of its performative qualities, have been subject to the act of looking, to the visual, and thus subject to the heteronormative male gaze (Burt 2001: 51). Discussing binaries between dance and music in the introduction to the journal

of *Women and Performance*, Goldman (2007: 124) describes dance and music as "one historically female, the other historically male; one of the body, the other of the mind; one seen, the other heard." The author notes that the consequences of such historical circumstances perpetuated by a mind/body dichotomy are extensive, as they are "inextricable from power relations, entrenched institutional biases, and historical circumstance, gendered divisions between music and dance affect how we understand and respond to bodies" while also shaping "people's freedom to move" (ibid.: 124).

A few of the female participants expressed compliance with hegemonic societal norms in relation to male desire, commenting that they enjoyed the sexual attention they elicited when dancing. However, the majority of respondents described resistance to hegemonic heteronormative gender stereotypes. For example, many women respondents felt less interested in attaining recognition from their male counterparts, emphasizing that, contrary to popular belief, they preferred to dance for themselves, thus their dancing was sexy or sensual but they resisted being sexualized. Other female respondents attempted to assert their independence from, and resistance to, the patriarchal male gaze by describing their dancing as expressly non-sexual. One woman stated:

> It seems to me sometimes there's a lot of people that dance that are very aware that they're dancing and other people are watching them dance and they're dancing for that purpose. Which is really annoying because sometimes they hit you and stuff, and especially if they're on cocaine as well as that. If you add that to that combination it's like I get beat-up on the dance floor because they're like pumping so much and stomping.

Is there a lot of that?

Yeah. A bit less at the *Library Square* actually, but yeah, I find that annoying (4-1).

The respondent is somewhat critical of the spectacle of dancing (she expresses distaste for people who dance for others rather than for themselves). Likewise, a young man noted that, when dancing, he sometimes feels part of a spectacle if the dance floor is not crowded:

> I guess sometimes you feel less inhibited in some ways depending on how a part of the crowd you feel or something. Depending on who you're with or what's going on, sort of the atmosphere. For me it's [dancing's] better if it's crowded because otherwise I feel inhibited or self-conscious. If it's crowded and everybody's dancing then you don't feel self-conscious but if most people are standing around and there's a big dance floor you're part of the spectacle or something (21-2).

His level of physical comfort is also dictated by how much he feels he is a part of the crowd. Besides friendship, such commonalities (or affiliations with the 'crowd') within the indie scene are indicated by factors such as the location and aesthetic of the event. The following woman also resists being watched when dancing:

> Well sometimes I guess I'm more susceptible to dance sometimes if I've been drinking a lot or if there's a dance floor that's really open. And I don't want to be the first person to dance so if it's like maybe the dance floor is hidden I'd try to dance a little bit more, people aren't staring at you (11-1).

More clearly, the following two young women assert a preference to dance for the sake of dancing, rather than as part of a sexual activity:

> I don't really go out to be sexy and dance sexy, I like to go out and dance and sweat and whatever (12-1).

> I don't go to clubs to socialize, I don't go to clubs to drink, I go to dance, right (4-2).

The fact that interviewees feel the need to justify why they dance suggests an attempt to counter preconceived notions about why people, and especially young women, dance. Similarly, another woman stated,

> I don't, I try, I really try not to care about people around but I guess I do. I do my thing, I don't try to be provocative like you know a lot of girls are really sexual when they dance, I am not really. I just have fun (18-2).

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Possibly internalizing conceptions of dance as a sexualized activity, a number of the female interviewees went out of their way to explain that their experiences fell outside of this narrow interpretation. Adair accounts for the marginalization of dance in Western society not only to an emphasis on the verbal but also to the Judaeo Christian tradition which demonizes the body, sexuality, and dance by extension (1992: 11-12). Recognizing that under patriarchy women's sexual feelings and identities are experienced and expressed in relation to male desire, hooks argues that in order for women to find agency and value in their own sexuality, they must understand their sexuality as having meaning in and of itself (hooks 2000). Importantly hooks does not dismiss the power of sexuality, what she seeks to disassemble are the patriarchal conditions under which sexuality is enacted (and also constructed). She states, "We need an erotics of being that is founded on the principle that we have a right to express sexual desire as the spirit moves us and to find in sexual pleasure a life-affirming ethos. Erotic connection calls us away from isolation and alienation into community" (ibid: 92). The quotes in this section reveal a desire to dance as one pleases but also to not have dancing equated with sexual desire. Such an attitude is markedly different than respondents' assumptions of why people frequent the Granville Strip for dancing (see Chapter Three).

The spectacle of dancing: sexy versus sexualized

Not all interviewees resist the spectacle of dancing. Describing her own dance group, 'Team Wicked,' which has occasionally performed at indie dance parties, this respondent stated,

> Yeah, it's a show. Even now, we used to have a little dance team called Team Wicked. My friend Wendy and I used to go out and she's an incredible dancer, she wears spandex and stuff, we used to go out dancing and we were just on a level together where it really didn't matter. It wasn't really a show but I guess it kinda was (12-3).

She enjoys the performance aspect of dancing but also relishes the connection or understanding she experiences with her female dance partner while performing.

In line with more dominant modes of objectification, the following white woman expresses pleasure with being looked at and seeks affirmation of male desire while dancing:

> Why do I like dancing? Because it's just a chance to do, to not be worried about anything. You're just into the music and you're there with your friends and you're usually being goofy and checking out people. But I think, actually that's part of it, you get to, instead of just standing there looking at people and checking them out and talking about them, you can kind of dance and kind of hide that you're checking them out. *You're like 'yeah I'm just looking at that guy but now I'm turning around and shaking my ass, did you see that?'* (9-1, emphasis added).

By actively emphasising her butt with pleasure, this young white woman benefits from, and draws upon, contemporary black culture's attempts at a revaluation of the black female body. Noting western culture's long racialized fascination with the black female butt (posing Sarah Bartmann as an early example), hooks (1998) argues that emphasising the black female butt while dancing can be understood as an act of challenge to racist assumptions and depictions of the butt as an ugly sign of gendered racial inferiority. In opposition to dominant racialized representations and assumptions about black bodies within popular western culture, some black artists have instigated a celebration of the butt. For example, "The popular song, 'Doin' the Butt,' fostered the promotion of a hot new dance favoring those who could most protrude their buttocks with pride and glee" (hooks 1998: 113). Rather than a silenced body, hooks tells us, 'doing the butt' offers women of colour the potential for playful resistance (ibid: 114). This affirmation has leaked into other aspects of culture, thus allowing for the young woman (above) to appropriate celebrations of the butt, evoking sexualized connotations while dancing but not those of shame. It is significant that the interviewee's description of her dance celebrates the (white) female body, although, it does not resonate with the political understanding that hooks

illuminates, as she is not forced to encounter the negative racialized (hyper-sexual) context into which such movement reasserts itself.

The following woman enjoys the freedom in which the indie scene allows her a space to dance without sexual attention but also expressed a desire for the pleasure of visual affirmation found in more conventional clubs. She stated:

> So sometimes it's funny because you don't feel like you're being, in the scene that I would go dancing at, at house parties or something like that, you don't feel like you're being checked out and you feel like you can dance freely but at the same time you're like 'hey why isn't anyone checking me out?' (9-2).

Pini, speaking of rave dance, locates this particular desire 'to-be-looked-at-ness,' this essentially self-centered enjoyment as a performance of sorts that is rendered safe specifically because of the alternative dance environment (2001:117). It is in this environment (which is fluid with changing modes of masculinity and negotiations of heteronormative sexuality) where performances of sexiness by women, while inviting a male gaze, are not assumed to be a sexual invitation; precisely because nothing is indicated beyond the performance. Gender performances are not synonymous with a desire for heterosexual relationships.

These results are dissimilar to mainstream nightclubs where, in Chapter Three, women respondents articulated that sexualized displays of femininity on the dance floor incurred unwanted, insistent male attentions *beyond* the performance itself, and were, therefore, essentially 'unsafe.' In other words, with larger commercial nightclubs there is an expectation that sexiness extends off the dance floor into sexual invitation, while at indie events, sexualized performances are contained within the dance floor.

Though women have to negotiate their sexuality within the confines of the patriarchal male gaze, men are not necessarily put in the same position of having to rupture such spaces.

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The following man also describes dancing as sexy, as something that appeals to the senses, but not necessarily as part of a 'mating ritual' that valorizes the scopic. He comments,

> Why do I like dancing? Because it's a form of self expression, it's a way to, it's fun, it's self expressive, it's sexy you know, I like to be sexy and it's also a way just to let loose and the music is infectious so it makes you feel happy. Actually, I'm probably putting it in the wrong priorities, it's fun, it has to be the right music. Like it has to be catchy danceable music that's a real good time, good time music.... I just like a strong melody and dance music. Strong melody and beat. I can't dance to all rhythm, there has to be hooks and rhythm and it's just fun to just goof around on the floor and do your moves and so those are the top things — self expression and it's a good thing to do with your friends and have people smile. [It's] a good way to, like, you know, you don't really have to talk to people, you just hang out and dance. And approaching people or having people approach you without having to- it's an icebreaker too. And also it's kinda sexy. Dancing is sexy (5-3).

Although this respondent discusses dance as a sexy activity, he does not reduce dance to sex. Instead he lists multiple positive adjectives to describe his relationship to dancing (as well as sexy, dancing is fun, a way to let loose, expressive, infectious and goofy).

Similar to Audre Lorde's (1979) discussion of the erotic as power, over two decades ago, the participants in this study experience dancing as a creative and empowering activity that underlines their capacity for joy. For some women interviewees, this 'erotics of being' also served as a resistance to acts of objectification and sexualization. While the act of dancing can participate in the maintenance of heteronormative patriarchal gender stereotypes, reinscribing dominant expressions of sexuality, it can also be experienced by women as an erotic expression, a celebration of bodily pleasures and sexuality, irrespective of male desire. These enactments can happen simultaneously; Foucault maintains that power can occupy multiple trajectories. He states that power is creative, power is everywhere, and that power is particularly exercised on bodies (Foucault 2000). Further, according to Foucault's analytics of power, resistance is also an integral part of any event of power (Foucault 1997: 298-99). This provides insight into how compliance with hegemonic gender norms, for instance, (through clothing attire, community

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positioning and/or particular engagements with feminine activities) can co-exist with a woman's erotic understanding of her body, dancing not simply in order to 'pick up' or for other's visual pleasure, but for her own pleasure and appreciation of movement and skill. Defining erotic knowledge, Audre Lorde emphasises the empowering potential of dancing:

> The very word erotic comes from the Greek word eros, the personification of love in all its aspects — born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creativity energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives (1979: 30).

Interestingly, common themes associated with social leisure practices such as drug use and sexual interaction remained peripheral themes within respondents' discussions on dancing. Many interviewees did hold the assumption that people in more mainstream clubs danced for the purpose of "hooking-up" or "getting laid" but differentiated themselves from such a practice. Instead, interviewees argued that they preferred to go out dancing with their (often same-sex) friends, rather than their sexual partners and tended to avoid unwanted sexual attention while dancing. Of course they still celebrated dancing as a sexy activity.

Articulations of the activity of dancing, through a phenomenological approach, reveal interviewees' negotiations, reactions against and conscriptions of pre-existing normative interpretations of gender, compulsory heterosexuality, how gender is embodied, and what Dillabough (2005: 91) calls a "performance of style and sub-cultural identity." Interviewees claimed that they enjoyed dancing because of a combination of elements: most significantly because it is fun; it is a skill that they take pride in; a form of self-expression; a non-verbal communication; it is sexy; it feels good; it is interconnected with music; it is good exercise; it allows one to lose oneself or, conversely, to be in the moment; it is a release; a freedom; a non-commodity; it is funny; and although this was not overtly stated, it was clear from the responses that dancing also builds community, and helps one gain a sense of self. Of course these

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sentiments are expressed within the context of a dance scene that is largely white, working-class and heterosexual, thus their comfort level is likely contingent upon this demographic make-up. Identity factors such as gender, sex, ethnicity, age, and social status are integrated with the dance experience. Yet, shared definitions of dancing within the indie scene, the unspoken performance of norms, customs and practices, can for some, more than others, work to evoke a sense of the collective subject. Dancing, within specific dancing environments (in this case East Vancouver indie venues), can provide a fluid space of identification (however fleeting), an affinity through mobile practices of a shared sense of place that engages with the sensuous, the empathetic, the emotional, among other things.

> [T]he club situation offers clubbers opportunities to inscribe their own creativities upon a shared space, to create a space of their own making of which they are also the consumers.... It is here, in this creation of a space of their own, that we find resistance, not as a struggle with a dominant, hegemonic culture [...] or even as the fact of clubbing itself, but resistance as located in the most minute subtleties of clubbing, the ways of clubbing – its *arts de faire* (de Certeau, 1984).... This resistance is found through losing yourself, paradoxically to find yourself.

> Ben Malbon (1998: 280-281)

CONCLUSION

The ethnographic study discussed in this thesis derived from 25 in-depth interviews with indie youth and participant observation of 21 East Vancouver indie events. Over half of the interviewees identified as working-class, lived in East Vancouver and, representative of the significance of artist practices within the scene, all but one participant worked or participated in the fields of arts and culture. The study provides an interdisciplinary approach characteristic of a performance perspective which allows for the privileging of mobile and embodied knowledge and emphasizes the value of integrating spatial practices into investigations of performance practices and vice versa. This approach works well when researching the complexities of youth practices. The exploration of indie social dance practice in the east side of Vancouver provides a lens through which to understand space, identity and performance against a backdrop of rocketing real estate, displacement of low-income people, policing and new ordinance laws, rezoning, the construction of a mainstream entertainment area and neo-liberal rhetoric.

The thesis begins with the concept of the mainstream and argues that though the concept manifests sometimes as an ambiguous construct that indie youth define themselves against, the mainstream is much more than an imaginary entity. Thus, I argue that analyses of the mainstream should take into account both material and discursive factors. In this case, the mainstream, as part of Vancouver's entertainment district, is a material corporate space that is actively produced by the city. Through an analysis of governmentality, surveillance and control within Vancouver's entertainment district, alongside indie youths' concerns for safety in that particular area and consequently their decision to play elsewhere, the mainstream is revealed as highly regulated, normalized and aggressively heteronormative.

Rejecting the big business nightclubs that occupy Vancouver's appointed entertainment district, many young people have created alternative venues for nightlife. Indie youths' leisure practices take place in community centres, local pubs, warehouse spaces, art galleries and house parties within Vancouver's more marginalized Eastside. However, youth pleasure practices are trivialized and often demonized by the mainstream media, as are their claims on urban space. Moreover, commercial development often relies on the concept of 'youth as deviant' in order to market counter-culture allure. As stated in Chapter Four, though institutional violence is much more commonplace than individual violence, we remain fascinated with the latter. In other words, though rapid gentrification is displacing many who are marginalized within Vancouver's urban core, it is the individual act of a punk house party, that prompt police action and public (media) resentment. Young people's everyday conflicts around the active use of public and/or urban space should not be dismissed as insignificant, even if mischievous; they should be understood as ideological battles, as social struggles around issues such as ownership, privatization, and social justice.

City spaces and what they signify are important to Vancouver's indie youth. They tend to share a collective pride in East Vancouver, supported by a general understanding of what the area means to them. Thus their leisure practices which take up this geography seem to offer a collective sense of belonging within the scene. This social space is also constitutive; young people within the indie scene constitute themselves in relation to what it means to be 'in' and 'of' East Vancouver, revealing their identities as closely tied to place. What 'East Van' means must be continually re(negotiated), however, one primary attribute indie youth tend to associate it with is the working class.

The indie scene's association with class is interesting because, though early subcultural studies tended to over emphasize class affiliation at the expense of other subject positions, some more contemporary subcultural studies have de-emphasized social class. This study, however, revealed that a closer look at social class is important because, though it is materially based, it is also both performed and revealed as performative, as a persistent mode of distinction within the indie scene. While some indie youth are eager to avoid being classed, perhaps operating within a fantasy of 'classlessness,' social class nevertheless operates as a primary signifying factor within the scene, as a physical aesthetic and spatial, geographical enactment that generates a certain amount of anxiety. Part of this anxiety around the working-class aesthetic is dependent upon the idea that aesthetics are a matter of personal choice, and therefore a performance of sorts. However, 'choice' is not simply an individual's prerogative; rather, choice though determined through various forms of subcultural capital, is also mediated in complex ways by socio-structural factors. This means that those restricted by the materiality of their social class can not 'perform' working-class aesthetics in the same way that mobile and middle-class youth can.

These complexities of performance were approached through the rubric of social dancing, a playful yet grounded practice that is productive precisely because it 'is simultaneously bodily and social' (Nash 2000: 659). This particularity of dance enables analyses that are at the same time social, spatial and embodied. For example, from this entry point we are able to explore how movement and sense inform subjective perceptions of place. Indie dance events offer the opportunity to connect participants to place, East Vancouver, and through body movement, dancing, to reaffirm membership in this group. Participating marks one's identity, at least temporarily, as part of 'East Van,' and all the associations that the place signifies to the

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participants at that moment. Respondents' articulations of pleasure, joy, comfort, safety, freedom, skill, sexuality, community and belonging when dancing in East Vancouver are both enabled by and inseparable from the dancing environment offered by indie events. Social dancing is important to those involved: it helps to build community and affiliation with one another and with the urban space. For some young women, dancing affords pleasure in a body already socially invested. The feeling of freedom and playfulness that dancing provides for these young women can be felt as spontaneous acts of resistance, regardless of whether or not power structures are overturned. For them, dancing 'out of place' becomes a necessary tactic towards avoiding male violence and aggression. Although the indie community traverses various ambiguous contexts, revealing complex class-based, racialized and gender-based dynamics, it also offers a sense of belonging for those East Vancouver-identified youth who (for multiple reasons) do not feel comfortable attending, dancing, and/or 'losing themselves' in the more heteronormative mainstream venues of Vancouver's entertainment district.

East Vancouver dance parties are an example of the innovative processes people participate in, in order to create something outside (or rather in relation to) typical conventional structures. While the city attempts to dictate where, when and how dancing should and should not take place, indie youth create their own spaces and embodied practices that are contingent upon, yet also in challenge to, the constructed myths with which the city spaces are already imbued. Though some neighbourhoods within East Vancouver are depicted by many as a place of crime, poverty and in some cases suffering, the lived experiences of indie youth from East Vancouver reveal that these areas are also places of pride, playfulness and creativity. Importantly, identities are not only acquired negatively (in opposition), but are also positively acquired, through constitutive practices. As youth dance practices are continually in flux and are

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also temporal, it would be worthwhile to continue to investigate the geographies of performance, nightlife practices and the subjective experiences of young people. This study represents a commencement of research into the complex meanings generated by the spatial and embodied practices of Vancouver's indie youth, when dancing out of place. At its heart, it aims to convey how the dynamics of one group and place enter into larger debates around class positioning, gendered embodiment, conceptualizations of space and politics more generally. This thesis is an attempt at making sense of the dance floor, of how movement generates meaning and how thought, ideas, ideology, perceptions and reflection continue to generate movement.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What is the context of your dancing activities in Vancouver?

2. Do you think that dance is an important activity in your everyday life?

3. Do you find the indie nightlife scene different than the conventional club scene in Vancouver?

4. Do you identify yourself as an "East Vaner"? Why/why not?

5. Do you find your dance community to be very diverse? (For example, is it open to various expressions of sexuality, and is it diverse in terms of ethnicity and class?)

Demographic Information:
Age

Occupation

Place of residence

Gender identification

Sexual identification

Class identification

Ethnic identification

Level of education

Artistic identification

APPENDIX B
ETHICS BOARD (BREB) CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

UBC

The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services and Administration
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	DEPARTMENT	NUMBER
Pratt, G.	Geography	**B05-1018**

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT
UBC Campus .

CO-INVESTIGATORS
Boyd, Jade. Women's Studies & Gender Rel

SPONSORING AGENCIES

TITLE
Dancing out of Place: Geographies of Performance and Vancouver's Independent Nightlife

APPROVAL DATE	TERM (YEARS)	DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL
DEC 1 2 2005	1	Nov. 30, 2005, Questionnaires / Contact letter / Consent form / Nov. 10, 2005, Advertisement

CERTIFICATION

The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the
Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical
grounds for research involving human subjects.

*Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
by one of the following:*
Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair,
Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in
the experimental procedures

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