URBAN CHANGE AND THE LITERARY IMAGINARY
IN VANCOUVER

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I examine literary responses to socioeconomic and spatial change in Vancouver, Canada—a city that has undergone recurrent, rapid, and intensive restructuring over the course of its history. Vancouver has received a significant amount of attention from urban studies scholars, and is home to a well-respected local planning culture. A vibrant, diverse, and critically engaged literary community has also long thrived in the city, with many authors writing about major issues related to Vancouver’s transformation, including population displacement, socioeconomic polarization, the increasing commodification of urbanity, and the mediation of cultural trauma.

Despite this engagement with key urban issues, literary texts are often ignored or given only cursory treatment in the broader scholarly and popular conversation about the city. Form, style, and epistemological difference all make literary texts difficult to integrate into this conversation. They are, however, carriers of a certain kind of knowledge—subjective, experiential, affective, interactive, often reflexive—that deserves more widespread attention because it expands and complicates our understanding of what the city is and might be.

I propose and enact an approach to reading urban fiction and poetry that privileges the space of the literary while still also attending to the ways in which literary texts, and the authors who produce them, are wrapped up in processes of socioeconomic and spatial change. I focus especially on what literary texts themselves have to say about the contexts informing their production, foregrounding and investigating the heightened self-consciousness of particular pieces of Vancouver-based writing. I argue that these
texts not only enrich and diversify the local urban imaginary, but also encourage a reconceptualization of the role of writers and other cultural workers in the city.
Preface

An earlier version of Chapter Three has been published:

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Dedication

For all those who have shared their experiences of Vancouver with me in the street and on the page.
Introduction

who knows if I’ll be around
when they come to chop my pear tree down
to build another condominium

magpie! magpie!
swayin’ on a high silverbranch!
will you caw me—

if you catch a glimpse of the axe-
man comin’ down our alley
cause i’ve got a petition signed by
all the neighbourhood children
who haven’t had a chance to skin their knees
let alone laugh and sneeze
up inside its thatched corridors
and there’s a young couple
i know who want to build their first nest
in its forkt-branches

magpie! magpie!
will you be my unpaid informer ?
my unimpeachable i ?

- Roy Kiyooka, untitled poem, *Pear Tree Pomes*

In the late fall of 2009, poet Oana Avasilichioaei, then writer-in-residence at UBC’s Green College, hosted a reading and discussion called *Vancouver: The Imagined and the Prospectedd*. The event featured Lee Henderson, Sachiko Murakami, and Roger Farr, three writers who had, like Avasilichioaei herself, used their literary work as a space to explore and respond to social and spatial change in the city of Vancouver. In the flyer for the event, Avasilichioaei observed that “[f]or many writers, Vancouver has and continues to be an active part of their imagination; a city in process, constantly being constructed.” She then went on to wonder, “Why does Vancouver have such a powerful
hold? Why are so many writers compelled to write its voices and where can these voices lead us?” Reiterating these questions in her opening remarks for the evening, Avasilichioaei compared Vancouver to Montreal, where she had recently been living. As a writer who had been involved in the literary communities of both cities, she described her sense, however anecdotal, that a particularly significant number of Vancouver authors were actively engaged in writing about the city as it was being built and rebuilt, and about community interactions and tensions as they emerged, developed, and changed in relation to the urban landscape.

Rob mclennan, a prolific reviewer and interviewer of Canadian authors as well as a writer in his own right, recently made an observation similar to Avasilichioaei’s—first on his blog, where he shares informal criticism and reading notes, and then in an article for the January 2011 issue of the Maple Tree Literary Supplement. Reflecting in his initial post on poet Kim Minkus’s “Billboards” poems in the Fall 2009 issue of West Coast LINE, the Ottawa-based mclennan noted that Minkus’s poetry “continues a thread of city-specific works that Vancouver poets have been producing for years, from writers such as George Bowering, Daphne Marlatt, George Stanley and Michael Turner to Stephen Collis, Oana Avasilichioaei, Sachiko Murakami, Wayde Compton and so many more” (“Ongoing Notes”). “[R]eeling from all the physical descriptions” of Canada’s westernmost metropolis, mclennan, like Avasilichioaei, mused: “Just what is it about Vancouver?” (“Writing the New” 1; “Ongoing Notes”).

Observations such as Avasilichioaei’s and mclennan’s suggest the presence, among writers in Vancouver, of what Raymond Williams memorably called a “structure of feeling.” Williams used the phrase to describe “meanings and values as they are
actively lived and felt,” and to distinguish these from dominant or established discourses, institutions, and social structures (“Structures of Feeling” 132). He emphasized that ideas, social formations, and practices emerge not as already-fixed categories, but rather develop gradually as part of complexes of perspectives and lived experiences that are “at once interlocking and in tension,” that co-exist in “living and interrelating continuity” (132). Williams proposed that in literature, the “social content is in a significant number of cases of this present and affective kind, which cannot without loss be reduced to belief-systems, institutions, or explicit general relationships, though it may include all these as lived or experienced” (133). Literature functions, in other words, as an important vehicle for expressing emergent social meanings and values.

In Vancouver, a city that has been subject to intensive restructuring over the course of its relatively short history, I have often found literary texts serving as spaces for writers to articulate affectively and critically engaged responses to social and spatial change. Displacement, socioeconomic polarization, community crisis, and changing contexts for cultural production recur as key issues for these writers. Some—like Roy Kiyooka, whose work opens this introduction—take clear positions in relation to dominant trends in the city’s restructuring, while others grapple with the complexities of social and spatial change without resolving their inquiries into specific stances. Across these varied texts, I find authors capturing the “present and affective” experience (to borrow Williams’s phrase) of living in a city undergoing rapid and dramatic restructuring, and doing the ethical work of exploring how to live and relate to others.

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1 Williams suggests that “[a]n alternative definition would be structures of experience: in one sense the better and wider word, but with the difficulty that one of its senses has that past tense which is the most important obstacle to recognition of the area of social experience which is being defined” (132, emphasis in orig.). “Feeling,” on the other hand, captures the sense of present-tense process that is foundational to Williams’s concept.
under such conditions.

With this body of Vancouver-based literary work serving as my primary material, and with Williams’s capacious framework guiding my inquiry, I investigate the ways in which differently positioned authors—their perspectives “at once interlocking and in tension”—respond in their writing to city building and community formation in Vancouver. How, I ask, do local writers conceptualize their role in the urban project? In what ways do their literary texts enrich and diversify Vancouver’s urban imaginary? And, how do they contribute to the scholarly and popular discourse about development, community dynamics, and everyday living in the city? My aim is to develop a better understanding of writers as producers of urban knowledge and critique, and of the reciprocal relationship between city-focused literary texts and the urban contexts in which they are produced. To do so, I read a selection of literary texts that attest to sustained, attentive observation of the city as well as, in some cases, extensive research into particular areas of the local urban archive. I consider these texts in relation to the lives and community affiliations of the authors who produced them, and to the material and discursive contexts that informed the texts’ making. Histories of socioeconomic and spatial change in specific Vancouver neighbourhoods and the city more broadly, the work of other writers and artists, and scholarly and popular understandings of urban culture and city building all inform my analysis of literary texts.

This approach to Vancouver-based writing has emerged, in part, out of my interest in the connections that might be forged between the study of urban change, as practiced especially by geographers and scholars of urban planning, and the study of literary texts and literary production, as practiced by literary critics. While the fields of
literary criticism and geography have enjoyed a long and often productive relationship, we are still only beginning to understand what and how literary texts might be able to contribute to the conversation about urban planning and development. At the same time, within the field of Canadian literature, we have yet to consider in a sustained manner how the extensive scholarship on urban restructuring might inform our understanding of literary texts. Indeed, only in the past decade have literary critics really started to turn their attention to the Canadian city, prompted in particular by the publication of the essay collection *Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities*. In their introduction to this collection, editors Douglas Ivison and Justin D. Edwards note that not only has Canada long been an urban country, but the city as a setting is in fact ubiquitous in Canadian literature, though it has often been elided or ignored in scholarly studies, and generally obscured in the country’s cultural imaginary by well-established and powerful national myths (12; see also Pache 1149; New, *Land Sliding* 156). Ivison and Edwards urge critics to investigate the long tradition of Canadian literature in which “the materiality and specificity of our cities and the experience of urbanism as a way of life” figure prominently (12). My contribution is to consider Vancouver-based literary texts in

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2 According to Statistics Canada, a majority of Canadians have lived in urban areas since the early 1930s. The 2006 Census indicates that 80 per cent of the Canadian population is now urban (Government of Canada).

3 Since *Downtown Canada* appeared in 2005, there has been a surge of interest in Canadian urban literature. Key publications during this period include *The Winnipeg Connection: Writing Lives at Mid-Century*, edited by Birk Sproxton; *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, by Sherry Simon; and *Imagining Toronto*, by Amy Lavender Harris, who also maintains an extensive online bibliography (imaginingtoronto.com) of literary works set in or engaging with the city of Toronto. Canadian urban writing has also been a recurring theme and panel topic at scholarly conferences in recent years, including the Modern Language Association’s annual convention, the annual conference of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE), and the University of Alberta Canadian Literature Centre’s annual colloquium. Scholars have also demonstrated an interest in Canadian writers’ connections to cities outside of this country: see especially John Clement Ball’s *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis*, Nick Mount’s *When Canadian Literature Moved to New York*, and Stephen Scobie’s *The Measure of Paris*. 
relation to urban studies scholarship and planning policy, and to situate these texts within the context of Vancouver’s history of urban change.

In the field of urban planning, important work on the relationship between planning and storytelling has been produced over the past few decades, perhaps most notably by John Friedmann, Seymour J. Mandelbaum, Peter Marris, Ruth Finnegan, John Forester, James A. Throgmorton, Leonie Sandercock, Edward Soja, Robert A. Beauregard, and literary critic Barbara Eckstein. These scholars have investigated a range of actual and potential roles of story and storytelling practices within the planning profession; however, notable across this work (with the exception of Eckstein’s) is the understandable tendency to emphasize oral narratives and to overlook or ignore published fiction and poetry—understandable because much of this scholarship is connected to participatory planning, which faces the problem of mediating the diverse anecdotal contributions to the planning process made by participating citizens. Of course, with fiction and poetry we face the same problem of mediation. Literary texts are, as I have suggested, the carriers of a certain kind of knowledge—subjective, experiential, affective, interactive, often reflexive; this is knowledge that many planning scholars and practitioners value, but that can be difficult to articulate and integrate into planning and development discourse. When we do find references to literary texts in planning discourse and urban studies scholarship, they are usually brief and function anecdotally. By contrast, my aim is to devote sustained analysis to literary texts, treating them as vital contributions to the broader conversation about urban change.

As I read Vancouver-based literary texts, I explore three dominant (and overlapping) modes of engagement in urban issues. I attend, first, to the cultivation of
critique in urban writing. Examining work by E. Pauline Johnson, Malcolm Lowry, and Jane Rule, I consider how literary texts from different periods in Vancouver’s history—early settlement, mid-century suburban expansion, and later-twentieth-century inner-city restructuring—function as spaces for querying and assessing the impacts of urban development. Then, I shift my attention to Vancouver’s most recent period of redevelopment, and to writers (George Bowering, Lisa Robertson, Meredith Quartermain, and Bud Osborn) who turn this critical lens on themselves. I explore how these writers acknowledge their own, usually inadvertent complicity in the very processes of urban change that they aim to critique, and how they come to understand and articulate the complicated ethics and politics of literary practice in contemporary city spaces. Finally, in recent work by Timothy Taylor, Nancy Lee, and Lee Maracle, I examine representations of cultural workers engaged in the mediation of community crises in Vancouver, and reflect on the ways in which these texts both supplement and problematize the social science scholarship and policy-oriented discourse on creativity and culture in the city.

While I began this introduction by citing observers who have emphasized the extent to which the Vancouver-based literary community is engaged in the urban project, this engagement is difficult to quantify and assess; indeed, a more empirical study of city-focused literary production in different regions might find that there is nothing particularly special about the Vancouver case. Certainly, many of the issues explored by Vancouver’s writers—from population displacement and socioeconomic polarization, to the complicated role of the urban artist in processes of city building and community formation, to the fraught work of mediating cultural trauma in the city—are being
investigated by writers in other cities undergoing similar forms of spatial and socioeconomic restructuring. My goal is not to prove the uniqueness of the Vancouver case, though I will insist that attention to particularity is integral to the study of urban writing. My primary objective is to explore the combination of representative and distinctive factors that have informed the production of city-focused work by Vancouver writers, attempting to account for the heightened interest noted by observers such as Avasilichioaei and McLennan, while also situating the Vancouver case in relation to broader trends in urbanization and cultural production.

“Recurrent Restructuring” in Vancouver

I chose to open this introduction with an untitled poem from Kiyooka’s *Pear Tree Pomes* in part because it articulates the worries about neighbourhood sustainability and the community-based activist response that emerged as Vancouver’s central area underwent redevelopment in the latter half of the twentieth century, and in part because Kiyooka’s collection appeared at an important time of transition in the city’s trajectory of change. Written during the early 1980s and published in 1987, *Pear Tree Pomes* came together toward the end of an initial phase of redevelopment in and near the core, and as Vancouver moved into a period of mega-project development\(^4\) catalyzed by hallmark events—first Expo ’86 (the world’s fair hosted by Vancouver in 1986) and, later, the Winter Olympic Games (held in Vancouver in 2010). Importantly, too, Kiyooka is one of a number of Vancouver-based writers—a short list might include George Bowering, Fred Wah, Daphne Marlatt, Gerry Gilbert, George Stanley, Jacqueline Turner, and bill bissett—who emerged during Vancouver’s first phase of redevelopment, and who

\(^4\) Smaller-scale, more piecemeal redevelopment also continued during this later period.
continued to work and help foster new generations of writers during Vancouver’s more recent period of change. Kiyooka was, moreover, a key cultivator of inter-community relationships—both between local literary groups (e.g. the experimental groups TISH and the downtown poets in the 1960s), and between the arts and literary communities (Kiyooka was a painter, photographer, art instructor, and musician, as well as a writer). Such inter-generational, inter-group, and inter-community relationships have proven integral to the ongoing development of innovative and critically engaged writing in Vancouver.

Kiyooka’s *Pear Tree Pomes* is not, first and foremost, a collection about city building or displacement but rather about the breakdown of a long-term relationship between two lovers. But attention to everydayness was a key component of Kiyooka’s artistic practice, and so *Pear Tree Pomes* became a collection not only about love and loss between two people, but also about quotidian life in Kiyooka’s local community, the neighbourhood of Strathcona, which borders on Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside (in Kiyooka’s poem, the edges of “neighbourhood” are personal and communal rather than institutionally designated). We might say that in the background is a narrative about another relationship—this one with a neighbourhood instead of a lover. Over the course of *Pear Tree Pomes*, Kiyooka captures various small but rich details from his neighbourhood, such as “the early bird traffic on prior street,” the “lady with a champagne voice on co-op radio,” an anecdote from “jack our cantonese neighbour,” a trip for “a late night bowl of barbecue duck noodle soup at kam’s garden,” the

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5 Kiyooka remained an active writer, artist, and teacher until his sudden death in 1994. Contemporary writers still cite his work (see, for example, Fred Wah’s *Sentenced to Light*, Rita Wong’s *Forage*, and Roy Miki’s *Surrender*), and he is remembered as an important figure in Vancouver’s avant-garde arts and writing communities.
companionship of “a siamese cat named cooper,” the “thin sliver of [a] november moon over maclean park,” and the “small clapboard house” that the speaker’s family has “thrive[d] in” (13, 17, 18, 36, 38, 44). Through the poems’ lively texture, Kiyooka builds an implicit argument for sustaining a neighbourhood that, by the time he was writing *Pear Tree Pomes*, had already been partly decimated by so-called “slum clearance,” had fought off further redevelopment as well as a freeway project, had witnessed evictions (in the Downtown Eastside) associated with Expo ’86, and was beginning to undergo gentrification.

As I read Kiyooka’s collection twenty-five years later, this part of the city is again facing the possibility of dramatic transformation, as Vancouver City Council has recently made the decision to allow highrise development in Chinatown. Community groups remain divided about the impact that such development will have on the area: some argue that the increased density will help support local businesses and will make productive use of inner-city space; others, however, worry that the zoning change will facilitate the gentrification of the area, and question the need for highrises when many European cities

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6 A similar zoning change proposal for the adjacent Downtown Eastside was successfully fought by community activists as well as a group of 56 academics, who argued in a petition to Vancouver City Council:

> We . . . note with concern the recommendation . . . to change the allowable heights in [Vancouver’s] “Historic Area,” which includes much of the Downtown Eastside. The effect of this will be to increase permitted heights on several sites. Assuming, as seems inevitable, that this facilitates market housing, we fear that this will lead to a further reduction of affordable housing in the surrounding area, particularly that of the residential hotels [which currently house many of the city’s poor]. This will have a devastating effect on low-income residents and the continued vitality and viability of the neighbourhood as a whole. We believe that planning in the Downtown Eastside should have at its centre the interests of the most vulnerable, rather than risk further destabilizing a community that is already facing intensifying pressures.

> Market development, if wisely managed with the insights of the low-income community, can bring benefits to the Downtown Eastside. However, it can, and has, also led to increasing rents, conversions and displacement. We encourage Council not to proceed with the Height Review until a more thorough community based planning process is conducted, a cornerstone of which should be the improvement and protection of the affordable housing stock of the Downtown Eastside. (qtd. in Bula, “Brigade of Academics”)
are able to accommodate high population densities in low- and mid-rise built landscapes (Brown, “Plea for Low-Rise”; Bula, “Brigade of Academics”; Bula, “Mayor Backs Away”). Such material contexts, which inform both the production and reception of urban writing, will receive more focused attention in my next chapter, where I offer a detailed overview of Vancouver’s history of development. In this introduction, I wish simply to provide a preliminary sketch of the city’s trajectory of restructuring, and to highlight factors that have made the Vancouver case at once representative and distinctive.

Vancouver’s history of change is, in significant ways, similar to the development histories of other major Canadian cities. Notable similarities include the growth, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of industrial sites in and near the city’s core, with primarily working-class populations clustering near these spaces, and—especially toward and after mid-century—increasing numbers of middle-class workers commuting to Vancouver’s downtown business district from expanding suburbs. As Vancouver underwent post-industrial restructuring over the second half of the century, it continued to follow “important national trends”: Trevor Barnes et al. observe in

Canadian Urban Regions: Trajectories of Growth and Change that blue collar jobs in the region began to decline during this period and, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, a growing middle class started to display new interest in urban living (291). Previously undervalued neighbourhoods in the central city became sites of gentrification as they

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7 Vancouver was never a classic industrial city with an economy centred on traditional Fordist industries; rather, it mostly provided processing, warehousing, and transportation-related functions for the regional resource economy (Hutton, “Post-Industrialism” 1958; Barnes et al. 292-93).

8 The post-industrial thesis was first developed by Daniel Bell in The Coming of Post-Industrial Society, in which Bell observed a new occupational trend toward white-collar service jobs. As David Ley explains, the rise of the post-industrial economy brought with it the increasing entrenchment of a two-tier labour market, socioeconomic polarization, population displacement in previously undervalued urban areas, and an enhanced culture of consumption (New Middle Class 15).
were “upgraded” and redeveloped for the burgeoning group that David Ley terms the “new middle class”; the period was also marked by the increasing commodification of urban lifestyles, as developers, retailers, and service providers sought to capitalize on this new market’s enthusiasm for city living. In the past few decades, as the gap between rich and poor has widened and as property prices have continued to rise, class tension has become a defining dimension of community life in Vancouver, with heated battles arising over a range of planning, policy, and development issues (see Campbell et al.; Ley and Dobson; Blomley, Unsettling; Mitchell; Shier; Olds, Globalization).

Reflecting on what distinguishes Vancouver from other Canadian urban regions, Barnes et al. suggest that certain features of post-industrial change—socioeconomic polarization, population displacement, the emergence of an intensified culture of consumption—have simply been exacerbated in the Vancouver case; we might say that Vancouver’s transformation has, in some ways, proven distinctive in its representativeness. At the same time, Vancouver has, in the past few decades, diverged “from the classic model of the post-industrial city, . . . typified by a monocultural, office-based economy . . . and modernist form and imagery” (Hutton, “Post-Industrialism” 1953). Factors informing Vancouver’s trajectory include the city’s influential gateway functions, its “insistent integration” into Pacific Rim markets, its use of hallmark events (Expo ’86, the Olympics) to catalyze mega-project and infrastructure development, and its post-corporate economy (Barnes et al. 291, 293-294). Barnes et al. note that while “Vancouver does not often make the list of global cities, remaining peripheral to the world’s financial and business centres[,] . . . the city’s economy has [nevertheless] been
transformed by global capital and labour” (307). With the decline of its mid-century role as an administrative and processing hub for the regional resource economy, Vancouver has become home to what Barnes et. al. describe as an increasingly invisible economy made up primarily of small and medium-sized enterprises, with an emphasis on services and consumption amenities (associated with entertainment, recreation, leisure, tourism), and—in keeping with the global emergence of the New Economy—noteable strength in the culture and technology sectors (see also Hutton, *New Economy*). Barnes et al. argue that, “more than other Canadian urban regions, Vancouver exemplifies the city as a space of flows and recurrent restructuring, rather than as a durable construct of stable industries, labour, social class, and communities” (291). In other words, in comparison with Canada’s other major cities, Vancouver has been subject to particularly frequent, rapid, and intensive socioeconomic and spatial change.

**Creativity and Cultural Work in the City**

In this study, I focus in particular on Vancouver as an emergent landscape of cultural production and consumption, and examine creativity and cultural work in relation to processes of city building and community formation. The commentator who has, over the past decade, proved most influential in transforming the discourse on urban

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10 In his article “Creative Cities: Conceptual Issues and Policy Questions,” Allen J. Scott offers this expansive definition of the oft-used term “New Economy”: “the leading edges of growth and innovation in the contemporary economy are made up of sectors such as high-technology industry, neo-artisanal manufacturing, business and financial services, [and] cultural-products industries (including the media). . . . [T]hese sectors in aggregate constitute a ‘new economy’” (3).

11 I employ the phrase “landscape of cultural production and consumption” following sociologist Sharon Zukin, who uses it in her work to capture the idea that processes of cultural consumption and production are organized spatially, and play a key role in shaping urban environments and communities.
creativity and culture is planning and policy theorist Richard Florida. In *The Rise of the Creative Class* and other writings, Florida champions “[h]uman creativity [as] the ultimate economic resource” (*Rise* xiii), and develops urban-policy prescriptions for fostering bohemian urban arts environments that in turn draw more lucrative “creative” talent (connected with new technology development, advertising, design, and so forth) to a city. Florida’s work has been criticized by many urban studies scholars who argue that, under the banner of “creativity” (the term usually vaguely and problematically defined in his work), Florida promotes economic development strategies intrinsically linked to gentrification and socioeconomic polarization. In Florida himself acknowledges some of the problems with his thesis in his later book *Cities and the Creative Class*, where he states that “the most salient of what I consider the externalities of the creative age has to do with rising social and economic inequality. . . . [D]iscouragingly, inequality is considerably worse in leading creative regions” (171; emphasis in orig.). As Loretta Lees et al. observe, “[Florida] recognizes that his model of urban economic renaissance both invites gentrification and stifles the diversity and creativity that it seeks,” as earlier, “bohemian” gentrifiers are, in turn, gradually pushed out by wealthier buyers (xx). Florida has nevertheless remained a champion of the creative class thesis, and the idea of the creative class as an economic driver with trickle-down benefits for other residents continues to inform urban planning and development (Stern and Seifert 1).

12 In “Struggling with the Creative Class,” Jamie Peck offers a useful summary of Florida’s opponents’ key arguments while also developing his own incisive critique.

13 In Vancouver, urban planning initiatives have helped foster the growth of the city’s cultural economy (see Hutton, *New Economy*; Hutton, “Post-Industrialism”); moreover, in 2004 the municipal government established a “Creative City Task Force,” with the stated aims of “achie[ving] the vision of Vancouver as a Creative City and as a Capital of Culture,” and “capitaliz[ing] on the profound potential of our creative community” (City of Vancouver). For a discussion of cultural policy in Vancouver, see Chapter Four.
In their introduction to the essay collection *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity*, Tim Edensor et al. criticize the way that the discourse of the creative class and the creative city\(^{14}\) has promoted a financial hierarchy of creative activity. This discourse, Edensor et al. argue, privileges “spectacular spaces of culture and consumption” (“festival market-places, creative quarters and cultural facilities designed by world-renowned, ‘star’ architects” \([2]\)) as well as “cultural activities whose products are easily commodifiable in terms of intellectual property rights and copyright material” \((4)\). The collection’s contributors call for greater attention to other kinds of creative activity that manifest in vernacular culture, exploring in their essays such practices as Flickr photo-sharing, community gardening, and public walks. Literary texts do not fit neatly into the category of vernacular creativity—they are, after all, a commodified art form; at the same time, however, they are not, usually, associated with spectacle, nor do they enjoy a place of prominence in the hierarchy of creativity implied in Florida’s work. We might say that literature is, generally speaking, the poor and often overlooked cousin of other commodified art forms such as film, television, and the visual arts, which in Vancouver (as elsewhere) tend to be more financially lucrative and enjoy considerably greater popular and critical attention.\(^{15}\)

\(^{14}\) Consultant Charles Landry and cultural planning scholar Franco Bianchini’s *The Creative City*, which identified creativity as an important aspect of economic regeneration in cities, was a precursor to Florida’s work, and helped popularize the phrase “creative city.”

\(^{15}\) Interestingly, the visual arts have—since artists associated with the Vancouver School of photoconceptualism (Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham, Ian Wallace, Ken Lum, Vikky Alexander, Roy Arden, Stan Douglas) rose to international prominence in the 1980s—become a sector where it is possible to achieve considerable financial success without abandoning a regional identity, as curator and critic Melanie O’Brien observes in her introduction to the essay collection *Vancouver Art and Economies* (21-22). In contrast, Vancouver’s two best-known writers, Douglas Coupland and William Gibson, achieved literary success with books set elsewhere, and then started to “regionalize” their fictional writing—Coupland with *Life After God* and *Girlfriend in a Coma*, and Gibson with *Spook Country*. (One exception, in Gibson’s case, is the story “The Winter Market,” which he published in the collection *Burning Chrome* in 1987. Paul Delany opened his 1994 study of this story by emphasizing the exceptional status of “The Winter Market” in Gibson’s oeuvre: “Gibson is a Vancouver author almost solely by residence . . . . [His] choice of
And yet, the ability of writers to create and command cultural capital means that, even if their work is not always profitable, they still play an important role in the urban landscape. As Zukin revealed in *Loft Living*, her groundbreaking study of New York City’s art and real estate markets, 16 artists contribute in significant ways to the revalorization of marginalized urban spaces. Indeed, it is this ability that Florida suggests cities should capitalize on; Zukin and other critical scholars, however, emphasize instead what they see as artists’ sometimes rather troubling role in the gentrification process. David Ley argues that the aestheticizing practices of artists significantly increase the cultural capital of the neighbourhoods in which they live, making these spaces more attractive for potential buyers (Ley, “Artists”). 17 Richard Lloyd, commenting on the early presence of a literary nonprofit in the now-gentrified Chicago neighbourhood of Wicker Park, notes that even makers of less commercially viable art such as poetry function as signs of cultural distinction and producers of cultural capital in urban spaces, “help[ing to] ‘make the scene’ . . . by providing local color,” featuring the neighbourhood in their work, and contributing the “real brow sweat” that goes into readings and launches, nonprofit organizations, and narrow-margin arts-related businesses (102); these factors, in turn, help make the neighbourhood more appealing to “new waves of artists, and the growing number of artists increases the attractiveness of the neighborhood for further

16 See also Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan’s article from the same period, “The Fine Art of Gentrification.”

17 For a more extensive discussion of Ley’s research—which draws on data from Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal—see Chapter Three.
Sarah Brouillette, in a recent study of literary texts marketed as representations of the gentrifying London neighbourhood of Brick Lane, argues that these texts “and their accompanying marketing and media commentary . . . solidify [Brick Lane’s] desirability as an urban frontier for exciting neighbourhood experiences” (427).

Significantly, Brouillette reads the literary text that is the major focus of her study—Monica Ali’s novel Brick Lane—as a “gentrification tale,” arguing that it offers, in its central character, a story of transformation through cultural entrepreneurship that reinforces the gentrification narrative (428). In my own study, I take a different approach, selecting texts that resist or query dominant processes and narratives of change, or that demonstrate a degree of self-consciousness about their place within those processes. In other words, the “social content” of the texts I choose to study does not simply reinforce an existing narrative of change; instead, I emphasize the importance of reading these texts as productive interventions in the conversation about the role of artists and cultural workers in the city.

As well, by selecting for analysis the work of a range of Vancouver-based writers, each distinctively positioned in the city, I aim to demonstrate that the urban artist is not simply a social type, as the social science scholarship on the role of artists in urban

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18 Economist Ann Markusen has questioned the scholarship linking the presence of artists in undervalued neighbourhoods to gentrification, noting that “[i]n roomy metros . . . and stagnant urban . . . environments, it is harder to argue that new artistic spaces are displacing anyone. . . . In Minneapolis, [for instance,] the decades-long presence of several converted breweries with in excess of 500 studio units for artists has not destabilized a persistent working class and immigrant community northeast of the center of the city” (1936-37). Drawing on research by Mark Stern, Markusen also observes that in Philadelphia, “where no larger dynamic is pressing on housing and land prices, the entry and presence of artists into stable, low-income neighbourhoods does not set off a process of gentrification” (1973). However, Markusen does still concur with Zukin that in cities with “high and rising” housing prices, such as New York City (or, for that matter, Vancouver), “the sequential arrival and departure of artists is more notable” (1936).
change often implies.\(^{19}\) The writers whose work I examine in Chapter Two (after providing an overview of Vancouver’s history of change in Chapter One) take me to the physical and social edges of the city, using their texts as spaces for articulating resistance to displacement and marginalization. Such objectives remain crucial in the poetry that I examine in Chapter Three, but these more recent texts include at least a partial recognition of artists’ complicity in processes of urban change; at the same time, the complicated poetic personas that emerge in the texts encourage the recognition that artists are more than mere signs of cultural capital in the urban landscape. In my final chapter, I consider how literary representations of cultural workers (restaurateurs, reviewers, scholars, librarians, journalists, teachers) invite a rethinking of the “economic” and “intrinsic” definitions of culture that have informed recent urban cultural policy. Read together, these literary texts build an argument for a more expansive understanding of cultural work, and query, without dismissing, instrumentalizing notions of the role of culture in the city.

**Conceptualizing the Space of the Literary**

I have proposed to explore, in this study, the ways in which differently positioned authors—their perspectives “at once interlocking and in tension,” as Williams puts it—have responded to processes of city building and community formation in Vancouver. But what is involved, and what is at stake, in taking such an approach? To begin to answer this question, I wish to consider together, briefly, the projects of Vancouver’s first

\(^{19}\) Markusen is a notable exception: in her interrogation of the link between artists and gentrification, she encourages a more complicated portrait of urban artists: “many artists are of the community in which they live, including many artists of color and immigrant artists. Many are also poor. . . . Many artists play active roles in their neighborhoods—in working with troubled youth, in visiting prisoners, and in staging and coaching community arts fairs and performances” (1937).
two poet laureates, George McWhirter, who served from 2007 to 2009, and Brad Cran, who completed his term in 2011. McWhirter’s and Cran’s different interpretations of the poet-laureate role are suggestive of the at times highly politicized tensions within Vancouver’s literary community; at the same time, however, they share notable common ground in their conceptualizations of literature’s relationship to the broader urban project.

McWhirter, during his tenure as poet laureate, compiled a book titled *A Verse Map of Vancouver*, in which he gathered poems by different writers about specific neighbourhoods, streets, parks, buildings, geographical features, and landmarks in Vancouver. Together, the poems sketch an alternative map of the city based on lived relationships to particular places. Some reviewers have questioned McWhirter’s editorial choices: Jacqueline Turner, for instance, finds that his selections suggest urban boosterism, though she does acknowledge that “there are some poems which veer from [a] celebratory formula to reveal glimpses, at least, of a lived reality.” My own assessment of the collection is more in line with that of Sonnet L’Abbé, who argues that *Verse Map* provides a “many-voiced, intimate and unpretentious portrait of the city. The Vancouver [it] present[s] . . . is not a tour of official sightseeing stops, but rather a ramble through the varied and sometimes seemingly ‘featureless’ places that have held enough meaning to people that they were inspired to write about them” (2). And yet, published in the lead-up to the 2010 Olympics as a $45 coffee-table book complete with glossy colour photographs of the city, *Verse Map* must be seen—regardless of its content—as a commodified consumer object, one that is at least in some ways complicit with the spectacularization of urban culture. Even without the special packaging, the celebratory discourse that dominated in the city during this period inevitably informed the publication
and reception of *Verse Map*. In this sense, *Verse Map* keeps company with Vancouver’s first three major anthologies of local literature, which were published in anticipation of Expo ’86——*Vancouver Short Stories* (1985), edited by Carole Gerson; *Vancouver Poetry* (1986), edited by Allan Safarik; and *Vancouver: Soul of a City* (1986), edited by Gary Geddes. All of these collections, including *Verse Map*, helped vitalize and diversify the local urban imaginary, and expanded the readership of Vancouver’s literary archive; and yet, without diminishing this function, I would suggest that they were also, perhaps inevitably, to some extent wrapped up in the urban boosterism associated with Expo and the Olympics.

Brad Cran, in partnership with the Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia, seized on another funding and marketing opportunity——Vancouver’s 125th anniversary in 2011——to spearhead a publishing initiative of his own, the Vancouver 125 Legacy Books Collection, which will see ten Vancouver-based works of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction return to print. This initiative shares similar goals as *Verse Map* and the 1986 anthologies, but with key distinctions. First, the Legacy Books list has a more explicitly politicized agenda, favouring texts that depict and explore class- and race-based issues and experiences. Moreover, each Legacy text is being re-published as a stand-alone document, with different local publishers responsible for particular texts. Only the Legacy Collection designation gathers the texts together under the sign of “Vancouver,” easing, at least to some extent, the burden of representativeness. Still, the project is

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20 The non-fiction book *Vancouver and its Writers: A Guide to Vancouver’s Literary Landmarks*, by Alan Twigg, was also published in 1986.

connected to the same promotional machinery as the anthologies.\textsuperscript{22}

Arguably, though, Cran’s most distinctive act as poet laureate took place a year before the announcement of the Legacy Collection, when he refused to read poems as part of the celebrations for the Olympic Games. Cran explained his position in an essay published on the Poet Laureate website and in a local newspaper, the Georgia Straight, citing both the content guidelines in artists’ contracts\textsuperscript{23} and the dearth of literary events in the Cultural Olympiad, which ran concomitantly with the Games.\textsuperscript{24} Though the latter reason perhaps makes Cran’s refusal seem somewhat counter-productive, he was clearly comfortable with the contradiction that his public stand involved: in his essay, he aligns himself with Vancouver-based writer and critic George Woodcock, an anarchist who—contrary to his anti-government political leanings—one accepted a Freedom of the City award from the municipal government because, according to Cran, he believed in honouring the idea of the city as “a bastion of intellectual freedom” (Cran). Cran goes on to suggest that the “muzzle clause” in artists’ contracts was an attack on the freedom that Woodcock had felt it was so important to honour. “[I]t shows,” he argues,

\textsuperscript{22} Another major project of Cran’s that also takes advantage of the city’s anniversary is the Vancouver 125 Poetry Conference, which will run for four days in October 2011. The conference is another example of Cran’s efforts to use the poet-laureate role to make a bold statement: as impetus for the conference, Cran has suggested that Vancouver’s poetry scene is too fixed on the past, that it is “still very much defined by the 1963 [Poetry] [C]onference,” a landmark international poetry event that was organized by UBC professor Warren Tallman and American poet Robert Creeley (Cran, qtd. in Lederman). Arguing that the Vancouver-based writers associated with the 1963 conference (the TISH group, the downtown poets) have overshadowed later generations, Cran has set up the 2011 event so that it will only feature poets who published their first book after 1990 (Lederman).

\textsuperscript{23} Cran explains, in the essay, that he had been invited to “read poems that corresponded to themes as provided to [him] by an Olympic bureaucrat,” and that his contract would have also included a clause stipulating that “[t]he artist shall at all times refrain from making any negative or derogatory remarks respecting VANOC, the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Olympic movement generally, Bell and/or other sponsors associated with VANOC” (qtd. in Cran). Cran was not alone in responding critically to the Olympics guidelines and contract: the so-called “muzzle clause” was the subject of considerable debate within the local artist community in the lead-up to the Games.

\textsuperscript{24} Cran notes that just six of a total of 193 events were devoted to literature, and only two featured local writers. In addition to these few Cultural Olympiad literary events, the Opening Ceremonies also included a local writer—Vancouver-based spoken word poet Shane Koyczan.
that VANOC [the Vancouver Olympic Committee] is misrepresenting Vancouver. Vancouver is the most politically progressive city in North America with a strong history of political activism. . . . Rather than finding a way to celebrate these important attributes VANOC has . . . tried to suppress them. As George Woodcock teaches us: our freedom as a city is a tradition that should be protected and we should not underestimate an attack on that freedom whether symbolic or otherwise.

In suggesting that any vision of Vancouver as a “world class city” must include a recognition of artistic and political freedom, Cran provocatively redefines this phrase favoured by urban boosters.

McWhirter and Cran clearly diverged in their approaches to the laureateship; and yet their conceptualizations of the role that literature plays in city building and community formation are not entirely irreconcilable. Both demonstrate a deep investment in literature as a means of articulating what Henri Lefebvre—in what remains one of the most subtle and productive theorizations of space—called “lived” space. For Lefebvre, the subjective experience of space (at once embodied, affective, and mental) is filtered through, but also involves the potentially resistant negotiation of, the representational lenses of culture. Lived space is, on the one hand, “dominated” space, structured according to prevailing “representations of space” developed by planners, developers, architects, government officials, lawmakers, business leaders—those who play an influential role in shaping the built landscape and establishing what Lefebvre terms “spatial practices” (schedules, routines, conventions of use) (Production 39, 38). Importantly, though, lived space is also “space which the imagination seeks to change.
and appropriate”—it is, in other words, where Lefebvre locates individual agency (39).

Both McWhirter and Cran, in their respective ways, encouraged Vancouverites to attend to the dominated but potentially interrogative, even transformative role of literary texts in the production of urban spaces and communities. McWhirter gathered and disseminated a diverse collection of “word-windows” onto lived experience; some of these queried, and others reinforced, dominant conceptualizations and depictions of the city (McWhirter, “Introduction” 5). Cran, meanwhile, criticized the reductive and troubling “misrepresentations” of Vancouver promulgated in Olympics programming and content guidelines, advocating for greater recognition of literary texts as vital contributions to the urban imaginary, and for the right of writers to share their work without censure. McWhirter’s and Cran’s perspectives and projects were (to return to Raymond Williams’s phrase) certainly in tension, but interlocking. Considered together, they suggest the complicated ways in which Vancouver-based writers are engaged in the project of city making.

Like McWhirter and Cran, and following Williams’s suggestion that the “social content” of literature is often of the “present and affective kind,” I approach literary texts as especially (though not uniquely) well suited to the task of articulating lived space, and suggest that they have the capacity to inform and influence the ways in which we experience, understand, and build community. Form, style, and epistemological difference all make literary texts difficult to bring to the broader scholarly and popular discourse about city building and community formation; however, I would suggest that this inassimilability is not simply limiting but also potentially instructive and productive. My understanding of literary texts is informed by the work of Charles Altieri, who in
“The Sensuous Dimension of Literary Experience” describes literary texts as complex, internally dense formal structures that perform and model a negotiation of the sensuous and reflective, the concrete and the abstract, the real and imagined dimensions of experience. Altieri suggests the need for a return of attention to the ways in which “literary experience affords not just the details of material life but also an affectively charged sensuousness calling forth and rewarding the free play of imagination” (72-73). He views literary texts not simply as supplementary fictions but as entities that inform, and that we engage as part of, our actual experience.

Altieri makes this call in response to the privileging of materialist theories in late twentieth and early twenty-first century literary criticism, citing in particular arguments about the material text, Bill Brown’s thing theory, and—most important for my own work—cultural materialism (73). He proposes that in “adamantly resist[ing]” the idealist dimensions of traditional literary criticism, these theoretical approaches can tend toward at least a partial failure to recognize “the distinctive roles literature can play in social life” (71, 72). In his discussion of cultural materialism, he suggests that there is a disjunction between the cultural materialist view of social relations as fundamentally structural, and methods of observing and reading that seek to account for and explore individual experience and agency. He also notes the tendency, among cultural materialists, to divert attention away from the text itself and to focus instead on the cultural context in which

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25 Literary criticism, for Altieri, is rooted in the recognition of literature’s special capacity to instruct and delight, which he argues “distinguishes the literary from both the commitment history has to unfolding particular stories and from the commitment philosophy has to sharpening our sense of the universals available for reasoning” (72). Altieri encourages a literary critical approach involving close readings which attend “primarily to how a work deploys various structuring devices to give it a kind of internal force and hence an intensified individuality capable of affecting our sense of possible actions and possible ways of caring for others” (79).
the text was produced\textsuperscript{26} and the ways it has been taken up or appropriated. He concedes that “[m]aterialist criticism promises a hard-headed, politically committed realism sharply at odds with the now somewhat embarrassing claims to sensitivity and to wisdom all too common in . . . close readings”; however, he goes on to emphasize that the materialist approach, far from escaping the idealist tendencies that it aims to resist, has its own, political pieties.

Like Altieri, I worry about the possibility of eliding or tending toward reductive readings of literary texts in the effort to demonstrate how these texts are wrapped up in socioeconomic processes. I also worry that approaches favouring a structural understanding of social relations do not always provide the best lens for, as Altieri puts it, appreciating the special capacity of literary texts to articulate subjective experience and “make particulars bear generalized reflection” (86). But I would not argue, as Altieri does, that we require “an alternative to materialist theory” (71). In fact, I would suggest that my subject of study—literary responses to urban change—\textit{demands} that I situate these texts in their appropriate socioeconomic contexts and consider their relations to power. My primary aim, however, is to do so without occluding the space of the literary. Thus, while always working to contextualize my readings, I privilege the literary as a space where (to borrow another phrase from Williams, whose cultural materialist work on structures of feeling was so attentive to the pre-structural quality of emergent social relations) we find social content articulated in its “generative immediacy” (133). And, as I have already indicated, I devote particular attention to what literary texts themselves have to say about the contexts informing their production and consumption, recognizing

\textsuperscript{26} Cultural context, as Altieri defines it, includes “the practices, the active ideologies, and the webs of interest that are largely responsible for the author’s sense of the possible significance of what he or she writes.”
and exploring the highly self-reflexive dimension of specific texts.

**Through a Regional Lens**

When the journal *Canadian Literature* held a conference to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2009, the editors invited a selection of established scholars to offer their thoughts on the current state of the field. In her contribution to the conference, Alison Calder called for a return to the critical discussion of region, which she suggested had been neglected in recent years: “literary analysis that attends to representations of specific places, or that connects itself to specific places,” she insisted, “can help us to develop ideas about what is going on in [those] places . . . —what forces are acting on us, and how we might respond to them” (114). Calder’s description of the kind of understanding that literary regionalism can produce recalls W. H. New’s reflections on the regional approach in *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing*:

> At its most sensitive, regional criticism can . . . usefully indicate that literary texts have social value. They are not to be dismissed as ornamental foibles or as artificial aberrations from some authoritative documentary norm. They emerge from specific social contexts. They are charged with particular social meaning. Hence they are contributing actively to an attitudinal dialectic in a society still very much concerned with change. (152)

My own study is, as I have emphasized, deeply invested in such a project. It is especially attentive to the role that processes of urban agglomeration play in configuring a region as a social, cultural, economic, and physical space, and to the capacity of literary texts to
foster what another important scholar of literary regionalism, Laurie Ricou, has described as “a different, critical, radical involvement in home” (“Region” 953).

My understanding of urban regions is informed by the work of urban theorist Edward Soja, in particular his application of the “long-neglected concept” of synekism to contemporary urban contexts (“Writing the City” 274). Soja traces the term synekism back to the work of Thucydides and Aristotle: both employed the Greek word *synoikismos*, in their studies of the formation of the Athenian polis, to describe processes of physical agglomeration and societal consolidation (273). Soja observes that Aristotle in particular used the term to articulate “an active social and spatial process that involved political and cultural confederation around a distinctive territorial centre” (273).

*Synoikismos*, Soja explains, has the root *oikos*—“home or dwelling place”—which is “the same root that is found in economics . . . and ecology” (273). The word’s suffix, *mos*, “connotes the conditions arising from,” and its prefix, *syn*, “refers to being together” (273). Thus *synoikismos*, according to Soja, describes “the economic and ecological interdependencies and . . . synergisms that arise from the purposeful clustering and collective cohabitation of people in space, in a ‘home’ habitat” (*Postmetropolis* 12). 27 In taking up the term, Soja uses it to articulate the way that “creativity, innovation, territorial identity, political consciousness and societal development . . . arise from living together in dense and heterogeneous urban regions”; he argues, moreover, that this crucial quality of cities can be grasped properly only through attention to the lived specificity of urban spaces (274). With Soja’s definition of synekism in mind, I focus, in

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27 Similarly—and apparently without debt to Soja—cultural critic Jenny Burman uses the term “ideo-syncretism,” in her reflections on the diasporic city, to describe the ways in which “[c]ultural difference is mobilized, portrayed or performed, and ‘managed’ differently from city to city” (268).
my study, on the production of a situated literary imaginary in Vancouver, and the interdependencies of this imaginary with the broader urban “habitat.”

My project is furthermore indebted to previous work on regionalism by Canadian literature scholars—notably Janice Fiamengo’s essay “Regionalism and Urbanism,” which foregrounds urban texts as often overlooked forms of regional writing, and also Lisa Chalykoff’s efforts to bring “a more precise and critically inflected vocabulary of space” (via the work of Soja and Lefebvre) to the discussion of Canadian literary regionalism (41). I take as foundational Ricou’s suggestion, in his entry on regionalism for the Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada, that regional writing helps make visible and animate “the contingencies, the network of relationships” that emerge in and produce a particular place (953). This recognition of contingency and provisionality comes to the fore especially in Chapter Two of my study, where I explore how Vancouver-based literary texts interrogate the binary distinction between the regions of city and hinterland: as New suggests in Land Sliding, “in practice, this binary breaks down; the categories move, being constantly in negotiation with each other” (158). Frank Davey’s observation that regions are characterized by “contexts in which specifically marked varieties of textuality differ and negotiate” has also helped shape my understanding of Vancouver’s literary imaginary as a diverse, changing, always precarious discursive construct (“Toward the Ends” 17). With Eva-Marie Kröller, I recognize the identity of the Vancouver city-region as fundamentally unstable, and see the ongoing acceptance, even nurturing, of such instability as “a challenge in civic responsibility” (Kröller, “Regionalism” 281).

While a regionalist approach has often been taken up, by Canadian writers, in
response to the apparently homogenizing, centralizing forces of nation, empire, and globalization, I concur with Herb Wyile that regionalism should not be understood as “a synonym for anti-centrism,” and am troubled by reactionary discourse that naturalizes or fetishizes regional difference (273). Following the historian Arif Dirlik, I appreciate that any region/centre divide “is now complicated by the recognition of differences internal to regions . . . and that distinguish groups of people that cut across national, regional, or civilizational boundaries” (163). I understand contemporary Vancouver as a particular expression of what Dirlik terms “global modernity”: the contradictions of capitalist modernity have, Dirlik suggests, been universalized “through the agencies of capitalism and colonialism” (163), but it is precisely the contradictory nature of capitalist modernity that creates unevenness and difference in its expression both across and within particular regions (24, 90-98).28 “We have all been touched by modernity,” Dirlik writes, but “it nevertheless has launched societies on different trajectories[,] . . . and that point . . . is important for considering what [the future] might bring” (155). The Vancouver of global modernity is, in other words, hardly a unique space, but at the same time global modernity has been established, and its dominant discourses disseminated, in this city-region in specific ways. My own work develops from the premise that studies of the literary texts produced in Vancouver must likewise be particularized and contextual.

28 As Jeff Derksen observes, Dirlik conceptualizes “globalization not as economic and cultural processes that national [or, indeed, sub-national] economies, . . . cultures, . . . and identities are centripetally drawn into, resisting and being transformative as they go, but as a more mobile class project of inclusion and exclusion, of integration and marginalization, of accumulation and dispossession” (“Poetry” 5). See Chapter One for an overview of how this class project has contributed to the reshaping of Vancouver.
During the time that I have been working on this study, I have often found myself returning to a small photo-text project by Fred Wah called “Me Too!,” which is included in his 2008 collection *Sentenced to Light*. The project was inspired by Wah’s visit, in 2004, to a retrospective exhibition of photography by his longtime friend Roy Kiyooka. The show included several photographs of the pedestrian traffic and shops along Hastings Street in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside—images taken by Kiyooka about 25 years...
earlier. Both Kiyooka and Wah have long-standing connections to this traditionally working-class neighbourhood, whose population has, in recent decades, struggled to survive and thrive in the face of various social and political pressures and failures.29

Wah’s idea for a photo-text response to Kiyooka’s photographs emerged as he toured the retrospective. In an introductory note to the “Me Too!” project, he writes:

Walking around the show, I accidentally pass[ed] between one of the slide projectors and the carousel of images projected on the wall. My shadow [was] cast into the image on the wall and I [had] the strange sensation that old friend and artist Roy Kiyooka [was] taking a posthumous photo of ME, framed in a familiar landscape, from within the darkness of a stairwell on Hastings Street in Vancouver around 1979. (65)

Wah decided to take digital photos of his silhouette against the street scenes (see fig. 1, previous page), and then wrote an accompanying text in the style of the utanikki, or Japanese poetic diary—a literary genre that has its roots in 10th century Japan, with Matsuo Bashô’s 17th-century travelogue Narrow Road to the Interior providing perhaps the best-known Japanese example of the form. Over the past century, the form has been adapted by a range of Western practitioners, including members of the San Francisco Renaissance and Black Mountain School, American literary groups with whom Kiyooka, Wah, and other members of Vancouver’s post-war poetry scene were in close and ongoing dialogue. Wah, however, has indicated that Vancouver-born, Toronto-based poet

29 The Downtown Eastside community is characterized by poverty but also a strong activist spirit, which has been sustained by many longtime residents who have fought for social housing and have, as I indicated earlier in this introduction, repeatedly challenged planning initiatives that would allow for gentrifying development in the neighbourhood. At least in part because of its proximity to the Port of Vancouver (a key entry point for illicit drugs into the country), the Downtown Eastside has also been hit hard by the city’s drug trade (Shier 2002: 14). See Chapter One for further discussion of housing and development issues in the Downtown Eastside.
bpNichol’s playfully titled poem “You Too, Nicky” was his first exposure to the form (Wah, “Is a Door”) (see Nichol, Gifts).

In his introduction to a collection of Japanese poetic diaries in translation, Earl Miner explains that the “dominant features” of the utanikki are “a strong consciousness of time and a desire to memorialize [experience]” (18, 3). Tyler Doherty reflects that while Miner’s term “memorialize” might connote a “kind of ‘flies in amber’ fetishizing,” the utanikki in fact tends to place “great emphasis on enacting and embodying the moments [and] movements [it] perform[s]” (14). The utanikki functions as a vital testament to “a broad, generous, and compassionate attention,” constellating reflection and memory in relation to the present-tense experience of the “world in the process of unfolding” (15). The work of articulating this sense of at once deep and open-ended experience is facilitated by the utanikki’s dynamic form, which is rooted in the Japanese tradition of haibun, combining haiku or haiku-like poetry and what Joanne Kyger describes as “prose-like descriptive narrative bridges” (33). As Miner writes, in the utanikki, “[a]fter prose has said all it can, or at least all that it is decent for it to attempt, poems rise to have their say” (19). A final characteristic of the utanikki that continues to feature prominently in contemporary examples, including Wah’s, is the practice of quoting other poets and observers; the utanikki thus holds the potential for highly textured forms of observation.

Such characteristics make the utanikki a fruitful form for Wah in his response to Kiyooka, enabling him to articulate an extended moment of attention to the way that

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30 As Wah understands it, haibun is “short prose written from a haiku sensibility and . . . concluded by an informal haiku line” (Waiting; qtd. in Wah, “Fred Wah on Hybridity” 151). “So,” he reflects, “if you’re writing this short piece of prose and you know that you’ve got to end it with a little haiku, that’s going to be in your consciousness as you’re working through the piece; you’re looking for the haiku sensibility—of fragility, seasonality, deep reflection, meditation—in the language” (“Fred Wah on Hybridity” 151).
body memory, along with the language and images of a particular artistic inheritance, inflect present experience. The prose bridges carry Wah’s readers through his experience of viewing Kiyooka’s photographs, while the movements into poetry hold us in the moment, attending with him to it. Throughout, Wah mingles Kiyooka’s distinctive and rather eccentric personal vernacular with his own voice and imagery, enacting in and through the text the “layered potency for montage” that, he tells us, the experience of viewing his friend’s old photographs evoked (“Me Too!” 68).

Kiyooka developed a highly idiosyncratic personal vocabulary over the course of his career as an artist, and one of the terms that he favoured, the word “inter-face,” seems to express particularly well the ethic and form that Wah, along with critics such as Miner and Doherty, associate with the utanikki. Kiyooka tended to insert a hyphen into the middle of the word “interface,” highlighting the term’s two component parts—a tactic that enabled him to evoke through the word an especially strong sense of vitality of encounter, whether among or between bodies, materials, spaces, or phases. For Kiyooka, everyday experience and artistic practice were informed by this notion of the inter-face: he devoted careful attention to the ways in which, for example, one subject meets another, viewing subject meets world, text meets photo, past meets present, and time

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31 Wah’s decision to draw on the utanikki in response and homage to Kiyooka is especially apt because Kiyooka himself engaged with the form (e.g. his long poem “Wheels,” which documents Kiyooka’s trip to Japan with his father). Even beyond instances of explicit engagement with the utanikki, aspects of its form and ethic were foundational to Kiyooka’s work. For example, shifts between prose and poetry and a sustained diaristic quality are key characteristics of the writing collected in his two thick volumes of published letters, texts which combine reflections on artistic practice, pedagogy, politics, personal and family history and relations, travel, and everyday experience. Moreover, some of Kiyooka’s most critically lauded works (e.g. StoneDGloves, Pacific Windows) consist of poetry or poetic prose appended to photographs, with the attached text enhancing the viewer’s awareness of the ways in which the photographs emerged out of daily observation and subjective response. Such projects, suggests Wah, “resonate with the utanikki” (“Me Too!” 65).
meets place. In his life and work, he endeavoured to acknowledge a lively otherness and to nurture an awareness of his own specific position as a viewing subject. Moreover, as a Japanese Canadian who had lived through marginalization and displacement during and following the Second World War, Kiyooka was particularly aware of what he termed the “inter-faces” between and within communities and cultures—especially the often disjunctive tensions of such spaces of negotiation—and he brought this awareness of difficulty and complexity to his thinking about what it meant to participate in, and observe, his downtown Vancouver neighbourhood.

Like Kiyooka, Wah has long been interested in what he has described as the “poetics of the hyphen”—the hyphen as a linguistic articulation of the social and phenomenological “dynamics of ‘betweenness’” (“Is a Door”)—and his evocation of an intricate set of inter-faces, or spaces of hyphenation, in his “Me Too!” project would likely have pleased his old friend. Combining observation, memory, and imagination, Wah uses the space of the appended text to highlight Kiyooka’s disjunctive relation to the scene he was photographing: he describes Kiyooka sitting and smoking, “crooked shoulder [tucked up] against his chin,” “shooting the framed street . . . from the camouflage at the top of [a] stairwell,” “there but not wanting to be seen there” (“Me Too!” 66). In altering Kiyooka’s photographs to include the figure of a photographer in silhouette, Wah further exposes (without fully revealing) the artist playing the role of shadowy voyeur, clandestinely capturing images from the darkness of the doorway.

32 See “Inter-Face: Roy Kiyooka’s Writing”—which combines an interview with Kiyooka and a commentary on his work by Roy Miki—for further background on Kiyooka’s use of the term “inter-face.” Miki, in his commentary, emphasizes the chiastic quality of the inter-face in Kiyooka’s art practice (41).
33 Reflecting on Kiyooka’s careful “attention to the textures of language in [his] poems,” Miki notes: “[w]hatever alchemical ingredients were stirred into the making of his speech-writing, the localism of the words at hand—in hand—enact a present-tense ‘i’ that is both affect and effect, both producer and produced” (“Coruscations” 314-15).
The inclusion of this figure is also, of course, Wah’s way of emphasizing his own viewing body, with its particular connections to the late 1970s Hastings Street scene in Kiyooka’s photographs.³⁴ “ME too,” Wah writes in the appended text, expressing his paradoxical feelings of connection to, and exclusion from, Kiyooka’s Hastings Street:

have always been there
some part of myself
left behind there
but joined
to the busy street

... what matters
man w. cane walks west
woman w. shopping bags
man w. no cane walks east
empty street
I’m left, behind
already past the frame
always
just off the edge. (66, 68)

Wah has remarked that he appreciates the utanikki for its “rambling possibility,” and has smilingly referred to his response to Kiyooka as a “Me too Nicky,” or me-too-nikki (“Is a Door”).³⁵ In his play with the utanikki as a form and ethic, Wah highlights its potential for flexibility and texture, making it a space for de-stabilizing and interrogating the authority of the perceiving “I”/eye (or “i,” as Kiyooka would write it), and for articulating the complexities of embodied relationality. This does not mean that he entirely

³⁴ In a reflection on the “Me Too!” project, Wah describes the following connections between his own work, Kiyooka’s, and the Hastings Street environs: “Around 1979-80, Daphne Marlatt had a writing studio on Hastings, just across the street from Save-On Meats, west of Army and Navy. She walked to her studio each day from Keefer Street [in Strathcona, where she lived with Kiyooka]. I was editing her selected poems, Net Work, at the time and she asked Roy to make a photo for the cover of the book” (“Is a Door”). The cover of Marlatt’s Net Work: Selected Writing features a photo montage by Kiyooka that includes one of his shots of Save-On Meats.

³⁵ Wah’s odd spelling of what is, already, a decidedly odd word/phrase is, of course, a nod to bpNichol’s “You Too, Nicky.”
undermines Kiyooka’s point of view as a perceiving subject, which to a considerable extent coincides with his own. Rather, Wah’s me-too-nikki at once celebrates shared experience and evokes a lively sense of otherness. Moreover, Wah grapples with a question that, Doherty argues, has often been elided by western practitioners of the poetic diary—“how to honestly acknowledge the place of the self in experience without tipping overboard into confessionalism or navel gazing” (qtd. in Rothenberg 90-91). In repeating the self-consciously childish cry of “Me Too!,” Wah highlights the role that ego plays in his desire to insert himself into the scene, even as his project also contributes to the conversation about what it means to be an attentive, affected artist-observer of an urban community.

What Wah ultimately contributes to this conversation, through his “Me Too!” project, is a portrait of artists living and working in Vancouver’s inner-city neighbourhoods as a kind of shadow community. The members of this community are, on the one hand, participants in the life of the neighbourhood, but their position as observing artists—which endows them with cultural and social capital, and (at least in Wah’s and Kiyooka’s cases) more opportunity for mobility than many of the neighbourhood’s low-income residents—also situates them at a certain remove from the broader community that they photograph and write about. While “Me Too!” pays homage to the honest effort of an artist to document his local community, it also highlights the way in which artists trade in a currency of images and text, and how the power of the observing “I”/eye continues to accrue even in a project that aims to interrogate its own authority. In the final section of “Me Too!” Wah seems to comment on this process, describing the multiplication of his silhouetted selves over the course of his series of altered images:
Me too, then
three, then four
more than
another some
one else

on Hastings Street. (69)

Of course, this multiplying figure remains in shadow, at once a configuring presence and an unsettling absence in the artistic document of the neighbourhood. Wah’s me-too-nikki can be read as an embodied meditation on how neighbourhood residents, in taking on the role of observing artists, find themselves on the outside looking in, engaged in an intricate push and pull of separation and belonging at what Kiyooka would describe as the inter-face of their arts and neighbourhood communities.

I have found myself often thinking about Wah’s “Me Too!” because I too am a long-time Vancouverite (I was born and raised in Vancouver, and returned in my mid-twenties to pursue graduate work) and have, at times, grappled with my relationship to the city as at once a resident and a researcher. I know that as I produce research on the work of writers such as Kiyooka and Wah, I too am trading in a currency of text and images, and accruing a certain kind of power through my observation, documentation, and critique of urban culture. I am especially aware of the power that lies in selection: for every text that I discuss in this study, there are many more that have informed my thinking, and that might—if not for lack of space—have expanded my discussion of literary responses to Vancouver’s trajectory of change, and my portrait of local writers’

\footnote{To borrow a phrase from Kiyooka in his poem “Mutualities: A Packet of Word/s,” the photographers in shadow (Wah and Kiyooka) “reveal[] even as they conceal their solemn ties” (134). Significantly, the poem “Mutualities” is Kiyooka’s homage to the painter Richard Turner, and it is a text to which Wah explicitly refers in “Me Too!”}
engagement in the urban project. And there are still, always, more texts to be read, more texts to be written. In both this study and this city, there are many persistent silences.

It is true, too, that my affective, embodied relationship to some of the places featured in this study has, inevitably, informed my responses to those places as well as my selection and reading of certain texts. I have, on many occasions, heard that little voice crying “Me Too!” and have tried to maintain an awareness of how sometimes deep emotions might be shading or distorting my perspective and approach. At the same time, though, I consider affect to be a vital and often productive aspect of the relationship between literary texts and their readers—including scholarly readers. Moreover, while my love for the city and its various communities undoubtedly blinds me in some ways, I also know that this love is enhanced not only by my daily participation in civic life, but also by the processes of research, reflection, analysis, and even critique that inform my project. As Vancouver-based poet and critic Jeff Derksen writes in his essay “How High Is the City, How Deep Is Our Love”:

By our productive movements through the spaces of the city, and by the making public of streets, parks, galleries, bars, studios, bars, apartments, through the ways we enliven them, and through the discussion of what is possible in a city, we slowly build up the city’s identity and life. Likewise, through the critique of the lack of possibilities . . . and the achingly stupid aspects of any city, we also build up a love for the city in another way.

Working on this project in my apartment in Vancouver’s West End, by a window overlooking a downtown alley, I have often felt—like some of the artists whose work I study—at once distanced and implicated, complicit and critically engaged. This tension, I
have come to understand, is part of a complicated, and certainly imperfect, way of loving the city.

& the lights of
Vancouver say
shine
even when lines aren’t there to be written

... outside the window
the rumble of other journeys
planes, trains, cars passing
the feet of friends or strangers echo the unseen concrete
the blind is white under its horizontal ribbing
the world enters
your ear

- bpNichol, “You Too, Nicky”37

37 “You Too, Nicky,” a section of bpNichol’s long poem The Martyrology, was written between 1979 and 1985. It was published posthumously in Gifts: The Martyrology Book(s) 7 & , and is also included in the bpNichol selected works An H in the Heart: A Reader. The version cited here is from Gifts (n. pag.).
Chapter One: 
Historical Overview of Urban Change in Vancouver

Vancouver had always seemed more like an encampment than a city . . . , about as permanent as a card table set up for a Friday-night game.

- Michael Christie, “Discard”

The now-staid Dominion Building began its life as a gleaming, high-tech example of what was possible in architecture. Just like the Sun Life Building in Montreal, it was a very proud colonial reference to the distant sea of Empire. Then it would have housed whatever businesses . . . needed peak profile and status. Now it represents what rental brokers call C or even D Property—desired, primarily, by people like myself, or by outfits that either don’t need or can’t afford shinier digs. Entire populations have washed in and out of the Dominion Building in those one hundred years. In each of them, the change in tenant profile would have shifted minutely, invisibly. But if you stand back and look at the century in total, then you see the change to have been an enormous, city-scale social phenomenon.

- Timothy Taylor, in interview with Noah Richler, 
This Is My Country, What’s Yours?

The material contexts of urban change will, for the most part, provide the background for sustained readings of Vancouver-based literary texts (including novelist Timothy Taylor’s Stanley Park) over the course of this study; however, in this chapter they come to the fore in the form of an overview of Vancouver’s history of development. I begin by examining key development trends and emergent narratives of civic identity from Vancouver’s late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century boom era, before turning my attention to the phase of extensive redevelopment in the central city that began after World War II. This period saw the rise of a progressive urban reform movement in
response to a long-dominant pro-development agenda at City Hall; however, as we shall see, the uptake of new ideas about urban living and heritage preservation during this era was also connected, in complicated ways, to the class-based transformation of residential neighbourhoods near the core that started to take place in the 1960s and 1970s. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of Vancouver’s most recent period of change, which has been characterized by mega-project development, ongoing gentrification, growing socioeconomic polarization, and the emergence of homelessness as an entrenched social issue. In this final section, I consider the role of hallmark events (Expo ’86 and the 2010 Winter Olympics) in catalyzing development, and reflect on the place these events hold in the local urban imaginary.

Over the course of this overview of Vancouver’s development history, I focus in particular on the economic, political, and social forces and events that have contributed to the pervasive feeling articulated by Michael Christie in his recent story “Discard” (2010), and perpetuated especially by players in the local property speculation game, that this city’s built landscape has a card-table quality to it, easily erected and just as easily discarded. Like Timothy Taylor, I try to stand back and take a longer view of Vancouver as an ever-shifting social and spatial structure, attending to distinctive moments and recurring trends in the city’s history of change.

The Early Boom Years: Speculation, Impermanence, Displacement

The first decades of Vancouver’s emergence were key to the formation of local attitudes toward development—attitudes that, in slightly altered forms, continue to dominate in the city today. When scholars and other commentators turn their attention to
Vancouver’s earliest years, they tend to highlight the intense real estate speculation and rapid growth that were characteristic features of many nineteenth-century settler cities. The anticipated completion, in the early 1880s, of the final stretch of the Canadian Pacific Railway led to feverish speculation and development at the proposed sites for the coastal terminus—first at Port Moody (now an eastern suburb of Vancouver) and then, when the CPR announced an extension further west, at Granville, which would be renamed Vancouver when it was incorporated as a city in 1886. The decades-long inaugural boom period that followed transformed what had been a little settlement of a few hundred sawmill workers into the central hub of British Columbia’s Lower Mainland, and ultimately enabled Vancouver to surpass the provincial capital of Victoria as BC’s largest city and major port (Wynn 69, 106-07).

Significantly, the year of Vancouver’s inception was marked by what might be described as a formative instance of demolition and redevelopment. Rapid construction was already underway in response to the CPR terminus announcement when, just nine weeks after Vancouver’s incorporation, a fire that had been lit to clear new land burned out of control and the little city was almost completely destroyed by the blaze. Vancouver residents, however, had a pressing reason to rebuild quickly in the wake of the city’s destruction: the first transcontinental train was set to arrive in less than a year’s time. According to geographer Graeme Wynn, by the time the train rolled in “local boosters [were] claim[ing] that no other city in the world had enjoyed such prosperity or held such bright promise. . . . In some minds, this burgeoning place with sixteen real

38 See James Belich’s *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* for an extensive study of what Belich describes as the “precocious sprouting of . . . nineteenth-century settler cities” (2).

39 Such fires, Stephen Hume emphasizes, were not “uncommon in the wooden cities of the day. San Francisco burned six times from 1849 to 1851. Portland burned in 1873 and Seattle in 1889.”
estate firms, twelve grocers, and almost 3,000 inhabitants was well on the way to becoming ‘the metropolis of the west, [and] the London of the Pacific’” (69). As Terminal City, Vancouver grew so quickly that Rudyard Kipling—who visited three times between 1889 and 1907 and invested in multiple parcels of land in the city—remarked after his last visit: “Time [has] changed Vancouver literally out of all knowledge. From the station to the suburbs, and back to the wharves, every step [is] strange, and where I remember[] open spaces and still untouched timber, the tramcars [are] fleeting people out to a lacrosse game.” Around the time of Kipling’s final visit, city boosters belonging to Vancouver’s “100,000 Club” were enthusiastically championing the slogans “In 1910, Vancouver then, will have 100,000 men” and “Move her! Move her! Who? Vancouver” (qtd. in Matthews 90). When 1910 arrived, the little city had not only met but surpassed the 100,000-resident mark.

Two widely disseminated photographs from this early boom era—both staged for the camera—highlight the centrality of speculation and development to Vancouver’s emerging identity. One, labeled “Real Estate Office in Big Tree,” features realtor James Welton Horne and colleagues perched on and around a large felled tree, from which hangs the sign “VANCOUVER LOTS FOR SALE” (see fig. 2, next page). The other shows members of Vancouver City Council standing in front of a tent that was, supposedly, the temporary home of City Hall after the great fire (see fig. 3, next page); the photograph appears to have been taken in the immediate aftermath of the fire, but was actually staged months later (Hayes 52). As Derek Hayes observes in his *Historical Atlas of Vancouver*, the photograph of the realtors “embodies the spirit of Vancouver after the fire—rebuild,

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40 Kipling never found the success in land speculation that some of his contemporaries in Vancouver enjoyed—indeed Lord Birkenhead, in his biography of the author, describes Kipling’s efforts in this domain as “pathetic” (qtd. in Davis).
get back to business, and let’s make some money!” (54). The photograph of the officials in front of their makeshift city hall, for its part, retrospectively constructs—and celebrates—the city’s newness and impermanence.

Fig. 2. Harry T. Devine, *Real Estate Office in Big Tree*, 1886, Vancouver Archives, Vancouver.

Fig. 3. Louis Denison Taylor, *City Hall & 1st Council*, 1886, Vancouver Archives, Vancouver.
If a formative event in Vancouver was its demolition by fire followed by rapid reconstruction stimulated by enhanced speculative interest, the fact that Vancouver was built and rebuilt on unceded Aboriginal land remains this city’s inaugural—and as-yet-unresolved—instance of dispossession and displacement.41 “For over a century,” Nicholas Blomley observes in *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property*, “First Nations in British Columbia have sought recognition of their rights to land through delegations, legal petitions, and direct action. It was not until 1991 that the province . . . gave partial acknowledgement of aboriginal title, and began treaty negotiations with native peoples, that continue, often proving fractious and controversial” (107). In Vancouver as elsewhere, stories of colonial settlement and urban and suburban development have all too often obscured the local Aboriginal presence. As Blomley points out, not only are Aboriginal people themselves often written out of the city’s story, but so too is the act of dispossession (117). Indeed, even when dispossession is acknowledged, it is often characterized as “a necessary and inevitable transition”; in other words, it is not recognized as an ongoing, fundamentally unsettling fact of the urban project (118).42 I would suggest as well that the particular emphasis on newness and impermanence in the popular discourse about Vancouver only encourages descriptions of the landscape as *tabula rasa*, the trope that was foundational to colonial expansion and settlement.43

41 Nicholas Blomley emphasizes, however, that “while dispossession is complete, displacement is not” (*Unsettling* 109). Aggressive property allotment, speculation, and development did lead to extensive displacement, but this has not resulted in the disappearance of Aboriginal people from Vancouver. As Blomley puts it, “[p]hysically, symbolically, and politically, the city is often still a native place” (109).

42 See Penelope Edmonds’ article “Unpacking Settler Colonialism’s Urban Strategies: Indigenous Peoples in Victoria, British Columbia, and the Transition to a Settler-Colonial City” for a penetrating examination of this issue within the context of the rise of Victoria as a settler city.

43 Hayes, for example, inadvertently invokes the *tabula rasa* metaphor in his commentary on Vancouver’s development after the great fire, suggesting that “the city grew rapidly from its clean slate” (54).
While the idea of Vancouver as a new and impermanent landscape is a strategic and in some ways highly problematic construction, I do not mean to suggest that it does not have any basis in fact. It is true, after all, that Vancouver is relatively “young”: it emerged late as a settler city, even in comparison with other settlements on the West Coast, and has undergone its transformation from colonial outpost to regional administrative and processing centre to transnational metropolis in a notably compressed timeframe.44 And there is, too, a longstanding trend toward demolition and rebuilding as opposed to renovation and refurbishment in the city, which enables Vancouver to retain a sense of impermanence and newness. Geographer David Ley attributes this trend in part to the preference for wood as a building material, in this city which was first built around a sawmill and which is located so close to vast timber resources (*New Middle Class* 3).

When residents rebuilt after the 1886 fire, many did choose to use more durable materials (brick, stone), but since that time wood has again become and remained, across the decades, a favoured building material.

Newness and impermanence have also remained “facts” of the Vancouver landscape thanks to an ongoing rhetorical emphasis on these traits, especially by those who have stood to profit from this increasingly old story. As Scott Watson observes in his essay “Urban Renewal,” by the mid twentieth century those more durable Victorian and Edwardian structures that had been built following the great fire had fallen out of favour, and architects and planners were exploring a new, modernist vision for the city (38); in his study of architectural modernism in Vancouver, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe suggests

44 Hayes suggests that “[i]n many ways Vancouver was a city waiting to happen; with such an advantageous site it was born at a time when the technology to create a modern metropolis was already available elsewhere: it just had to be brought [to Vancouver]” (54).
that the energetic young architects who arrived during this period saw small, culturally marginal Vancouver as “an architectural tabula rasa” (27). In the decades that followed, plans emerged to “renew” (demolish and rebuild) portions of older neighbourhoods in the central city, and the downtown core was “transformed rapidly and dramatically” by commercial modernism (178). Conservation and innovative renovation did also begin to play an important role in shaping Vancouver’s built landscape; however, despite the presence of an active heritage preservation organization, the demolition of older buildings continues today. Rather ironically, numerous examples of mid-century modernist architecture have now been lost to (or are currently threatened with) demolition.45

Vancouver after Mid Century: Rethinking and Redeveloping the Central City

One particularly influential factor in Vancouver’s history of development is the city’s physical geography: since Vancouver is bound on two sides by the Pacific Ocean and the Coast Mountains, the extensive suburban expansion that is characteristic of most North American cities has not been possible in Vancouver. Its suburbs to the south and east have, to be sure, grown steadily over the past century (and residential development continues ever higher up the North Shore mountain slope), but geographic constriction has also encouraged planners and developers to devote considerable attention to the centre of the city, where redevelopment has, in the last 50 years, produced one of the

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45 Vancouver filmmakers Mike Bernard and Gavin Froome recently completed a documentary, Coast Modern, that explores the emergence of architectural modernism on the West Coast, the values the style embodied, and the (partially) disrupted transference of this vernacular architectural vocabulary from one generation of architects to the next. The film highlights demolition and redevelopment as both a cause and result of failed knowledge transfer. While Bernard and Froome focus on residential modernism, Windsor Liscombe notes in the conclusion to his study of Vancouver modernism that “almost all the major Modernist commissions in downtown Vancouver have been either demolished or distorted out of all recognition—with the partial exception of the BC Electric Head Office, which survives reclad as the Electra condominium” (179).
most densely populated downtown cores on the continent. As early as 1956, Vancouver planners were rezoning the West End (on the downtown peninsula) to allow for highrise residential development; a nation-wide recession kept development to a minimum in the early 1960s, but following the recession a building boom began in earnest (Gutstein 101).

As was the case in many other cities on the continent, Vancouver’s Central Business District (CBD) also underwent considerable redevelopment during this period.\(^{46}\) And so, while it was still primarily low-rise at mid century, the built landscape of the downtown peninsula had been dramatically transformed, by the 1980s, into highrise office buildings and apartment towers (Hutton 1960).\(^{47}\)

Also during this period, proposed urban renewal plans were threatening the historic central-city neighbourhoods of Strathcona and Chinatown, located to the immediate east of the downtown peninsula. With the stated aim of tackling urban “blight,”\(^{48}\) the municipal government proposed the razing of whole blocks of two- and three-story, turn-of-the-century working-class homes, which were to be replaced with row houses and apartments; a new freeway project was also set to cut through Strathcona,

\(^{46}\) Donald Gutstein observes that the West End and the CBD “[fed] off each other,” with population growth in the former ensuring a burgeoning supply of shoppers and office workers for the latter (98).

\(^{47}\) Since this time, constraints on space have also led to considerable densification in Vancouver’s suburbs, where home buyers seeking “urban” lifestyles (walkability, proximity to amenities), but lacking the funds to purchase a home in the sought-after central city, are fuelling mid- and high-density development. According to Christina DeMarco, a Metro Vancouver senior planner, Vancouver currently has more suburban residents living in dense developments than any other city in North America (Bula, “Home” S1, S4). Metro Vancouver is also set to finalize its new Regional Growth Strategy, which will help protect agricultural and industrial land from (sub)urban sprawl. (The Regional Growth Strategy builds on and modifies land designations made in the Livable Region Strategic Plan, introduced by the Greater Vancouver Regional District [now Metro Vancouver] in 1996.)

\(^{48}\) A pro-development National Film Board film from the period, To Build a Better City (1964), describes in voiceover the need for urban renewal while displaying a series of shots of the residential areas to the east and south of the downtown core: “Blight is death to a city. And these dwellings, built with such hope and care at the turn of the century, are dying, board by board, and the property they occupy dies with them. Most of Vancouver is kept strong and healthy through the normal process of land and building renewal, but in areas such as this nothing happens except dilapidation, and decay gets worse each year. Property values fall, and blight is the result.”
Chinatown, and Gastown (Harcourt et al. 33). “Armed with background studies to rationalize the rebuilding of the inner city through slum clearance, and using its powers of expropriation, the municipal government purchased properties deemed ‘blighted’ for comprehensive demolition and redevelopment,” Jo-Anne Lee recounts in her study of the multi-ethnic forms of community-based activism that arose in opposition to the project (384). Beginning with the area through which the new freeway connector was to run, the City cleared 30 acres of land and, in the process, displaced 3300 people (384). Perhaps the most devastating loss was Hogan’s Alley, the centre of Vancouver’s small black community.  

Ultimately, however, the final and most extensive phase of this project was halted as a result of the efforts of a coalition of neighbourhood residents, business owners, politicians, concerned professionals, and members of the arts and counterculture communities (see Lee, “Gender, Ethnicity”; Harcourt et al.; Watson; Ley, New Middle Class; Ley et al.; Gutstein). The surge of resistance marked the beginning of a new period in local politics, in which the question of how “to build a better city” (to borrow the title

49 Wayde Compton, poet and founding member of the Hogan’s Alley Memorial Project (HAMP), explains further:

“Hogan’s Alley” was the local, unofficial name for Park Lane, an alley that ran through the southwestern corner of Strathcona . . . during the first six decades of the twentieth century. While Hogan’s Alley and the surrounding area was an ethnically diverse neighbourhood during this era, home to many Italian, Chinese and Japanese Canadians, a number of black families, black businesses, and the city’s only black church—the African Methodist Episcopal Fountain Chapel—were located there. As such, Hogan’s Alley was the first and last neighbourhood in Vancouver with a substantial concentrated black population. . . . Today, the block or so that is left of the alley itself bears no mark that there was ever a black presence there, having become part of greater Chinatown. Nevertheless, the building that was the Fountain Chapel still stands, and is still a church, having been handed over to the Chinese Lutherans in the 1980s. (Compton, “Hogan’s Alley Memorial Project”)

HAMP members have initiated and supported various grassroots memorial initiatives, including poetry (see Compton’s Performance Bond) and a guerrilla gardening project conceived by Lauren Marsden that saw the planting of the words “HOGAN’S ALLEY WELCOMES YOU” in a green space near the viaduct, mimicking similar official floral messages of civic welcome (“Guerrilla Art and Public Memory”). In 2010, as the City discussed plans to close and demolish the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts, HAMP was continuing to call for the history of the area to be remembered in the form of an official public memorial (“New Facebook Group”).

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of a local pro-“renewal” promotional film from the era) became the subject of intense debate. Since 1937, the pro-growth, pro-development Non-Partisan Association (NPA) had held office at City Hall, but in 1968 two new municipal parties—The Electors’ Action Movement (TEAM), consisting primarily of younger, middle-class, liberal professionals, and the more left-wing Committee of Progressive Electors (COPE), which provided a voice for anti-poverty groups, tenants, and unions (Ley, New Middle Class 4)—were formed, with TEAM eventually coming to power in 1972 on a platform that “incorporated growth management, urban aesthetics, and social justice in an uneasy amalgam” (4).

In his now-foundational study The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City, David Ley explores the changes in the local discourse about city building that were taking place in Vancouver (as well as other major Canadian cities) during this period. Factors in Vancouver’s transformation included its role as a hub for the 1960s counter-culture (see Aronsen), the critique of post-war society that informed this youth movement, the expansion of the welfare state, and new ideas about city building and urban living that developed in conjunction with emergent social, cultural, and environmental values of the period (Ley, New Middle Class 3-6). These ideas about the city were taken up especially by members of the baby boom generation, who came of age in the 1960s and, by the 1970s, were establishing professional careers. Many, Ley notes, were employed in the public and non-profit sectors (4), which informed how they understood the function of local government and their own roles as citizens in ensuring and enhancing the public good. The expanding welfare state not only provided jobs for this cohort, but also funded many new social projects. Jeff Sommers and Nick Blomley
point out that “[m]uch of the present-day social infrastructure of Vancouver was organized during this period as non-profit organizations proliferated in response to community demands for services and political representation” (37). The welfare state also provided support for an interactive planning process that, especially in the 1970s under the guidance of the Greater Vancouver Regional District’s director of planning Harry Lash, attempted to bring the opinions of ordinary residents to the table (see Harcourt et al. 76-86).

Jane Jacobs’s critique of slum clearance projects and her ideas about urban livability and community dynamics, especially as articulated in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, were particularly influential in shaping the new generation’s visions for the city; Henri Lefebvre’s call (made in the lead-up to the 1968 student uprisings in Paris) for a city that fosters play and sensual pleasure as well as fulfilling the basic needs of all inhabitants also played a role. Ley explains: “If, as Jane Jacobs charged, the modernization of the Canadian city then underway showed no advance upon the modernist visionaries of the 1920s and their dream of the freeway, high-rise city, the urban reformers of the 1970s had a more humanistic view with a complex approach to the quality of urban experience” (*New Middle Class* 4). The reformers wanted “a city people [could] live in and enjoy”;

50 their vision for Vancouver privileged mixed-use zoning to enhance amenity accessibility and walkability, improvement and expansion of parks and other green spaces, greater government responsibility for housing and infrastructure (e.g. social housing, public transit), and resident participation in the planning process (4).

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50 This phrase was a TEAM campaign slogan from the 1974 municipal election (qtd. in Ley, *New Middle Class* 20n13).
The turn to and rethinking of the city during this period had a range of complicated effects. The countercultural groups who moved into central city neighbourhoods during the 1960s, from the flourishing artist and bohemian communities in the early part of the decade to the influx of hippies a few years later, helped initiate this turn and the continuing transformation of Vancouver’s central area into the 1970s. Ley observes that

the youth culture of the 1960s included not only the last in a long line of poorer households occupying the inner city, but also the first in a new sequence of residents for whom the inner city would not be the site of last resort for households with few choices, but rather the preferred location of a middle-class cohort with a rather different vision of the opportunities of city living. (175; emphasis in orig.)

Guided by data from Montreal and Toronto as well as Vancouver, Ley proposes a succession model for the movement of the middle class into traditionally undervalued areas of the central city, with members from lower positions in the class hierarchy (e.g. “bohemians” and artists, social- and cultural-sector employees) serving as bellwethers for other professionals and businesspeople with more economic capital (“Artists” 2540).

While many members of the more progressive wing of the middle class may have been keen to save historic inner-city neighbourhoods from redevelopment and to prevent the displacement of longtime inhabitants, the desire of this class cohort to live in these areas placed increasing pressure on the real estate market. Housing prices rose, making the neighbourhoods less affordable for the populations who had traditionally inhabited them, and evictions began to occur as property owners and speculators saw opportunities
for redeveloping property for the new, growing middle-class market. Importantly, too, “saving” particular neighbourhoods meant different things for different members of the expanding middle class. For some, it meant helping to sustain longstanding communities in place, but for others, it involved simply protecting and, often, upgrading built structures; as Sommers and Blomley emphasize, heritage preservation was as much, if not more, “an alternative economic and property development strategy” as it was a progressive social project (41). In Vancouver, as in many other North American and European cities, “saving” central city neighbourhoods became intimately tied up with the gentrification of these areas.

Coined in the early 1960s by British sociologist Ruth Glass, the term gentrification, Loretta Lees et al. explain, was originally used to describe “a complex urban process that included the rehabilitation of old housing stock, tenurial transformation from renting to owning, property price increases, and the displacement of working-class residents by the incoming middle classes” (Lees et al. 5); however, most gentrification scholars now recognize a more expansive definition that includes new-build development along with renovation and refurbishment (129). New construction played a key role in the transformation of Vancouver’s central area, especially following the introduction, in 1966, of legislation allowing for strata ownership of apartment units. The aim of the legislation was, according to Watson, to “stimul[ate] . . . development and to increase the value of urban real estate” (39). Watson goes on to observe that the subsequent condominium boom “transformed not just the appearance of Vancouver, but the texture of everyday life and the notion of what constitutes a home” (39). The changing landscape and real estate market brought with them a new rhetoric about what it
meant to live in the city: Caroline A. Mills, in her examination of architectural styles and marketing messages associated with new-build developments in Vancouver’s Fairview neighbourhood during the 1970s and 1980s, finds that new developments were, over the years, increasingly “promoted with images of upward social mobility, convenience of location, and—most prominently—the qualities of ‘urban’ living. To quote a representative example, developers offer ‘. . . truly distinctive city homes—homes that city people will treasure for the pleasure they add to an urban lifestyle’” (“Fairview Slopes” 309; see also Mills, “Life”). “Livability” effectively became a commodified lifestyle as developers and realtors co-opted and transformed the messages of this urban agenda for marketing purposes.

The 1970s also saw significant decline in the primary resource industries of the region—forestry, mining, and fishing—and the concomitant “‘decoupling’ of the Vancouver economy from . . . resource production in the rest of the province” (Barnes and Hutton 1254). As Vancouver moved toward a post-industrial (or, more accurately, post-staples) and post-corporate economy, it also entered the first phase of redevelopment of the industrial lands circling the False Creek basin, which separates the downtown peninsula from the southern part of the central city. The major project of this initial phase, during which the lands on False Creek’s south shore were transformed into “medium-density residential and amenity uses” (Mills, “Life” 173), was the redevelopment of Granville Island into a mixed landscape of consumption and production, comprising “a public food market, theatres, an art college and hotel, and shops and offices cheek by jowl with new and long-established industry, including a cement plant” (Ley, New Middle Class 6–7). Along with serving as an important new
destination for tourists, Granville Island became the prime amenity space used to lure
buyers to nearby Fairview with promises of a leisured urban lifestyle. Ley offers this
description of the transformation:

On Granville Island an adventure playground was created in the shell of the
former Spear & Jackson sawmill, . . . an unprepossessing corrugated iron
structure, in places rusting, dented, and torn. The playground (as a microcosm of
the Island) contained some of the inversions of a contemporary urban aesthetic, an
orientation to experience and the sensuous. . . .

[The Island’s] retail outlets contain no chain stores, its produce is
advertised as direct from regional farms, its goods are personalized by resident
artists and craftspeople. The public market . . . is a . . . swirl of colours, sounds,
tastes, and fragrances, an aesthetic triumph, joyous festival. (7)

Ley goes on to wonder if the acts of conspicuous consumption that now take place on
Granville Island—and indeed, the “carefully themed” island itself—are “the true harvest
of 1968,” the actual cultural and social product of the urban revisioning that informed this
period of social change (7). Certainly, the transformation of Granville Island and nearby
Fairview was part of a shift toward a new landscape of cultural consumption and
production in Vancouver, and toward increasingly commodified conceptualizations of
urbanity. It also demonstrated the potential profitability of redevelopment on False
Creek’s industrial lands, setting the scene for major projects on North and East False
Creek over the next three decades.
From Expo ’86 to the 2010 Winter Olympics: The Rise of the Neoliberal City

The 1980s and 1990s saw the global emergence of neoliberalism, which David Harvey has defined, in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2). Privatization, deregulation, and the reduction of social programs are all common practices of the neoliberal state, which endeavours to create the conditions for new markets to emerge, while keeping intervention in existing markets to a minimum (3). In the early 1980s, with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan leading the way in Britain and the United States, nation-states across the globe began to take up neoliberal forms of governance, resulting in what Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore have described as a “dramatic U-turn of policy agendas throughout the world” (3). Canada was no exception: in the closing decades of the twentieth century, the federal government amended its immigration policy and developed transnational agreements with the goal of removing impediments to cross-border trade and attracting global capital. Canada’s immigration policy changes were clearly class-based: in 1978, the federal government introduced a Business Immigration Program, amending it in 1984 and again in 1986 as Britain announced that it would hand over control of Hong Kong to China (see Mitchell; Olds, *Globalization*). As Katharyne Mitchell observes in *Crossing the Neoliberal Line*, the new legislation—which “entitl[ed] those with capital or business experience to skip processing queues, procure landed-immigrant status, and ‘join’ the greater Canadian community without the usual hurdles and aggravating bureaucratic delays”—targeted
wealthy immigrants from Hong Kong who were considering leaving the colony (or acquiring citizenship elsewhere) in anticipation of the 1997 handover (Mitchell 4, 58).

Actually existing neoliberalism is, Brenner and Theodore explain, “polycentric and multiscalar”: “in contrast to neoliberal ideology, in which market forces are assumed to operate according to immutable laws no matter where they are ‘unleashed,’ we emphasize the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal restructuring processes insofar as they have been produced within [supranational,] national, regional and local contexts” (3; emphasis in orig.). The combination of class-based amendments to the federal immigration act, the surge in immigration and investment interest from Hong Kong, and provincial-level neoliberal restructuring initiatives ultimately generated a range of regional and local impacts in British Columbia, including the dramatic reshaping of Vancouver’s downtown peninsula. BC was particularly hard hit by the global recession of the early 1980s, and the provincial government responded by introducing a Thatcher-inspired “restraint” program. However, Mitchell notes that “while the working rights and benefits of labor were eviscerated,” the BC government also engaged, during this period, “in a land-buying spree. In an attempt to stimulate the economy by diversifying away from resources and by initiating megaprojects, the provincial government . . . acquired massive quantities of land for redevelopment” (46).

The purchase, by provincial crown corporation BC Place Ltd., of 176 acres of CPR-owned land on North False Creek in late 1980 was made with the declared premise that the land would be “for public use,” and that its first function would be to serve as hosting area for a world exposition in 1986 (Bennett, qtd. in Olds, Globalization 51). The land was purchased from CPR subsidiary Marathon Realty. The amount of acreage purchased “later increased to 224 acres” (Olds 2001: 101).
After the fair, however, the site—which made up approximately one-sixth of the downtown peninsula—was put on the market as a single package (“effectively excluding small-scale developers with low capitalization levels” [Olds 108]), and was sold in 1988 to Hong Kong-based billionaire Li Ka-shing, who would go on to redevelop the site as Concord Pacific Place, one of the continent’s largest condominium mega-projects (Smith and Derksen 68). The sale and massive redevelopment project initiated Vancouver into the phase of gentrification in which, according to Neil Smith, “real-estate development becomes a centerpiece of the city’s productive economy, an end in itself, justified by appeals to jobs, taxes, and tourism. . . . [T]he construction of new gentrification complexes in central cities,” Smith continues, “has become an increasingly unassailable capital accumulation strategy for competing urban economies” (“New Globalism” 443; emphasis in orig.). The Concord Pacific Place mega-project would ultimately function as lynchpin for the development, on the southeastern portion of the downtown peninsula, of Vancouver’s new upscale condominium neighbourhood of Yaletown. The seafoam-green glass towers of Yaletown became, in turn, the dominant image of the “new” Vancouver. While this image is very different from the felled tree and makeshift tent in the photographs from Vancouver’s inaugural boom period, it told the same story of a newly emergent landscape, a developer’s and speculator’s paradise.

The future of the North False Creek industrial lands that would eventually become home to Concord Pacific Place had been in question since the mid-century beginnings of industrial decline. The first plan for residential development in this part of the city was put forward in 1969, but political conflict and concerns about economic viability stalled development throughout the 1970s (Olds, Globalization 100). In 1980, aiming to catalyze
development, the government announced that Vancouver would host a world’s fair at the site (100); geographer Kris Olds argues that the city’s centenary in 1986 was “simply a suitable excuse” for the event that became Expo ’86: the link to an important date in Vancouver’s history, he suggests, was “required in order to attract support from the community, all levels of government, and the Bureau of International Expositions” (100). Expo ’86 was the first of two major forays, in Vancouver, into the use of hallmark events as “fast-track, facilitative mechanism[s] to speed up the redevelopment process” (Olds, qtd. in Pablo)—the second would be the 2010 Winter Olympics (announced in 2003), which would offer yet another reason for accelerated infrastructure and amenity development and would see a major section of former industrial lands at the southeastern end of False Creek become the site of the Olympic Village. Along with providing incentive and justification for the provincial government to amass and (after the fair) sell the land on False Creek’s north shore for private development (Olds, *Globalization* 105), Expo ’86 also enhanced Vancouver’s profile on the world stage, helping develop the city’s reputation as a site for investment and as a “world class” tourist destination.

In his research on this period of change, Olds describes the negative impacts of Expo on residential communities in the central city. “The fair,” he observes, was . . . used to spur on the redevelopment of [the Downtown Eastside,] a stable low-income community (the “slums” according to Premier [Bill] Bennett) which bordered the Expo site. This area . . . was traumatized by the forced eviction of between 500 and 850 elderly and handicapped residential hotel and rooming house residents[,] a process which drove several evictees to their premature death. (*Globalization* 105-06; see also Campbell et al.; Olds, “Canada”; Cameron,
The new, more lucrative market for the hotels proved to be a temporary one: after Expo, vacancy rates rose again, and “the vast majority of evicting residential hotels began catering to traditional clientele” (Olds, “Canada”). But Expo set the stage for the reshaping of Vancouver’s downtown that was to come, both by providing the rationale for the acquisition of the North False Creek site, and by offering an early indicator of the tensions and displacements that would continue to accompany the core’s transformation.

The closing decades of the twentieth century were marked by racial as well as class tensions, as Vancouver’s Asian immigrant population grew quickly in the wake of the immigration policy changes and concerted efforts by government officials to attract investment and elite immigrants to the city (Mitchell 57). Such tensions were not new: Vancouver has, since its inception, been home to many residents of Asian descent, and as Glenn Deer observes the city has “a long, but often overlooked, history of significant conflicts between dominant white communities and minority communities of colour, mainly of Asian background, over the ownership and use of space” (“New Yellow Peril” 20). Most of Vancouver’s earliest residents of Asian descent earned substandard wages and were restricted to specific spheres of employment, as a minority group they lacked economic as well as social and political power, and were subject to racializing strategies of spatial management, both institutional and informal (Anderson). Key examples include

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52 According to Mitchell, “[m]any regions around the world attempted to attract the Hong Kong capital, but British Columbia laid siege in an especially stubborn and effective manner. Building on preexisting connections . . . , the province began an all-out campaign to sell Vancouver as a world-class city in which to do business and reside” (57).

53 Vancouver’s early community of Chinese settlers was, Kay Anderson explains in Vancouver’s Chinatown, “economically differentiated into a small élite of well-to-do merchants and their wives, a significant minority of small businessmen, and a large number of workers. Family life was the preserve of a minuscule proportion of the merchant sector who could afford the onerous head tax and whose often elegant living conditions set them widely apart from the less privileged ‘bachelors’” (79).
the race riots of 1887 and 1907 spearheaded by anti-Asian organizations, which resulted in extensive destruction of property in Vancouver’s Chinatown and Japantown; the 1885 Chinese head tax (raised in 1900 and 1903) and the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act, which limited immigration from China until 1947; and, during World War II, the federal government’s decision to seize Japanese Canadian property and confine Japanese Canadians in internment camps (see Deer, “New Yellow Peril”; Barnholden; Anderson; Miki and Kobayashi; Ward; Adachi).

It is important, however, not to emphasize the actions and strategies of dominant white communities at the expense of attending to Asian Canadian subjectivities and agency, and their role in the formation of institutions, communities, and spaces in Vancouver (Ng 6-8). As Wing Chung Ng argues in his study of Chinese Canadians in the city, while “the asymmetrical relationship between the dominant host and Chinese [Canadians] [is] too glaring to be ignored,” we must also recognize “the dynamics and complexities of . . . identity construction and contestation” within Chinese Canadian and immigrant Chinese communities, and the ways in which cultural, social, and economic variables have “play[ed] out differently for different groups and at different times” in Vancouver (6, 8). Such group differences, together with “process[es] of group interaction and engagement,” are the focus of Ng’s study, which explores and delineates the “discursive parameters” of the complicated, inter-generational debates about identity within Vancouver’s Chinese Canadian community (6).

New variables certainly came to the fore during the period of property-related conflict at the close of the twentieth century. It mattered, for instance, that many of the new immigrants and investors from Hong Kong had a substantial amount of economic
power, and that their growing interest in Vancouver’s property market extended to middle-class, predominantly white suburban areas (especially Richmond, just south of Vancouver) and to neighbourhoods on Vancouver’s affluent West Side that had long been the enclaves of white elites. A significant amount of single-family-home development (including the construction of so-called “monster houses”) began to take place with the aim of catering to this emerging Asian market, and cultural differences in housing and landscape aesthetics enhanced tensions in residential areas (Mitchell 163-64).

The state, as I have emphasized, was instrumental in creating the conditions for this period of rapid respatialization in Vancouver, and many local developers, realtors, and property owners were keen to capitalize on the emerging market opportunities; as Eva-Marie Kröller observes, “The urgency with which the project of turning Vancouver into a welcoming site for Asian investors [was] conducted derive[ed] from an economic agenda which [was] equally important to newcomers and older residents” (“Regionalism” 281). However, the new Hong Kong immigrants (and, indeed, longtime residents of Asian descent, who—in a failure or unwillingness to acknowledge the diversity of communities of Asian background in Vancouver—were sometimes conflated with this group) became the prime targets of increasingly angry responses to the city’s transformation (Deer, “New Yellow Peril”; Mitchell; Ray et al.). “[I]n complex ways,” Mitchell argues,

the heretofore “invisible” workings of certain aspects of the circuits of capital . . .

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54 As Mitchell explains, “[c]ultural differences became apparent in many areas: beliefs around geomancy or feng shui, the importance of size and newness rather than architectural or landscape aesthetics, views on nature and gardens, assumptions about appropriate family relations and size, and conceptions related to the meaning of home” (163-64).
were rendered visible (vis-à-vis the practical consciousness of the residents) as a result of the spatial practices and presence of the Hong Kong immigrants, who were positioned as the ultimate vectors of fast capital. This sudden visibility forced Canadian residents to consider more fully the repercussions of the state’s neoliberal agenda, which facilitated the creation of a spaceless, free-flowing, giant enterprise zone. . . . At the same time, it exposed the limits of many taken-for-granted liberal assumptions in Canadian society. (4-5)

Further complicating matters, some of those who stood to profit from Hong Kong investment and immigration used charges of racism as “a strategic intervention to silence critics” (Ley, “Rhetoric” 340), their “cynical manipulation of the ideology of tolerance” exacerbating rather than alleviating tensions in local communities (Mitchell 37). In other words, both racist discourse55 and a distorted version of Canada’s national discourse of multicultural tolerance were employed by parties attempting to manage and control space during this period.56

I have, thus far, foregrounded the roles played by the federal and provincial governments in creating the conditions for Vancouver’s transformation in the closing decades of the twentieth century, but what Hutton has described as “the extraordinary reordering of inner-city space” during this period was also guided by policy and planning

55 Among the various forms of “subliminal and not-so-subliminal racial prejudice” that proliferated, Kröller points to a particular emphasis on the absenteeism of Hong Kong buyers, whether . . . in empty “monster houses” in which the lights [were] automatically switched on and off to simulate their inhabitants’ presence or in the off-shore purchase of vast chunks of valuable real-estate. Here, the buyer’s or occupant’s absence [became] proof not so much of an enviable transnationalism but of evasiveness and impenetrability. Both of these are staples of orientalist discourse in which the Orient plays seductive but untrustworthy female to the West’s conquering hero. (“Regionalism” 278)

56 I have focused on late-twentieth-century Hong Kong immigration and investment because it was connected with heightened property-related tension and inspired widespread public debate. However, immigration from Hong Kong tapered off after the handover to China; in recent years, Vancouver has seen an influx of mainland Chinese immigrants, as well as significant immigration from other East and South Asian countries (see Yu; City of Vancouver, “Multiculturalism and Diversity”).
at the municipal level (“Post-Industrialism” 1954). Hutton argues that the City of Vancouver’s Central Area Plan, implemented in 1991, diverged in notable ways both from previous planning in Vancouver and from approaches to planning elsewhere (1954-55). The plan circumscribed the space occupied by the Central Business District, made housing a priority in the downtown areas surrounding the CBD, and “enabled the rise of a specialised inner-city ‘New Economy’ shaped by intersections between culture and technology” (1955). After government restraint had, in the 1980s, put an end to the participatory planning initiatives of the 1970s, the City’s new policy direction in the 1990s also included the re-integration of public consultation into the planning process (though grassroots organizations continued to play a crucial role in resident advocacy).

According to Hutton, municipal planners tried “to balance the market, the broader public and marginal groups by means of a dialectical process of plan-making”; however, generally the City tended to accommodate “ascendant ‘new class’ interests over those of declining occupations and social groups,” and to privilege new construction at the expense of preservation (1975).

The recent redevelopment of the downtown core has been celebrated by many commentators, and copied by planners elsewhere. In his book *The Vancouver Achievement*, for instance, urban design scholar John Punter argues that Vancouver underwent an “urban renaissance” thanks to local planning and policy initiatives:

Vancouver can justifiably claim to be a compact, proto-sustainable city with a livable downtown surrounded by a series of distinct high-density, mixed-use residential areas. . . . It has reclaimed its derelict industrial waterfront for public recreational use, . . . [and is transforming] into a resort in its own right, quite apart
from enriching the quality of life for its citizens. (346)

Architecture critic Trevor Boddy has become a major champion of Vancouverism, a term that, he explains in the introduction to an exhibition on the subject co-curated with architect Dennis Sharp, was first coined by “American architects and city planners . . . who began speaking of ‘Vancouverizing’ their under-populated, unloved urban cores”:

Our city has become first a verb, and now, an ideology promoting an urbanism of density and public amenity. Vancouverism at its best brings together a deep respect for the natural environment with high concentrations of residents. Within condominium residential towers . . . and courtyard and boulevard-edging mid-rise buildings . . ., Vancouverites are learning to live tightly together. (Sharp and Boddy)

Both Punter and Boddy acknowledge that there remain important issues, such as a lack of affordable housing, that planning and policy initiatives have failed to resolve; nevertheless, they tend in their work toward generally positive, sometimes even boosterish, assessments of Vancouver’s recent transformation (see also Boddy, “Vancouverism”).

Numerous critics, however, have emphasized that during this same period, homelessness became an entrenched social problem in the city, and working- and even some middle-class residents started to struggle in the face of astronomical housing prices. Funding for the National Housing Act—which saw the creation of thousands of social units across the country annually—was cut by 1993, to be replaced by the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP), a program whose name, Smith and Derksen point out, is reminiscent of the language of earlier “regeneration” programs, and which
only offers “grants for ‘upgrades’ and maintenance of existing buildings” (80; see Government of Canada). At the same time, Vancouver began to see a significant decrease in the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units that housed many of the city’s poor. Smith and Derksen note that while the BC Housing program cut funding and placed much of the onus for “regeneration” on the private sector, the City did initiate a program that responded to resident displacement in the Downtown Eastside by providing new social housing, though it was not able keep up with the loss of other dwellings (86).

The ongoing housing shortage, in combination with the extensive upscale development that was taking place elsewhere in the city and proving a growing threat to the long-established Downtown Eastside community, resulted in a three-month-long protest that became known as Woodsquat. In September 2002, protestors formed a tent city on the sidewalk outside of Woodward’s department store; once the commercial centre of this struggling community, the building had been standing empty since the store’s closure in 1993 while developers, government officials, and non-profit groups attempted to negotiate a deal for its future. The protestors were eventually moved to temporary accommodations, and the City bought the property from the Province in early 2003 (Campbell et al. 188-90). A new mixed-use development, which included 200 units of social housing (plus retail space and approximately 500 condominium units), was finally completed in early 2010, just in time for the Olympics. The development remains controversial, with critics arguing that it will contribute to gentrification, and supporters applauding the social housing units and the fact that the new businesses employ neighbourhood residents (Baluja).

The ongoing homelessness crisis and ever-mounting concerns about
gentrification\textsuperscript{57} have remained hot-button issues in Vancouver during the past decade. These concerns, combined with memories of the Expo-related evictions of the mid-1980s, made housing a much-discussed issue in the lead-up to the announcement of the Olympics in 2003, and to the Games themselves in 2010. Activist groups were particularly vigilant about the impact of Olympics-related development, speculation activity, and tourism on housing affordability and availability. According to a count commissioned by the City of Vancouver, homelessness continued to rise throughout the decade (Eberle Planning and Research \textsuperscript{1});\textsuperscript{58} however, the extent to which the impending Olympics contributed to the problem remains the subject of debate (see, for example, Delisle; Lewis). The original development plan for the Olympic Village did include promises of a significant amount of social and affordable housing; as early as 2005, however, the number of planned units was already being scaled back.\textsuperscript{59}

Built on former industrial land on the southeast shore of False Creek, the Olympic Village is part of a larger site that will be developed over the course of the next decade,

\textsuperscript{57} In a recent study, David Ley and Cory Dobson observe that certain factors (e.g. community activism, public policy, the presence of social housing, a lack of amenities, higher levels of crime, a “gritty street scene,” and proximity to working industrial sites) have helped slow long-anticipated gentrification in particular Vancouver neighbourhoods, including the Downtown Eastside and the adjacent neighbourhood of Grandview-Woodlands (Commercial Drive) (2493). However, they emphasize that “the loss of affordability elsewhere” in the city is nevertheless starting to bring “in the middle class in larger numbers . . . , creating significant conflicts about the definition of liveable environments and tolerable behaviour in public spaces. As planners, police, social workers and politicians are appealed to as intermediaries, the role of public policy . . . continues to be significant” (2493).

\textsuperscript{58} The same report finds that, while the homeless population increased between 2008 and 2010, the annual homelessness growth rate decreased slightly. More homeless people were also being accommodated in shelters in 2010 (Eberle Planning and Research \textsuperscript{1}). A year later, in 2011, the Metro Vancouver Homeless Count found similar numbers, recording a very slight increase in the City of Vancouver’s overall homelessness population, but a significant decrease in the number of unsheltered homeless. The Metro Vancouver count also found that the suburb of Surrey now has the largest unsheltered homeless population in the region (OrgCode Consulting 1-2).

\textsuperscript{59} The original development plan for the Olympic Village promised that two-thirds of the Village’s 1100 units would be affordable or social housing units. In 2005, Vancouver City Council cut back the number to 252, with 30 to 50 percent set aside for “core-need individuals” (Delisle). In late 2010, as the first tenants began to move into the Village, there were 126 social housing units available and another 126 were being rented out to “essential service workers” (e.g. firefighters, police, nurses) at market rates (Cole \textsuperscript{1}).
and that will, according to the City, become home to between 12,000 and 16,000 people by 2020 (City of Vancouver, “About SEFC”). But the future of the Village and surrounding area is uncertain. During the Village’s construction, mounting costs combined with the global recession led to a funding crisis, and the City was forced to borrow additional funds to complete the project; the property was placed into receivership in late 2010, and prices for market units have been cut by an average of 30 per cent (Sherlock and Lee). It is still too early to assess the total cost to taxpayers for the Village on False Creek (as it has been rebranded by Vancouver real estate marketer and “condo king” Bob Rennie), or what the future of South East False Creek will look like in terms of development, housing costs and rents, and availability of social housing. While a somewhat different narrative seems to be playing out than the one for the Expo lands, it is important to keep in mind that a year after Expo, the future of False Creek’s north shore was also still very much in doubt: it was not until 1988 that the Expo lands were sold to Li Ka-shing (and then for only a portion of the original cost)—a move that was widely criticized at the time. Indeed, the history of the Expo lands reminds us that there will be more than one story to be told about the Olympic Village and South East False Creek.

With this in mind, I wish to close this chapter by briefly reflecting on the place of Expo and the Olympics in Vancouver’s popular imagination. I have focused especially on the more negative impacts of accelerated development catalyzed by such hallmark events, but it is true that they have brought real benefits, too: I would emphasize especially the transportation infrastructure projects that were pursued in the lead-up to both Expo and the Olympics, as well as, from a social perspective, the sense of belonging that the events instilled in many, though not all, Vancouverites (and, in the case of the Olympics, in
Canadians more broadly). Like urban planning scholar Leonie Sandercock, I am convinced that “a city of bread and circuses” is possible (“Negotiating Fear” 201; emphasis in orig.); however, Vancouver’s ongoing struggle with homelessness and the debt left to taxpayers by the Olympics suggest that we have not yet figured out how to achieve both of these objectives—fulfilling social needs and celebrating through festival—together.

I wonder, too, if the emotional attachment many Vancouverites feel to Expo and the Olympics impedes the important work of imagining what a different trajectory of change might have looked like, or what we might do differently in the future. As Derksen has suggested in a recent essay, our “love for the city,” as he puts it, is often harnessed and directed toward policy objectives that may not always be in residents’, or the city’s, best interest (“How High”). Vancouver-based designer Lindsay Brown has been exploring this issue as part of her research on the UN Habitat Conference on Human Settlements (or Habitat ’76), which a still-“provincial” Vancouver hosted for two weeks in May and June 1976. According to Brown, the event was

at the time the largest conference the UN had ever assembled. It was the first time the world community met to discuss the growing challenges of urbanization, the accelerating human migration from rural to urban areas, urban problems including clean water, sanitation, poverty and homelessness, as well as the nascent field of

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60 In saying this, I wish to emphasize that it is always important to question and discuss the terms of such belonging. In the case of the surge of Canadian nationalism inspired by the 2010 Olympics, scholars have taken different perspectives on the phenomenon: Jeff Derksen has described it as “a nonreflexive form of nationalism that was resistant to any challenge or questioning” (“How High” n16); Laura Moss, on the other hand, has suggested that it might be described as an example of “strategic nationalism,” arguing that it was “not an uncritical celebration of all things red and white—the more traditional notion of cultural nationalism—but a focused pride on Canadian accomplishments in the realm of the arts or sports” (qtd. in Woo). My own sense, from anecdotal observation, is that the sentiment was interpreted and enacted by different individuals in decidedly different ways—sometimes uncritically, and sometimes in the strategic, focused manner described by Moss.
sustainable urban design. (*Habitat Forum*)\(^\text{61}\)

Conference attendees included Buckminster Fuller, Mother Teresa, Margaret Mead, and Pierre and Margaret Trudeau, along with many other international delegates. Brown is particularly interested in Habitat Forum, a people’s forum associated with the conference. Five art deco seaplane hangars at Jericho Beach were retrofitted by a team of 11,000 local labourers (including a number of skilled craftsmen, as well as local youth who were taught skills on the job) for the event, which was organized and run by citizens without government intervention (Brown, *Who Killed Habitat?*). And, as Brown notes, they converted the site “without waste. They re-used salvaged BC lumber, the hand-forged iron railings that had once graced the Lion’s Gate Bridge, silk from WWII parachutes and other materials from Vancouver’s history.” Brown wonders why we remember events such as Expo and the Olympics, while this citizen-run forum—which was executed “without bureaucracy, without real estate developers, without stock brokers and without bankers,” and which could have made Vancouver a real leader in housing and sustainable design issues—has been all but lost from the city’s memory.\(^\text{62}\)

Brown has set herself the task of bringing Habitat ’76 back into Vancouverites’ collective memory: she is currently writing a book about Habitat Forum, and has contributed a manifesto on the subject to *WE: Vancouver—12 Manifestos for the City*, an exhibition held by the Vancouver Art Gallery in celebration of the city’s 125\(^\text{th}\) anniversary (see fig. 4, next page). Her project resonates with me: after all, a similar

\(^{61}\) For a more extensive discussion of Habitat ’76, see H. P. Oberlander’s *Habitat ’76: The Hinge in a Decade for Change.*

\(^{62}\) The converted hangars, which included a large exterior wall mural by artist Bill Reid, were unceremoniously demolished a few years after the conference, despite community protests and a City Hall directive not to do so (Brown, “Habitat Open Forum”). According to Brown, one of the hangars burned down under mysterious circumstances, just a few days after it was discovered that the sprinkler system had been dismantled. The rest of the buildings were demolished—apparently under the direction of the Parks Board—during a spell of particularly foggy weather (“Habitat Open Forum”).
desire informs my own study of local literary texts, and my particular interest in work that encourages us to experience and imagine the city we thought we knew, differently.

1. **Vancouver Has a Short History, Yet Its Memory Is Even Shorter.**

2. **History May Be Written by the Victors, But with Scissors Rather Than the Pen.** Deleted chapters blow around like the ghost of a forgotten book.

3. **Why Did Margaret Mead, Mother Teresa, Buckminster Fuller, Paolo Soleri, Arthur Erickson, Maggie and Pierre Trudeau, Sustainability Economist Barbara Ward and the Entire United Nations All Come to Vancouver in 1976?**

4. **Who Remembers Habitat Forum? Who Remembers That the World Gathered Here to Discuss the Looming Housing Emergency in Its Overflowing Cities?**

5. **To Unwrite History, Start by Demolishing the Buildings in Which History Is Made.**

6. **Let’s Say You Are Standing at Jericho Beach, Just East of the Sailing Club.** Where you are standing now, once stood five art deco WWII seaplane hangars.

7. **Who Remembers That in 1976, an Army of Vancouver Citizens Converted These Hangars into an Place for the World to Discuss the Chasm Between Rich and Poor?**

8. **Let It Be Burned into the City’s Memory That 11,000 Vancouver Labourers, Volunteers, Architects and Students Converted the Deco Hangars in Under Six Months, and That They Did It Without Bureaucracy, Without Real Estate Developers, Without Stock Brokers and Without Bankers, and in the Face of Constant Opposition from City Hall.**

9. **They Did It Without Waste. They Re-used Salvaged BC Lumber, the Hand-Forged Iron Railings That Had Once Graced the Lion’s Gate Bridge, Silk from WWII Parachutes and Other Materials from Vancouver’s History. Vast Murals by Haida Artist Bill Reid Transformed the Main Hangar into a Longhouse of Undisputed Authority.**

10. **If History Is Written by the Victors, Who Unwrote Habitat?**

11. **When the World Went Home, the Hangars Were Bulldozed by the Parks Board, Despite Public Outcry, and Habitat Was Not Mentioned Again.**

12. **Vancouver Is Young in Years, But Its Erased Histories Fill a Ghostly Library.**

13. **Vancouver, You Are a Tale of Two Cities. Which Will Prevail? “The Most Livable City in the World,” or the Infamous City of Homelessness?**

14. **Vancouver, You Remember Expo ‘86, the 2010 Olympics, yet you willfully forget a time when you aimed to share—not own—the podium.**

15. **Citizens or Spectators? Which Will It Be, Vancouver?**

16. **We Need Not Start from Scratch!**

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**Who Killed Habitat?**  
**Lindsay Brown**

Fig. 4. Lindsay Brown, *Who Killed Habitat?*, 2011, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver.
Chapter Two: Writing at the Edges of the Dream City

What charmed [Orthodocia] most were the unbuilt city squares, still dotted with the stumps and green with the ferns of the forest which was here two years ago. . . . [H]er frequent expressions of confidence in the future of Vancouver . . . gave me profound misgivings. One afternoon, while we were riding in the Park—which is really a British Columbian forest with a seven-mile drive round it, where they show you trees fifty and sixty feet in girth, and the pale green moss hangs its banners everywhere between you and the far blue sky, . . . my misgivings were justified.

“I am going,” said Orthodocia, with a little air of decision, “to invest.”

“You are not,” I replied. . . . Whereupon Orthodocia began to discuss the scenery.

- Sara Jeannette Duncan, A Social Departure

Vancouver imagines itself as on the edge of something else: a city which is not a city but could be.

- Laurie Ricou, “Vancouver—Rim of the Park”

Situated on a wedge of land between snow-capped, densely treed mountains and a sometimes moody, sometimes glittering sea, Vancouver has emerged as a built environment and urban culture imbued with a heightened awareness of its physical setting. Urban planning commentator Lance Berelowitz observes that while we tend to think of cities as centripetal spaces, where the attention of the populace is pulled inward toward the public squares and busy streets of the core, Vancouver is more centrifugal, more outward looking, a place where “activity intensifies towards the edges,” and where the spectacle of the view and the leisured consumption of nature are especially privileged components of the local culture (162). Some observers, Berelowitz notes, “describe Vancouver as anti-urban,” but he proposes that we consider it instead “as a particular
type of urbanism in which the city acts as . . . a vast display case for the aesthetic consumption of nature” (162). Like Sara Jeannette Duncan—believed by scholars to be the first writer to represent Vancouver in fiction (Gerson, “Introduction” xi)—Berelowitz emphasizes the extent to which the spectacle of nature keeps many people in its thrall; indeed, both Duncan, writing in 1890, and Berelowitz, a century later, suggest that this spectacle is a troubling—if profitable—distraction. Going on to reflect on the creation and cultivation of public space in Vancouver, Berelowitz argues that residents are too mesmerized by the view, too committed to the leisured consumption of nature, and fail more than they succeed as citizens engaged in the collective effort of fostering diverse, vibrant, civically oriented spaces (164).

Certainly, Vancouver has been designed and built so that many public and private spaces and structures—its seawall walkway, its shoreline park spaces, its protected view

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63 Duncan’s *A Social Departure* (1890) describes a trip around the world taken by two young women—the practical and sometimes self-mocking American narrator, identified as SJD (Duncan’s initials), and the narrator’s friend, a naively romantic and rather conventional Englishwoman named Orthodocia Love. The two women travel across Canada by train, and arrive at the CPR’s terminus in Vancouver with the plan of boarding a ship for Japan. But the little boomtown, just two years old, seduces Orthodocia, and the friends decide to extend their stay. The brief story that Duncan goes on to tell about Vancouver is, as Carole Gerson has observed, a speculation story (xi). Orthodocia is impressed by Vancouver’s youth and rapid growth, and, despite her friend’s resistance, she quickly gets caught up in the speculative fever that is gripping the city. Within a few days she has bought—and sold for a profit—a stump-filled lot off of Granville Street.

64 Berelowitz does acknowledge that these aspects of local culture have led to the construction of a considerable amount of public space at the city’s edges, remarking that “[n]o developer can now contemplate a new waterfront project without [the] automatic inclusion [of a shoreline promenade]. The waterfront walkway has become a sacred cow in this city, and its citizens ardent worshippers” (166). In this sense, the spectacle of nature has become a tool not only of developers but also of the city and its residents, allowing restrictions to be placed on private building; as geographer David Ley emphasizes, “the opening up of the waterfront to public use,” in Vancouver, is an important example of “government action promoting a more accessible and convivial public realm” (*New Middle Class* 6). However, as Berelowitz’s language indicates, he is markedly suspicious of these waterfront view spaces and the forms of engagement they engender. “If public space is where homogeneity breaks down, where civic rights and rituals are exercised,” he writes, “then what Richard Sennett calls a Public Geography—that is, a coming together of a Crowd in a Public Space—has but a tenuous foothold in Vancouver. The city is endowed with a number of platform spaces in which the public is rendered passive. . . . Public life requires collective activity, but these are platforms for private consumption” (164-65).
corridors, its glass towers—invite a turn toward the spectacle of the view. It is true, too, that the “private pursuit of nature and leisure” has long been, and continues to be, widely celebrated and reinforced as a lifestyle choice in local property marketing and tourism imagery and rhetoric (Berelowitz 161). But while these powerful and pervasive aspects of the local culture have fixed and framed connections in and to space, many Vancouver-based writers have, across the decades, encouraged us to think about spatial and social relations in the city-region differently. In Chapter Three, we will see that Vancouver has—despite the outward-turning tendency described by Berelowitz—a vibrant and highly self-reflexive tradition of local poetry inspired by the experience of street and neighbourhood life in the inner city; however, I will first attend to literary texts that engage critically with, and complicate our understanding of, “edge city” urbanism (as Berelowitz calls it) in Vancouver. To this end, I will focus on three authors from different periods in Vancouver’s history—E. Pauline Johnson, Malcolm Lowry, and Jane Rule—who all lived, worked, and helped build alternative communities at the physical and social edges of the city. While foregrounding, in their texts, significant negative impacts (dispossession, displacement, enhanced social tension) of the city’s growth and change, they each describe other, often overlooked, but nevertheless vital versions of “edge city” culture that have thrived in Vancouver.

After a preliminary section in which I offer a theoretical framework for understanding “edge city” urbanism and alternative forms of edge consciousness, I turn to an examination of Lowry’s story “The Forest Path to the Spring” (1961). The story is set in a fictional community based on an actual squat that existed for decades near Dollarton on Vancouver’s North Shore, and that was home to Lowry himself between
1940 and 1954. Situated in what was then a relatively rural area, the squat looked out on an industrial landscape (integral to the economy of the growing city) across Burrard Inlet, and was repeatedly threatened by suburban expansion. Drawn to this little community by the romance of the simple rural life, and negotiating also both the threat and lure of the nearby city, Lowry’s narrator in “Forest Path” explores involvement and retreat, work and play in the quest for the good life, both personal and communal. In Johnson’s *Legends of Vancouver* (1911), the city similarly recedes into the distance (remaining at the edge of our awareness, a configuring power) and turn-of-the-century Aboriginal experience comes into focus. As Johnson transcribes and re-envisions oral narratives that tell of the mythical origins of particular features of the local landscape—testifying to a long history of Aboriginal settlement—she continues to register the presence and impact of the settler city, while also foregrounding her own positioning as an edge figure. Rule’s *The Young in One Another’s Arms* (1977), for its part, is set in Vancouver during the 1970s, a period of extensive inner-city redevelopment. The novel focuses on a mixed group of socially marginalized residents attempting to live together according to cooperative principles. Development forces them out of the old house that they share, and they find themselves pushed to the city’s outskirts—first to a farmhouse near the Fraser River and then across Georgia Strait to one of the southern Gulf Islands. Even there, the young idealists find themselves forced to negotiate the social and economic forces that threaten their chosen way of life, finding on the island only a partial retreat from the city.

While Berelowitz proposes that in Vancouver we find urban space distorted, even inverted, as Vancouverites turn their attention away from the city (163), Lowry, Johnson, and Rule effect rather different spatial “distortions” in their literary texts. Giving us
characters that are not only physically but also socially displaced from the urban centre, they encourage us to look back at Vancouver from the point of view of marginalized inhabitants at its edges, and to attend to these inhabitants’ attempts to build socially just and sustainable communities despite the threat of urban expansion and redevelopment. Importantly, too, all three authors query the regime of private property that plays such a central role in structuring social relations in cities. In *Unsettling the City*, geographer Nicholas Blomley criticizes the widely held view that links the ownership model of property to the “settled prosperity” of cities (xvii). Using, as examples, the struggles over space associated with colonial settlement and gentrification in Vancouver, Blomley argues that cities are fundamentally unsettled places. He questions the “definitional certainty (this is property, that isn’t)” of the ownership model and calls for greater recognition of the diverse and often conflicting claims made to particular urban spaces (xv; emphasis in orig.). I turn to Lowry’s, Johnson’s, and Rule’s narratives about spatial conflict and alternative community formation because each can be read as a contribution to the project of denaturalizing the structure that the ownership model imposes on social relations. Like Blomley, moreover, they explore how some claims to, or investments in, space open up the possibilities of community affiliation and engagement.

**Theorizing the “Edge City”**

As Duncan’s brief representation of Vancouver in *A Social Departure* suggests, the relationship between the leisured consumption of nature and property speculation can be traced back to the city’s earliest days, with the formation of Stanley Park (Vancouver’s largest public green space, situated on the northwestern half of what is now
the downtown peninsula) offering a prime example of their interplay. Historian Jean Barman observes that while “[i]n the popular imagination, the park rose pristine out of the wilderness,” Stanley Park was the product of a series of land transfers between governments and strategizing by prominent landowners in the area, including the Canadian Pacific Railway (85). The Canadian government acquired what is now the park site from the British in 1884—though as Barman emphasizes, the land was then and remains unceded Aboriginal territory (13). The CPR then tried to request ownership of the land, and when this failed, it joined forces with other landowners to keep the site from going on the market at all, so that the value of nearby property would remain stable (88-89). In a motion passed at the newly incorporated city’s second council meeting in mid 1886, the CPR proposed that the site be transferred to the City of Vancouver for the creation of a public park: this way, Barman explains, stakeholders could use the park to “depict Vancouver as a desirable place to live,” drawing on the “romanticized association of parks with natural bounty” with the aim of “transform[ing] the image of Vancouver [into] . . . more than just another boomtown” (90). Over the next century, the park was developed and preserved according to an eclectic combination of values, becoming a favoured space of leisure and nature at the edge of the downtown core.66

65 Barman’s book Stanley Park’s Secret is devoted to recovering and sharing the stories of the people who lived at the site that became Stanley Park. Inhabitants included local Aboriginal people as well as newcomers, and many were mixed-race (see Renisa Mawani’s “Genealogies of the Land: Aboriginality, Law, and Territory in Vancouver’s Stanley Park” for a discussion of how the colonial legal system handled the question of Native title for these mixed-race inhabitants). “Long before there was a Stanley Park,” Barman writes, “the thousand-acre (400 hectare) peninsula we know by that name was a locus of family life. Much of the history has been lost, but enough survives for us to acknowledge that the park was never the virgin forest its promoters would have us believe it was at the time of its imposition” (11). The process of dispossessing and displacing inhabitants of newly designated park sites is not, Barman notes, exclusive to Vancouver; rather, such evictions have proven a characteristic component of North American park creation (12-13).

66 In his article “‘Holy Retreat’ or ‘Practical Breathing Spot’: Class Perceptions of Vancouver’s Stanley Park, 1910-1913,” historian Robert A.J. McDonald emphasizes the class- and period-based character of the romantic principles informing the initial creation of the park, and describes how the idea of the park as
Such dynamics in what Henri Lefebvre would call the social production of space suggest that Vancouver’s “edge city” urbanism might be usefully understood as a particular manifestation of the contradictory spatial processes of differentiation and equalization, which produce the uneven geography of capitalism. Glenn Willmott, who has brought geographer Neil Smith’s foundational theorization of these processes to a study of modern Canadian fiction, offers this concise summary of Smith’s argument:

Capitalist development requires not only a constant movement of change and exchange, transmuting all things into exchange value, but a realm of absolutes, and “absolute spaces”—distinct physical forms and locations according to which differential values can be produced. . . . For Smith, capitalist modernization does not act in a linear narrative of progress, but in a kind of see-saw, in which the development of one space demands the underdevelopment of another, a non-linear progress between “relative” spaces—for example, between empire and colony, or town and farm. (Unreal Country 150; see Smith, Uneven Development)

Paradoxically, Willmott continues, regions differentiated and “fixed” as underdeveloped tend to “accumulate and develop and modernize anyway” (150; emphasis in orig.). This process of equalization “arises from the ineluctable interests of capital to produce newer and larger markets wherever it can” (150). In Vancouver, the “fixing” of the urban/rural or city/nature divide has, as I noted, played an integral role in the city’s growth and development since its founding, with spaces of apparently undeveloped “nature” used to attract investors and residents to the city. But these dominant constructions of place, in

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67 Despite their designation as “nature,” these spaces, already to some extent settled, and often radically altered by resource extraction, developed concomitantly with the city. Stanley Park, as we know, emerged...
reifying the categories of nature and the city and raising leisure pursuits to a high form of participation in civic life, have tended to obscure more complicated and diverse social and spatial realities—including, for example, the fact that spaces of “nature” and “wilderness” were already settled, that spaces designated as leisure and recreation spots remain sites of habitation for marginalized residents, and that the apparently non-urban scenes we appreciate as viewers are in an important sense produced through the same processes which shape the spaces we call “city.”

Though he focuses primarily on texts with rural settings, Willmott’s reading of modern Canadian fiction through Smith’s work on differentiation and equalization speaks to my own study of “edge city” writing. After all, Willmott finds that his chosen texts testify not to “nostalgic or pastoral alternatives” to the modern city but rather to a decidedly modern, urbanized consciousness extending into, and shaping experience in, rural spaces. He explains:

   such invisible cities are not the expressionist product of writers turned inward, moodily immersed in psychological dramas that they project upon a setting. . . . They are rather the realist product of writers trying to express a modern Canadian rural experience in terms of a social whole which encompasses the self, others, and the artificial and natural space that knits them together. If there is a truth to the general recognition of modernism as an “art of cities,” then a tradition of rural Canadian writing has established its continuity with this urban truth. (148)

Just as this continuity between urban and rural spaces, between the city and the hinterland, informs the rural Canadian fiction studied by Willmott, so too does it come to

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as a carefully managed and increasingly commercialized leisure space; similarly, suburban development has crept ever higher up the sides of the local mountains that make up the city’s scenic natural backdrop, and ski areas continue to expand near the mountains’ peaks.
the fore in the “edge city” texts that I examine in this chapter, all of which work to make visible, to make readers conscious of, the frames through which we perceive the Vancouver city-region.

Indeed, literary texts, with their focus on the particular and the subjective, offer a helpful lens for exploring the role of individual inhabitants in perpetuating, negotiating, and interrogating dominant spatial categories and processes. The work of fiction writer Ethel Wilson, who was one of Vancouver’s most astute observers of the local cult of the view, can take us some way in beginning to conceptualize the subjective dimension of “edge city” urbanism and its critical articulation in literature. In her short story “A Drink with Adolphus” (1961), for example, Wilson explores the experience of appreciating a view through the character of Mrs. Gormley, who is, at the beginning of the story, on her way to a house on Capitol Hill in the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby. As her taxi speeds up the hill, the elderly woman asks the driver to stop so that she can enjoy “ten cents’ worth of view”:

She looked down the slope at the configuration of the inlet and on the wooded shores which now were broken by dwellings, by sawmills, by small wharves, by squatters’ house-boats that were not supposed to be there, by many little tugs and fishboats. . . . But her eyes left the shores and looked down across the inlet, shimmering like silk with crawling waves. . . . She looked farther on to where the dark park lay, . . . at the ocean and islands beyond (so high she was above the scene), and across at the great escarpment of mountains still white with winter’s snow. In ten cents’ worth of time, she thought—and she was very happy islanded,
lost, alone in this sight—there’s nearly all the glory of the world and no despair, and then she told the taxi-man to drive on. (73)

Mrs. Gormley, here, at first notices various details of industrial and underclass residential development that, according to dominant constructions of space, “[are] not supposed to be there”; she then proceeds to focus on the natural spectacle, selecting and framing as she does so. Significantly, Mrs. Gormley must pay for her experience, but it has its rewards—she finds the view “superb and worth more than ten cents” (73). In stopping to enjoy the view, this dodderly old middle-class woman finds a moment of privileged seclusion from, and a sense of power over, her community;\(^{68}\) then, her money spent, she must drive on. Wilson captures Mrs. Gormley in a necessarily fleeting, decidedly self-indulgent act of viewing; while not denying or decrying the pleasures associated with the view, Wilson highlights its power to mesmerize, select, privilege, and elide.\(^{69}\)

In his reading of “The Window,” another story in which Wilson explores the local cult of the view, Richard Cavell notes that what is framed by the big view window that gives the story its title is effectively “the realm of capital, with its infinite extension [into apparently undeveloped regions] and its infinite production of value” (27).\(^{70}\) In this instance, the story’s protagonist, Mr. Willy, “owns” the view—the window is in his waterfront home—and yet he is even more fully in its thrall than Mrs. Gormley. Cavell reads the story as suggesting that “Mr. Willy cannot get outside capital; there is no realm

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\(^{68}\) Nina Varsava’s article “Beyond the Window” offers further analysis, from an ecocritical perspective, of the ways in which the frame of the view organizes human experience in Wilson’s fiction. Focusing on Wilson’s representations of view windows, Varsava argues that they encourage “fallacious conceptions of human distinction from, and superiority over, the landscape and its non-human species” (n. pag.).

\(^{69}\) I am grateful to my students in English 470B (Fall 2009) for their thoughtful contributions to our discussion about Wilson’s treatment of the view.

\(^{70}\) Cavell’s analysis of Wilson’s work is, like my own, informed by Willmott’s examination of Canadian modern fiction through the lens of uneven development. Along with Wilson’s “The Window,” Cavell also considers work by Charles G. D. Roberts, F. P. Grove, and Sinclair Ross, arguing that “the experience of the land has consistently been negated in the service of colonialist abstraction” (15).
of escape” (29). However, while Mr. Willy seems particularly trapped, the narration of
both stories (Cavell emphasizes Wilson’s strategic use of free indirect discourse, which
allows her to convey and connect the experience of subjects on both sides of the window
[28]) suggests, if not the possibility of escape, then at least a manner of looking
productively and critically askance. Indeed, in her ability to perceive the ways in which a
scene is assembled, and to register details and complexities that often disappear from
view, Wilson exhibits not passivity or enthrallment (like Mr. Willy or Mrs. Gormley) but
rather what I would describe as a dynamic and critical edge consciousness.

An essay by Peter Dickinson on reading and teaching Vancouver-based writing
(published in Downtown Canada: Writing Canadian Cities—the same collection in
which Cavell’s article appears) offers insight into the potentially unsettling effects of this
kind of literary description on local readers. Dickinson proposes that we think about the
relationship between literary text, reader, and city through Marshall McLuhan’s idea of
the “city as classroom”—as an environment where humans can become conscious of, and
begin to grapple with, structures and patterns of relationality.\footnote{Dickinson brings McLuhan’s ideas to his reflections on the experience of teaching an undergraduate course on Vancouver literature at the University of British Columbia. “I wanted my students to think,” he says, “of what it means to be both resident and reader of a particular place, to make connections between the spit of land on West Point Grey occupied by UBC (which, technically speaking, is not part of the City of Vancouver) and other areas about which they were perhaps reading for the first time, or were told never to visit, or were heading back to after their class had ended” (80). In other words, Dickinson suggests that literary texts might play a role in un-fixing the dominant, divisive constructions of place that shape our encounters with particular places within the city-region.} In “The Invisible
Environment,” moreover, McLuhan figures the urban artist as a kind of renegade teacher,
a maker “of anti-environments or counter-environments, created to permit perception of
environments” (165). Such a role, he suggests, has caused the artist to become
“increasingly fused or merged with the criminal in popular estimation” (165). While
McLuhan’s figuration of the artist is somewhat exaggerated for rhetorical purposes, his
point is that in making an environment perceptible, the artist draws other people out of their unconscious immersion in that environment, engaging them in a process of making strange that can be productively, if also uncomfortably, unsettling.

Along with McLuhan, Dickinson draws on Elizabeth Grosz’s important essay “Bodies—Cities” to help him conceptualize relations between reader, city, and text. According to Grosz, “The city provides the order and organization that automatically links otherwise unrelated bodies: it is the condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced” (104). The body and the city, she suggests, are not distinct entities but rather are “mutually defining. . . [T]here is a two-way linkage that could be defined as an interface” (108; emphasis in orig.).\footnote{Here, Grosz takes up and theorizes a term that was, as I noted in my Introduction, particularly important to Vancouver-based writer, artist, and teacher Roy Kiyooka. Kiyooka used the term to describe the complicated dynamics of encounter among and between bodies, sites, discourses, and materials.} Grosz thus reconceptualizes urban relations non-dualistically as “assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or micro-groupings” (108). For Grosz, the bodies of city residents operate as thresholds between the “individual” (whose isolation as such is illusory) and other components (e.g. other residents, physical structures, discourses) of the city. Social and spatial relations, in this formulation, are “provisional and often temporary” (108): a complicated interplay of power, agency, and chance shapes an individual’s experience of, and intersections with others within, the spaces of the city.

Grosz’s understanding of the city is informed by the Deleuzian concept of the assemblage—a complex of heterogeneous components organized according to at most “contingently obligatory” (rather than “logically necessary”) relations (DeLanda 11). Such a relational complex, which is made up of both material and “expressive” (or
discursive) components, is open, inherently dynamic (12). Manuel DeLanda, who has devoted himself to gathering and synthesizing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s disparate discussions of the concept of assemblage, notes that any component in an assemblage can be material or expressive, or play a combination of material and expressive roles (12). As Helen Stratford explains in an essay that examines urban spatial practice through a Deleuzian lens, assemblages are imbricated complexes of physical, social, and discursive structures that “define and are defined through” their particular location and arrangement (108). Processes that assert the power of a particular structural component or that sharpen boundaries can “stabilize the identity of an assemblage” (DeLanda 12), and we might say that in Vancouver the economic and discursive forces associated with speculation and development have had such an effect. But, as Stratford argues, recognizing the city as “a dynamic inter-related aggregate” as opposed to a monolithic structure “makes it possible to express the potential of being otherwise” (109). In other words, the inner and outer edges of an urban assemblage, and the ways that they are conceived, matter. They are spaces of “dynamic . . . animate/inanimate interchange,” as Laurie Ricou puts it in his reflections on Earle Birney’s “November walk near False Creek mouth”—a poem that recognizes Vancouver’s shoreline and the spaces it appears to separate as imbricated, and as always in process (Ricou, “Vancouver” 30).

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73 See especially A Thousand Plateaus, where Deleuze and Guattari offer this description of “the nature of Assemblages”:

On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away. (88; emphasis in orig.)

74 As Phillip Mar and Kay Anderson, drawing on the work of George E. Marcus and Erkan Saka, affirm: “[a]ssemblage theory . . . has provided a means for social and cultural analysts to identify new formations and phenomena proliferating on the edges of historically structured institutions, to focus on the ‘always-emergent conditions of the present’” (36-37).
Attending to the interfaces between parts of an assemblage, between parts of a city, can open up the possibility of imagining and cultivating a different kind of urban space and community—it can turn us, as Birney’s poem does for Ricou, toward the city that “could be” (30).

This idea is central to Dickinson’s reflections on teaching and reading Vancouver-based literary texts. He explains that he was interested in exploring the interfaces “between city and classroom, body and text” (80): “I was hoping . . . to reconfigure the spatial or figure/ground indices between bodies, texts, cities, and classrooms not as a set of opposing or isolated practices (i.e., texts belong in classrooms and bodies reside in cities) but as a metonymic . . . chain of linkages that together map out new spaces of inquiry, exchange, and contestation” (81). Dickinson emphasizes his interest in the way texts “reorient[] readers,” helping them to see and experience the city differently (101).

Like Dickinson, I am proposing that recognizing and engaging local literary texts as significant components of our urban assemblage might contribute to a reconfiguration of relations in the city. The local literary tradition testifies to repeated, provocative efforts to unsettle dominant discursive and socioeconomic structures, pushing again and again toward an understanding of community that is informed by heterogeneity, openness, and an ethical recognition of fundamental implication.

Importantly, the effect is temporal as well as spatial: local literary texts help foster an awareness of multiple, often contestatory versions of history in a city “where everything is new,” as the poet Evelyn Lau has put it (F4);75 they cultivate a sense of

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75 I am grateful to Thomas Hutton for first drawing my attention to the *Vancouver Sun* article in which Lau makes this remark (see Hutton’s chapter “New Industry Formation and the Transformation of Vancouver’s Metropolitan Core” in *The New Economy of the Inner City*). In the *Sun* article, Lau reflects on her
community across time; and they can alter our relation to the future. Vancouver is often
figured as a dream city (Berelowitz, in fact, takes this phrase as the title of his book)—a
dream that is at once already realized in the apparent glassy perfection of its downtown
towers (the image chosen for the cover of Dream City) and, paradoxically, endlessly
deferred in the form of ever-emerging new speculative development projects. As I
emphasized in Chapter One, this “dream” version of Vancouver—both its present
manifestation and projected future—masks a much more complicated reality that includes
increasing socioeconomic polarization and a longstanding homelessness crisis. And yet,
while I am troubled by the misrepresentation of Vancouver as a “dream city,” I also want
to question the way that projects or ideas with any kind of utopian dimension tend to be
met with great suspicion. Critics stress that utopias are impossible no places we can never
realize, never attain; however, following recent scholarly work by Ann Cvetkovich, Jill
Dolan, and Avery Gordon, I want to reconceptualize the utopian and think of it rather as
projects that we attempt to put into practice in the lived present, in whatever limited and
necessarily failed ways that we can. Gordon argues that

[the utopian ] exists in all those examples of the things we are and do that exceed
or are just not expressions of what’s dominant or dominating us. It exists when
there is no painful split between the dream world and the real world; when
revolutionary time doesn’t stop the world, but is rather a daily part of it; when
needs and desires and investments are already being re-engineered. . . . It exists

experience as one of the earliest residents of Vancouver’s new downtown neighbourhood of Yaletown,
which was developed over the course of the 1990s and into the new century.
76 In a recent article in The Walrus, Gary Stephen Ross jokingly observes that investors in unfinished condo
projects are “buying an idea rather than a condo,. . . a hologram of aspiration shimmering above a muddy
hole in the ground.”
when the utopian is not the future as some absolute break from the past and the present, but a way of living in the here and now. (129)

Like Gordon, I am interested in projects and imaginaries that contest dominant socioeconomic structures and processes, and that are dedicated to the cultivation of socially just and sustainable forms of community. The authors whose texts I now turn to in this chapter—Lowry, Johnson, Rule—are part of a long history of just this kind of utopian practice in Vancouver.

**Community in the Intertidal Zone: Malcolm Lowry’s “The Forest Path to the Spring”**

In January 2010, acclaimed Vancouver-based artist Ken Lum installed a new artwork at the Vancouver Art Gallery’s Offsite exhibition space, located at the luxury downtown hotel Living Shangri-La. Titled from shangri-la to shangri-la, the artwork involved scale reproductions of three shacks that belonged, respectively, to writer Malcolm Lowry, artist Tom Burrows, and Greenpeace co-founder Dr. Paul Spong. The shacks once stood in the intertidal zone on Vancouver’s North Shore where a squatter

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**For Cvetkovich, an important example of this kind of utopian project is the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, where she has worked for many years:**

Writing about the music festival, the haven of lesbian separatism and women-only space, might seem like an anachronism, a return to the period before queer culture, yet it is a significantly queer project for me since the festival, particularly the workers’ community, has survived as a locus for alternative cultures and visionary thinking. I focus on how forms of manual labor associated with the working class, especially working-class masculinities, can be the site of community building and creativity, remaking Marxist notions of alienated labor. And I consider the continuity between labor and performance, as evident in the many impromptu kinds of performance that occur in the festival community beyond the more formal staged events. The festival enacts utopian possibility, and for those workers, performers, and audience members who establish a sustained relation to it, it can be transformative far beyond its temporary duration. (“Public Feelings” 466-67)

Cvetkovich includes these brief reflections at the end of an article about political depression, insisting that we not see a discontinuity between the two topics: “if I began with depression and close on utopia, I have not necessarily shifted topics or even affective registers—the point would be to offer a vision of hope and possibility that doesn’t foreclose despair and exhaustion. It’s a profoundly queer sensibility and one that I hope can enable us to tackle the work that needs to be done and to create the pleasures that will sustain us” (467).
A community had survived until the 1970s. As art historian Scott Watson explains, “Squatting in the intertidal zone is as old as Vancouver and is an important part of the history of the city. . . . Intertidal squats have been established and last largely due to the ambiguity of jurisdiction over the intertidal area. In Canada, private property, regulated by cities and their zoning laws, can extend no further than the mean high tide mark” (40). The squat, in other words, was located in a physical and social edge space, at once rural and urban (41). Here, squatters were somewhat freer to engage and explore alternative modes of community formation and everyday living.

Ken Lum’s replicas of the shacks, which were smaller than the originals and made (like the originals) out of what at least appear to be salvaged materials, contrasted sharply with the aspirational height and material excess of Living Shangri-La, and of the city more broadly whose growth over the second half of the twentieth century threatened and eventually destroyed the squatter community at its edge.78 In a Georgia Straight article about Lum’s installation, Robin Laurence notes that

the curatorial line, given on Offsite’s didactic panel, is that Lum’s work is about the contrast between a “rustic conception of the ideal life” and the “abstract

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78 In an email to Gordon Hatt that is now publicly available on Tom Burrows’s website, Burrows included the following details about the three shacks featured in the Lum artwork:

Ken Lum had 3/4 scale models of once-upon-a-time skwat [sic] shacks assembled by a prop-shop working from borrowed photos. . . . You might recognize the middle one was mine (part of a Canada Council grant I received at that time was to build our home from effluent). To the left is Paul Spong’s, the save the killer whale guy. Historically it was about 100 yards to the east of our home. The shack to the right was Malcolm Lowry’s which was about a mile to the east, the other side of Chef [sic] Dan George’s Tsleil-[W]aututh people’s land. It was razed in 1954, Spong’s and ours were torched in 1971. All three done-in by the same corporate district of North Van building inspector.

Here, Burrows notes Lum’s divergence from the original building method of the shack dwellers (assembly by prop shop vs. construction by owners and community members using salvaged materials) and also highlights his own institutional affiliation, gesturing to the performative dimension of his life and work at the squat (see Anderson [“Looking for the Utopian”] and Watson for more information on Burrows’ activities and projects in the intertidal community). There does not appear to be evidence in Lum’s exhibit of an Aboriginal presence (either the Tsleil-Waututh or the nearby Squamish), or of the fact that the squat site (like most of the city-region) was and remains unceded Aboriginal land.
perfection” of the towering architecture that characterizes Vancouver’s downtown core. We’re warned against reading from shangri-la to shangri-la as “an overly simplified duality between past and present.” Actually, it’s almost impossible not to read it as an extreme duality—a screaming irony—between present and present.

. . . Lum’s work looks a lot like a metaphor for the gap between the marginalized lives of Vancouver’s homeless and the staggering privilege represented by Living Shangri-La. Still, it is more complex and layered than that: some of the mud-flat squatters lived there by choice, including Lowry, who was a remittance man. The son of a wealthy industrialist, he spurned bourgeois comforts and consciously embraced an unencumbered life close to nature.

Though Lowry’s choices were in fact fairly limited (his longtime struggles with alcohol affected his ability to make and manage money, and his father kept him on a strict allowance [Volcano: An Inquiry]), Laurence is right to emphasize an element of agency: Lowry purposefully turned away from the city—indeed, he seems to have felt, as the narrator and protagonist in “The Forest Path to the Spring” puts it, that in a figurative sense “the city was . . . behind [him] on the path” (216).79 And yet, while Lowry chose the squat over the city, the latter continued to play a significant role in his life and, at times, functioned as a lure: he made numerous trips into Vancouver for access to books, films, and music, and in some years overwintered there. In “Forest Path,” Lowry’s narrator describes the troubling effect of a trip to the city, suggesting that in just “a few

79 For Lowry at Dollarton, the city was “behind . . . on the path” in a literal sense too: though parts of north Burnaby (with its oil refinery) and Port Moody were visible from Dollarton, the city of Vancouver itself was out of sight off to the southwest, back up the road (Dollarton Highway) and over the bridge (Second Narrows / Iron Workers’ Memorial).
hours” the city could “[begin] to render our existence [at the squat] an impossible fable, .
. . almost suffocat[ing] all memory of the reality and wealth of such a life as ours” (252).

“Forest Path” is fiction (Lowry refers to the squat as Eridanus), but much of the story is based on events from Lowry’s own life. Indeed, in “Forest Path” Lowry seems to be making a concerted attempt to rehabilitate the public image of the real squatter community, which faced repeated threats of eviction over the years as the Dollarton area developed and interest in the squatters’ land increased (Salloum 28-29). In the story, Lowry’s narrator describes some of the typical public complaints about the squat, remarking that “the rate-payers in the district were in the habit of using the slightest excuse to make a public issue of the existence of the ‘wretched squatters’ at all upon the beach, whose houses, ‘like malignant sea-growths should be put to the torch’—as one city newspaper malignantly phrased it” (236-37). Lowry and his wife, Margerie Bonner Lowry, arrived in the Dollarton area in 1940 and outlasted several eviction notices before a range of concerns—including income tax debt, Margerie’s health, and yet another threat of eviction—culminated in a decision to leave in 1954 (Salloum 123). Bulldozing of the squatters’ shacks finally began in the year of the Lowrys’ departure, the last of the homes were demolished by 1958 (Salloum 123), and eventually the District of North Vancouver designated the area Cates Park, which now, ironically, includes a trail in Lowry’s name as well as a commemorative plaque.80

80 Burrows and Spong arrived on the North Shore after the Lowrys had left, in the late 1960s, and their shacks were located further west on the Maplewood Mudflats, where a squatter community thrived until much of it was demolished in 1971, ostensibly to make way for a proposed private development, though this never materialized. Andrea Anderson explains the role that speculative development played in the fate of this squat:

[i]the squatters’ occupation and activities on the mudflats were curtailed when the District of North Vancouver chose to consider the Grosvenor Plan, a major commercial development for the mudflats proposed in 1970, which included a multi-purpose town centre with apartment blocks, marina, shopping centre, hotels, theatres, office buildings, and other amenities. The plan was never
Lowry was undoubtedly a recluse, and his life in the squatter community at Dollarton was in important ways a retreat, but—just as Glenn Willmott discovers in his study of rural characters and settings in modern Canadian literature—Lowry’s positioning was conceived and constructed in dynamic relation to the encroaching city and its attendant ideologies of class, economic development, and morality. However, while Willmott focuses on how his chosen texts “fail[] to offer a pastoral alternative to modernity” and instead “ironically and uncannily repeat[] it” (153), I am most interested in the critically and ethically engaged edge consciousness that Lowry seems to have cultivated—and that he gave voice to through his “Forest Path” narrator—in the unsettled settlement of the intertidal squat. In Lowry’s descriptions of the fictional squat, power lines cut through the view of the sunrise, the forest referred to in the title is mostly second growth, slicks of oil leak from a tanker docked at the refinery across the inlet, and the narrator is shooed off of private property while gathering water from a nearby creek; the narrator notes, too, that members of the broader urban community have been agitating to change the name of the squat site to Shellvue, which would—at least symbolically—utterly reduce the squat to its relationship to the heavily developed landscape (which includes a Shell oil refinery) across the inlet (226). And yet, finding himself in this compromised and overdetermined landscape, Lowry’s narrator does not try to retreat even further; rather he begins participating in the community that he gradually finds implemented, but the inhabitants were nevertheless forced to leave. Burrows’s court battle resulted in the bulldozing of his and other shacks. Although most shacks were razed on December 18, 1971, some on private land remained until March 1973; the commercial development that was the premise for the expulsions never happened. It seemed that the issue was really that the squatters were not ratepayers and the proposed development served as an excuse to remove them. Burrows made a performance event out of the razing of his shack. He hauled it over to a piece of disputed land and documented its destruction by fire. (58)
there, making a social and personal investment in the squat, while also maintaining a tentative—and certainly critical—relationship to the city.

In the process of conceptualizing the edge consciousness that informs Lowry’s relations with others in this story, I have sought out theories of community that accommodate and help illuminate his reclusive, critical, but intrinsically connected positioning. The term “community”—which, as Raymond Williams notes in his Keywords, carries with it “warmly persuasive” connotations (66)—has traditionally described a form of bonding through a shared sense of commonality or interest (65). But, recognizing the inherent dangers of such an understanding of community, many scholars have, especially in the past few decades, complicated the term. Particularly important for my own thinking has been the conversation about community that has emerged in the work of Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Alphonso Lingis, who have all—often in dialogue with each other—theorized community in a manner that accounts for fundamental difference in relations with others. The critic Kuisma Korhonen has summarized this conversation, explaining that

the background of [the] discussion has been the conviction, shared more or less by all the authors . . . but expressed perhaps most memorably by Levinas, that human subjects come into being only in relation to the Other. Singularities may gain their subjectivity only by facing the other or the multiplicity of others; before one can

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81 Notably, Williams’s work proved exemplary of such danger. Williams was deeply influenced by his memories of his childhood home in rural Wales, and at times tended, as James Donald observes, to “translate[] [this] sense of loss, our routine sense of being not quite at home, into a cultural-political programme for restoring the conditions of a plenitude which can only ever exist as a memory” (Donald 1999: 151).
construct any immanent self-hood, one has already been called into question by the existence of others.

“Some primal community is thus inescapable,” continues Korhonen, “but is soon replaced by communities that constitute themselves as work—communities that exist in order to produce an identifiable [structure or system] that then defines the identity of its members” (emphasis added). Even resistant communities (and certainly we see this in Lowry’s description of the squatter community) “still form their own mythology and their own institutions and ways in which the community becomes ‘a work’” (Korhonen).

The term “work” (or oeuvre) is central in this conversation, as Blanchot and Nancy in particular are interested in the possibility of what has been translated as an “unworking community,” or a communauté désœuvrée—in other words, the possibility of revealing and experiencing the state of primal being-together that precedes the “work” of community formation. The unworking community—also referred to as the “negative” or “unavowable” community—is, as Korhonen explains, “‘unoccupied,’ ‘idle’: it is not bound to any institution, instrumental reason, or some clearly defined goal.” Says Blanchot: “it takes upon itself . . . the impossibility of a communitarian being as subject. . . [I]t differs from a social cell in that it does not allow itself to create a work and has no production value as aim” (11). And Nancy: “[the unworking community is] that which, before or beyond the work, withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension” (Inoperative 31). Thus, while they propose that communities are constituted through and as work, Blanchot and Nancy try to recover and gesture toward a more complicated and expansive sense of community that emerges in and as “unworking.” Says Korhonen:
“Our duty in our respective working communities is to stay open to the call of this other community.”

Significantly, the narrator in “Forest Path” attends repeatedly to work and also to work’s other, idleness. In fact, he and his wife first come to live at the fictional squatter community on Labour Day—a day of leisure set aside to celebrate the achievements of workers (Lowry 226). Labour Day is also the day that the population of Eridanus changes like the tide, with summer inhabitants leaving for the city, their vacations complete, and wintertime dwellers arriving at the end of their seasonal work (222). Through his description of these movements, Lowry’s narrator reminds us of the ways in which Eridanus and the city beyond are constructed in relation to the concept of work. As a vacation spot and overwintering space, Eridanus is primarily perceived as a place of idleness, while the city is perceived as the place where work happens. But in symbolically connecting these constructions to Labour Day, which intertwines notions of work and idleness, Lowry invites a querying of such a simple divide; indeed, “Forest Path” can be read as an extended interrogation of these opposing concepts and their application to particular spaces and communities.

We know, of course, that work happens in Eridanus. Lowry’s narrator repeatedly highlights the various challenges involved in living at a remove from the city. In a fruitful comparison with Henry David Thoreau’s Walden, one critic has noted both the greater difficulty Lowry’s narrator experiences in achieving seclusion at Eridanus (an environment “more fully beleaguered by heavy industry” than Thoreau’s rural Massachusetts), and also the “considerably weaker position” of Lowry’s narrator, who is “a recovering alcoholic compared with Thoreau’s sinewy teetotaller” (Otterberg 118-19).
Lowry’s narrator also finds himself lacking “the practical knowledge necessary to survive. He enters his new life naked, and must relearn what a character like Thoreau’s can largely take for granted” (119). Lowry focuses on the many delights of this learning process, but he also emphasizes that it involves considerable physical and psychological labour.

This foregrounding of work is integral to Lowry’s depiction of the squatter community as a community. He repeatedly stresses the efforts of the inhabitants to maintain their homes and those of their neighbours, cultivating a responsible, benevolent sense of what we might call, after Blanchot and Nancy, a working community. Lowry also highlights the psychological labour necessary to maintain an alternate identity: as I noted, even a short excursion to the city can plant seeds of doubt about the lives that the protagonist and his fellow squatters have chosen to lead at Eridanus. An emphasis on work is also integral to Lowry’s attempt to rehabilitate the squatters’ public image: as a vacationer’s idyll and a longer-term dwelling place for perceived idlers, Eridanus is viewed by outsiders as essentially an unproductive space, a place where no work happens, where nothing is made. Such a perspective is certainly clear in the newspaper article that describes the squatters’ houses as “malignant sea-growths”—natural deformities rather than structures built and cared for by human beings.

The narrator also demonstrates his awareness of his own prejudices, especially toward the summertime vacationers who, arriving from the city, complicate the sense of community established at Eridanus. Such self-awareness comes through especially in his discussion of the jokey names that these inhabitants give to their shacks—names that, significantly, frame Eridanus as a leisure space. The narrator admits that,
[h]aving once seen the joke about some of these names . . . they began to irritate me, especially Wywurk. But apart from the fact that Lawrence wrote *Kangaroo* in a house called Wyewurk in Australia (and he was more amused than irritated), though I did not know this at the time, the irritation itself really springs I now think from ignorance, or snobbery. . . . But irritate me they did then, and most especially Wywurk. The holophrastic brilliance of this particular name, and more obvious sympathetic content, never failed to elicit comment from the richer passersby in motorboats, who, having to shout in order to make themselves heard on board above the engine, could be very well overheard on shore. (220)

As he describes this scene it becomes clear that the narrator, in hindsight, sees these names performing another kind of work—a kind of work that effects what one might term an “unworking.” “First there was the brilliance of the pun to be discussed as it dawned upon them,” the narrator remembers, “then its philosophic content to be disputed among the boat’s occupants, as a consequence of which they would disappear round the northward point in that mood of easy tolerance that comes only to the superior reader who has suddenly understood the content of an obscure poem” (220). In other words, the name Wywurk is a way of speaking across a divide that reduces the tension of that divide—unworking (though not completely undoing) the class structures that differentiate the community of shore-bound vacationers from the community of pleasure boaters.

The narrator’s recollection and re-reading of the shack names also hints at another kind of work that is central to Lowry’s story—the work of art. Indeed, it seems that “Forest Path” itself was partly created out of the desire to speak across a divide in much the way that the Wywurk name does, with the aim of increasing tolerance of, and
sympathy for, the squatter community that Lowry called home. Though Lowry does not shy away from enhancing this divide by expressing his extreme dislike of the city and describing the misinformed views of the squat that are cultivated there, his story involves a repeated working and unworking of the boundary between the city and squatter communities. Such an unworking takes place, for instance, when the narrator (who, it should be noted, himself first arrived at the squat as a vacationer, as did Lowry) describes his own initial assessment of Eridanus as a garish, dirty and strange place (226-27). This unworking happens, too, when the narrator acknowledges that he continues to appreciate the beauty of industrial structures such as the oil refinery across the inlet, even as he abhors the destructive work that takes place there (256). And the narrator also unworks the city/squat divide when he celebrates the culture that thrives in the city, and that helps sustain him, both psychologically and financially, in his rural retreat.

“Forest Path” thus contains key moments of unworking, but I would suggest that it is not the story itself but rather the works of art described in the text that best articulate Lowry’s sense of the unworking potential of art. Significantly, the central artwork in the story—a symphony composed by the narrator—disappears: it is consumed with his entire shack in a fire. Such an end is perhaps fitting, even symbolic, as the narrator’s conception of the symphony is connected to, in fact seems to emerge from, a moment of extreme unworking, when the narrator encounters a mountain lion in the forest near his shack while walking to the spring to fetch water. We might read the encounter with the mountain lion as an encounter with the radically other—as a recognition of that primal community that precedes and exceeds all forms of human construction. After all, the

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82 Lowry’s own shack also went up in a fire, but the manuscript of his novel Under the Volcano, on which he was working at the time, was saved.
walk has drawn the narrator out of the home that he has built and the happy community of two that he shares with his wife there, and the encounter with the mountain lion takes him completely out of himself, distancing him, if only momentarily, from his tendency to endlessly, obsessively story himself and his world. It is also in this moment that the narrator forgets the labour in which he is engaged, the burden of the water-filled canister that he is carrying (262).

As I suggested, it seems fitting that the work of art that emerges out of the narrator’s experience, on the forest path, of “incommunicable” or “extraterritorial existence” (as he puts it) disappears and cannot be recaptured (270). Instead, after the fire’s unworking of his life and art, the narrator explores the idea of re-working. This is a practice that he has already begun to hone at the squat, converting old, found items such as a ladder and canister to new uses. After the fire, the narrator and his wife, with the help of their neighbours, build a new house on the foundations of the old one, “out of driftwood and wood from the sawmill at Eridanus Port, which was now being torn down to make way for a real estate subdivision” (270). These scenes highlight the fact that Lowry’s “Forest Path” is, in important ways, a narrative about sustainable living and community building, one that preceded the environmental movement (which would, as I noted, find an early architect in another tidal flat squatter, Greenpeace’s Paul Spong). Already, at mid century, Lowry was not simply questioning but also advocating an alternative to the processes of development that were radically reshaping the edges of the city during this period, and that would transform the inner city in the decades to come.

Significantly, too, the narrator of “Forest Path” begins to make art again following the fire, composing an opera that, he says, was “built, like [the] new house, on the
charred foundations and fragments of the old work and . . . old life” (271). The narrator’s intent seems to be to allow unworked materials to be present in, to give substance to, this new work of art. The opera, he explains, is partly in the whole-tone scale, like <i>Wozzeck</i>, partly jazz, partly folksongs or songs my wife sang, even old hymns. . . . I even used canons like Frère Jacques to express the ships’ engines or the rhythms of eternity; Kristbjorg, Quagga, my wife and myself, the other inhabitants of Eridanus, my jazz friends [from the city], were all characters, or exuberant instruments on the stage or in the pit. (271) The opera is, like “Forest Path” was for Lowry, a creative reworking of the artist’s life that includes his disparate cultural influences, the sounds of industry and nature, and the voices and bodies of neighbours as well as friends beyond the squat. Both the narrator’s art and his life at the squat are—as were Lowry’s own—created through acts of reworking that could be likened to the artistic practices of collage or its three-dimensional counterpart, assemblage. Lowry’s notion of reworking is at once an aesthetic and an ethic, including as it does a revaluing of old materials (“my new vocation,” says the narrator, “was involved with using [the] past . . . with turning it into use for others” [279]) along with an appreciation of a diversity of styles, forms, and perspectives brought together—indeed, cohabiting—in carefully negotiated juxtaposition.

Certainly, prejudices and unquestioned biases do remain in the reworked, collage-like conceptualization of community that Lowry presents in “Forest Path.” Most notably, he generally fails to acknowledge the Aboriginal work of community that had existed long before the establishment of the squat (see Ravvin), or, for that matter, the daily
domestic and editorial\textsuperscript{83} work performed by his wife.\textsuperscript{84} Despite the limitations of his perspective, however, Lowry offers, in “Forest Path,” a consciously and carefully reworked understanding of community, one informed by an effort to remember and remain open to the possibility of its own unworking. “Forest Path,” in this sense, is an important document of local utopian thinking and practice—limited, incomplete, in some ways a failure, and yet nevertheless a vital testament to the possibility of living otherwise.

In highlighting the collage-like qualities of art making and community formation that Lowry describes in “Forest Path,” I am building on recent scholarly and curatorial efforts to draw attention to the vibrant local history of collage and assemblage in Vancouver’s post-World War II art communities and practices. In “Urban Renewal: Ghost Traps, Collage, Condos, and Squats,”\textsuperscript{85} Scott Watson shows how many artists from the period came to privilege an oppositional aesthetic in response to a variety of related forms of urban change and development, including the demolition of Vancouver’s Victorian and Edwardian building stock, the condo boom, and the aspirational growth of the downtown core (see Chapter One for an extensive discussion of redevelopment in Vancouver during this period).\textsuperscript{86} Watson finds that these artists tended toward a

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{83} Margerie Bonner Lowry was much more than a domestic helpmate to Lowry: she transcribed and provided extensive feedback on his writing, and edited and compiled the stories collected in \textit{Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place}, including “Forest Path.” Indeed, the collaborative practice that produced these texts as well as Lowry’s great testament to reworking, \textit{Under the Volcano}, could certainly be said to have a collage-like quality.

\textsuperscript{84} I am grateful for Sherrill Grace’s feedback on an early version of this examination of “Forest Path,” in which she noted Lowry’s failure to acknowledge gendered work in the story.

\textsuperscript{85} This essay is now archived online as part of \textit{Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art in the Sixties}, “a research archive and educational resource that brings together still and moving images, ephemera, essays and interviews to explore the diverse artistic practices of Vancouver art in the 1960s and early 1970s” (“About this Site”). An impressive resource, the site is the result of a partnership between grunt gallery and The Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery.

\textsuperscript{86} In the artist community of the period, Watson notes, “late Victorian and Edwardian furniture and bric-a-brac furnished communal houses . . . . Art Nouveau was revived and deployed to advertise concerts and events. Rejection of the “brutality of the new” was, in essence, a very real concern about the disappearance of places to live, eat,
politiciated mixing of older styles, structures, and materials—a collagist aesthetic that was intrinsically connected to a political stance and a mode of everyday living. Watson focuses on a period slightly later than Lowry’s—the 1960s and 1970s—and in his discussion of squats he concentrates on the Maplewood Mudflats, home to Spong, Burrows, and a thriving hippie community during the later 1960s. A text such as “Forest Path,” and Lowry’s own experience and literary practices at Dollarton, anticipate the concerns and practices that emerged in later decades, providing an early example of how ideas about art and community as assemblage were cultivated in relation to the threat of demolition and redevelopment.

Michael Turner, who has also written about collage in local visual art (see “Glass and Mirrors”), recently turned his attention to the rich but often overlooked history of local literary and textual collage practices—and to the work of Lowry in particular—in an exhibition that he curated for the Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art in the Sixties archival initiative. Titled “to show, to give, to make it be there”: Expanded Literary Practices in Vancouver, 1954-1968,” the exhibition opened at the Simon Fraser University Gallery in January 2010, just a few weeks before Lum’s installation opened at VAG Offsite. Turner identified Lowry’s short story “Through the Panama” as a particularly early example of local collage art, and an important reminder that a collage aesthetic has long informed key examples of local literary innovation. Combining poetry, song, ephemeral documents, and marginalia, Lowry’s “Through the Panama” asks readers to attend not only to the story’s halting, drifting through-narrative (the account of
an ocean voyage from the west coast of North America to Europe, taking the form of a writer’s travel journal), but also to the juxtapositional relations between various fragments of text. For the exhibition, Turner highlighted the visual dimension of this collage-like structure by laying out the story page by page in a large square on the gallery wall, and announced the story’s inaugural status by locating the display near the gallery entrance, along with *In Search of Innocence*, Québécois filmmaker Léonard Forest’s documentary of innovative modes of artistic practice and collaboration in the early 1960s in Vancouver.

“Forest Path,” for its part, is not as collage-like as “Through the Panama,” though in incorporating bits of song, signage, and newspaper headlines there is certainly a collagist aspect to Lowry’s approach. However, as I have suggested, the real importance of “Forest Path” lies not in its style but in what it has to say about art practice, the

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87 In an email to me, Turner emphasized that he did not wish to suggest, through such placement, “a causal root (route?) that binds the show”: “‘Through the Panama’ is something that washed up on shore,” he remarked, “like what [local artist, writer, and musician] Al Neil found outside his cabin and made into assemblages.”

88 *In Search of Innocence* is, as Turner observes in the exhibition program, itself a work shaped by a collage aesthetic, offering

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Aesthetics and ethics intertwine in Turner’s description of the film, and of the Vancouver art community it depicts. Both Turner and Forest highlight the interest, among writers and artists of the period, in process over finished product, in simultaneity and improvisation, in interdisciplinarity and the mixing of media, in debate and community formation as key dimensions of the artistic process, and in the fusion of this process with everyday life, as opposed to the separation and sanctification of art practices and spaces.

Along with Lowry, another key player situated by Turner at the beginning of literary/textual collage’s emergence in Vancouver was poet, visual artist, performer, and publisher bill bissett, whose editorial poem in response to *In Search of Innocence*, printed in his *blewointment magazine*, provided the title for Turner’s show. Bissett celebrates in particular the immediacy and viscerality highlighted in Forest’s film: “To me,” he wrote in his editorial, “you [Forest] showed all these levels instead of talking about them” (qtd. in Turner, *to show* 3). Bissett’s *blewointment magazine* was shaped according to similar values. Crafted with a whimsical but purposeful casualness, it served as an innovative space for exploring connections and frictional intimacy between a range of different art forms and media, from concrete and other kinds of experimental poetry to illustrations and collages. (See Chapter Three for further discussion of bissett’s formative influence on Vancouver art practices and communities.)
connections it draws between art making and community formation, and the specific
local context it provides for the collagist sensibility that Lowry describes in the story.
While “To the Panama” is an important example of Lowry’s engagement with collage as
a style, “Forest Path” is perhaps better described as a situated exploration of a collagist
ethic of community building and place making. I should emphasize that I am not
proposing a direct and exclusive causal link between the local context informing “Forest
Path” and the emergence of Lowry’s collagist sensibility (internationally, collage was, by
the time that Lowry was writing, a prominent and much-practiced art form, and non-local
influences and contexts abound), but I do mean to suggest that the latter was cultivated in
dynamic relation to former.

Before closing this discussion of “Forest Path,” I would like to return briefly to
the idea of unworking and reworking that Lowry explores in the story, and draw attention
to his narrator’s repeated emphasis on what I would describe as a leisurely approach to
creative work. Such an approach is most memorably foregrounded, for me, in the
narrator’s immediate response to the burning of his house: “[my wife and I] created our
most jubilant memory that very day,” he says, “when careless of [the shack’s] charred
and tragic smell we wonderfully picnicked within it” (280). A hint of leisure or idleness
also seems to inflect more specific descriptions of art making: the narrator places the
phrases “my work,” “my music,” and “my bouts of composition” in quotation marks,
questioning, though never completely undermining, the work’s status as such (261, 266).
Throughout “Forest Path,” work and leisure intertwine; Eridanus is at once a space of
challenging work and a rejuvenating idyll. Neither art nor life completely loses its
seriousness, but the narrator emphasizes a spirited, playful approach to the materials at hand.

Henri Lefebvre has criticized the idea that spaces and experiences of leisure might allow subjects to “escape[] the control of the established order,” insisting instead that “leisure is . . . both an assimilative and an assimilated part of the ‘system’” (Production 383). Leisure spaces, he goes on to argue, are “extension[s] of dominated space, . . . arranged at once functionally and hierarchically. They serve the reproduction of production relations” (384). And yet, as soon as Lefebvre makes this argument, he complicates it. Reflecting in particular on the heightened sensorial experiences that we often discover at the beach and when listening to music, he proposes that these can “[give] rise to startling differences” (384):

The space of leisure tends—but it is no more than a tendency, a tension, a transgression of “users” in search of a way forward—to surmount divisions: the division between social and mental, the division between sensory and intellectual, and also the division between the everyday and the out-of-the-ordinary (festival).

This space further reveals where the vulnerable areas and potential breaking-points are: everyday life, the urban sphere, the body. . . . The space of leisure bridges the gap between traditional spaces with their monumentality and their localizations based on work and its demands, and potential spaces of enjoyment and joy: in consequence this space is the very epitome of contradictory space. (385; emphasis in orig.)

“Forest Path” has nostalgic overtones and its narrator does idealize what he sometimes describes as his rural haven, and yet time and again Lowry shows us something else:
seeming to recognize the fundamentally unsettled quality of relations in and to space, he explores, through his narrator, a difficult yet vital contradictory space at the edge of the city, and engages in the “search [for] a way forward,” as Lefebvre puts it—of making art and building community in a manner that acknowledges and encourages careful negotiation.

At the same time, we know that Lowry himself was very much wrapped up in, even consumed by, a different kind of unworking and reworking—a need to return to and rewrite his material obsessively in the drive for perfection. As a result of such obsessiveness, Lowry appears to have at times become utterly entangled in a world of signs that he had trouble bringing to useful order. Ultimately, Lowry was unable to cultivate in a sustained manner the sensibility that he evokes so movingly in “Forest Path,” which ends, significantly, with laughter. The fact that “Forest Path” was not quite complete at the time of Lowry’s death, and that Margerie Bonner Lowry cobbled together the final version from a draft and additional notes, pushes us toward an understanding about works of art (and perhaps, by extension, works of community) that Lowry recognized, even celebrated, but never quite seemed to come to terms with in his lifetime—that there are necessary limits to any work, but at the same time a work is always open-ended because it can be picked up and reworked by others, again and again.

This is an understanding with which Lowry’s best-known protagonist, the Consul (Geoffrey Firmin) in Under the Volcano, also struggles. Toward the end of the novel, the

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89 In recollections taped for radio in 1961, Lowry’s longtime friend Gerald Noxon describes a night spent discussing and editing Under the Volcano with Lowry, when the two re-wrote the novel’s opening sentence “perhaps twenty times” (qtd. in Salloum 25). Noxon goes on to remark that “[m]uch of this was, in my opinion, not absolutely necessary, and I think one has to realize that while there was an admirable side to Malcolm’s perfectionism about what he was writing, that sometimes he re-worked material to a point where it began to lose its vitality” (25).

105
Consul, whose alcoholism has driven away his wife Yvonne and is driving him quickly toward the end of his own life, begins to read Yvonne’s letters. “Do you remember tomorrow?” Yvonne asks in one letter. “It is our wedding anniversary” (358, 359). The Consul’s answer to this question is “No.” And then: “The words sank like stones in his mind. It was a fact that he was losing touch with his situation” (358). Yvonne’s question and the Consul’s answer emphasize the latter’s refusal of the real possibility of futurity, which can be cultivated only by making some kind of ramshackle sense of one’s life, one’s art, and one’s relations with others. Unwilling, unable, to take on this work, with its challenges and limitations, the Consul instead meanders among symbols detached from life-affirming meaning—condemned to, but also seeming to choose, a curtailed existence in what he at one point describes as “the arid air of an estranged postponement” (268).

Interrogating Settlement: Pauline Johnson’s Legends of Vancouver

I conclude my discussion of Lowry with an emphasis on the Consul’s failure because, in exploring the negotiation of physical and social edge spaces in this chapter, I do not wish to idealize the figure of the outsider: indeed, I hope that my discussion of alternative community formation thus far has registered my resistance to “endorsing [a] state of unbelonging as . . . permanently desirable,” as Smaro Kamboureli, building on Edward Said’s theorization of the exilic positioning of the public intellectual, puts it.

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90 Significantly, Yvonne imagines that this future might take the form of life together in a small weathered house in Canada—a highly idealized version of the Eridanus/Dollarton shack (279-84, 290). “The thing to do,” the Consul’s half-brother Hugh informs Yvonne, is to get out of Vancouver as fast as possible. Go down one of the inlets to some fishing village and buy a shack slap spang on the sea, with only foreshore rights, for, say, a hundred dollars. Then live on it this winter for about sixty a month. No phone. No rent. No consulate. Be a squatter. . . . After all, [the Consul’s] as strong as a horse. And perhaps he’ll be able really to get down to his book and you can have some stars and the sense of the seasons again. . . . And get to know the real people: the seine fishermen, the old boatbuilders, the trappers, . . . the last truly free people left in the world. (127)
Like Kamboureli, I am interested in exploring the idea of a figure whose “subject position and role are not the product of identification with, or disidentification from, her community but rather defined through a relationality with it that allows her to operate as a border figure.”

Scholars have emphasized the extent to which Pauline Johnson took on such a role over the course of her long career as a performer and writer, which spanned the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. Born on the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario, to a Mohawk father and Anglo-Canadian mother, Johnson publicly celebrated her dual ancestry in her work, and in the last years of her life she brought her carefully and strategically honed border sensibility to her negotiation of relationships with both

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91 Said describes the exilic positioning of the public intellectual as follows:

> Even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate, it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins, where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the comfortable.

> ... [T]o be as marginal and as undomesticated as someone who is in real exile is for an intellectual to be unusually responsive ... to the provisional and risky rather than to the habitual, to innovation and experiment rather than the authoritatively given status quo. The exilic intellectual does not respond to the logic of the conventional but to the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on, not standing still. (Representations 63-64; emphasis in orig.)

Kamboureli’s thinking is informed not only by Said on this topic but also Abdul R. JanMohamed, who theorizes what he terms the “border intellectual” in his essay “Worldliness-without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual.” Kamboureli notes that “JanMohamed develops the concept of the ‘border intellectual’ in relation to a wide range of Said’s writings,” in particular Beginnings: Intention and Method and The World, the Text, and the Critic.

92 Kamboureli focuses on the role of contemporary public intellectuals in primarily national and global contexts, whereas I am, in this chapter, exploring historical examples of such figures in Vancouver, and considering how their life and work has been shaped by and responded to a combination of local, national, and global forces. In connecting writers to the scholarly discourse on public intellectuals I am following Said, who, while acknowledging the “separate origin and history” of writers and intellectuals, proposes that “they belong together” to the extent that they share “adversarial attributes in such activities as speaking the truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, [and] supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority” (“Public Role” 25).

93 In their study of Johnson’s writing, performances, and reception, Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson describe her (drawing on the words of a critic from Johnson’s period) as a “unique figure on the borderland,” highlighting Johnson’s self-conscious “linking [of] Euro-Canadian and Native identities” as well as her ability to “bridge[] high and low culture over a deepening chasm” (117). In a similar vein, Deena Rymhs suggests that Johnson “embodies Gerald Vizenor’s emblem of the ‘crossblood’ . . . whose survivance bears the signature of the trickster and whose intercultural mediation befits a personality who assumed various cultural poses” (53).
the Squamish and settler communities in her adopted city of Vancouver—negotiations that she articulated in the stories collected as *Legends of Vancouver*.

I have chosen to examine Johnson’s work after Lowry’s, despite the fact that it precedes his by more than 30 years, partly because I want to avoid suggesting a chronological narrative of progression in their treatment of space and community, and also because Lowry’s life and work present problems that Johnson handles in sensitive and productive ways. After all, the Aboriginal inhabitants of Vancouver’s North Shore seem to have all but escaped Lowry’s notice during the years that he lived there; as Norman Ravvin notes (234), one of the few mentions that Lowry makes of an Aboriginal presence near Dollarton is a reference, in “Forest Path,” to the fact that the suburban expansion threatening the squat was “baffled by the Indian reserve” (276). This reference reminds us that Lowry might have found allies in his neighbours living at the reserve, but he seems to have been relatively uninterested in cultivating relationships with them or representing them in his fiction. By contrast, Johnson—in part because of her own cultural background—made such interactions a priority and foregrounded them in her writing. That is not to say, of course, that she did not have her own blinders and prejudices. Commenting on “her few brief observations of Chinese and Japanese newcomers,” for example, Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson note that Johnson “compared them unfavourably with Canadian Indians,” adding that the “anti-Oriental sentiment among the western tribes themselves may have further reinforced” Johnson’s attitude (80). As well, while Johnson made barely enough money from her writing to support herself, we might still question her decision to sell and profit from her creative “translations” or interpretations of Aboriginal oral narratives. Certainly, there was, in her
community-building and art-making practices, an element of complicity in processes of domination that she did not seem to recognize. And yet, keeping these important limitations in mind, I would insist that *Legends* remains valuable as an early example of creative urban critique and as a document of alternative community formation in the city-region.

Previous scholarship on *Legends* has tended to focus on its complicated relationship to the national imaginary, and on Johnson’s negotiation of colonial and Aboriginal cultures and storytelling styles (see Willmott, “Modernism”; Rymhs; Strong-Boag and Gerson). These issues play a significant role in my own study too, but I am specifically interested in the contribution Johnson makes to an emerging urban imaginary in Vancouver, and especially in the way that *Legends* is wrapped up in, but also creatively articulates opposition to, dominant ideas about property and city building.

Johnson arrived in Vancouver on the Canadian Pacific Railway and stayed, when she first arrived, in the Hotel Vancouver, the CPR’s flagship hotel on the West Coast (Gray 357). As I explained in Chapter One, the CPR’s expansion of its transcontinental line to Coal Harbour in the mid 1880s served as the impetus for a population explosion and furious real estate speculation in the surrounding area; by the turn of the century the rapidly growing city of Vancouver had become the province’s largest urban centre (McDonald, *Making* xi-xii, 37). Johnson’s arrival on the CPR and stay at the Hotel Vancouver remind us of her embeddedness in the invader-settler culture that was dispossessing and marginalizing the local Aboriginal population. As will become clear in my reading of *Legends*, Johnson was to some extent invested in the city-building rhetoric and associated ideas about landscape aesthetics that dominated during the period.
However, Johnson was also committed to her friends among the local Aboriginal population, whose presence in and around Vancouver (fishing off English Bay, trading goods downtown, working at the docks and canneries, living in small communities in Stanley Park [Gray 351; Barman 123ff]) was significant. Ultimately, “settlement,” for Johnson, happened in and through her development of a network of relationships that included many inhabitants of the settler city (especially in Vancouver’s “vigorous and congenial community” of writers, activists, and clubwomen [Gerson and Strong-Boag 2002: xx]) but also extended into the city’s deep margins. Through Legends’ narratorial persona, she offers a self-conscious and rather unusual settler perspective, foregrounding the impact of the rapidly growing city on the displaced Aboriginal population, and describing—as she sets the scene for each legend’s telling—the vital cross-cultural exchange between storyteller and listener. While she remains a settler interpreting the Aboriginal stories for a settler audience, a complicated portrayal of the young city of Vancouver, at once critical and affirmative, develops over the course of Legends.

Johnson’s relationship with the Squamish community began in the last decade of her life, and it was initiated not in Vancouver but rather at the centre of empire, in London, England. While seeking performance and publishing opportunities there in 1906, Johnson met Squamish chief Su-á-pu-luck (Joe Capilano), who had travelled to London with other Northwest Coast Aboriginal leaders to protest new hunting and fishing laws and to promote Aboriginal land claims. Able to speak a few phrases in Chinook

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94 Johnson’s background and affiliations remind us not only of the heterogeneity within the category of the “settler,” but also in the particular backgrounds of individual settlers. Moreover, Johnson experienced and enacted “settlement” in complex ways. She spent much of her life in a state of unsettlement, travelling extensively in Canada and the United States and making trips to England for her performance and writing career. She remained also in a state of figurative unsettlement, never entirely escaping her somewhat marginal status in both the Aboriginal and settler communities (Strong-Boag and Gerson 36-37).

95 One of Johnson’s biographers, Charlotte Gray, explains the background to the group’s London visit:
Jargon—the hybrid trade language used by West Coast Aboriginals and early settlers—Johnson developed what quickly became a deeply respectful friendship with Su-á-pu-luck. Johnson would later describe her knowledge of Chinook as the “drawbridge” that made her cross-cultural friendships with the Aboriginal peoples of the West Coast possible (Johnson 84).

In 1908, when Johnson arrived in Vancouver for a break from her performance schedule, Su-á-pu-luck welcomed her with a Squamish delegation; they then resumed their friendship when Johnson settled permanently in the city in 1909. Johnson also became friends with Su-á-pu-luck’s wife, Líxwelut (Mary Agnes Capilano), who would paddle from her home on the north shore of Burrard Inlet across the narrows to Vancouver, where she sold berries, shellfish, and woven goods to the Hotel Vancouver and the wealthy colonial inhabitants of Vancouver’s West End (Barman 219). Su-á-pu-luck, Líxwelut, and their son Matthias shared oral narratives from the Squamish culture, many of which Johnson recorded, re-interpreted in short story form, and eventually published in the *Vancouver Province Magazine.* Johnson’s friendship with the chief lasted until he died of tuberculosis in 1910, and she served as mistress of ceremonies at his funeral reception (Gray 369). As Johnson’s health declined following Su-á-pu-luck’s death she struggled to carry on with her regular activities, including canoe outings with Líxwelut (373); however, she succumbed to breast cancer in 1913.

For years, BC’s native peoples had complained about encroachments on their lands by miners, railroaders, fishermen and settlers. British Columbia was the only province in Canada where Europeans had appropriated land from the indigenous peoples without negotiating land treaties. Successive governments had broken one promise after another regarding land settlements. Now they had unilaterally announced that Indians could only hunt and fish in season. . . . BC natives had protested vigorously, but Canadian politicians were deaf to their arguments. (323)

96 Versions of a number of the stories were also published in *Mother’s Magazine.*
Legends of Vancouver emerged as a fundraising initiative by members of Vancouver’s press and women’s organizations keen to help support Johnson during her illness. In 1911, they gathered a selection of Johnson’s Squamish legends and published them in book form. The book sold quickly, and over the next two years was issued at least eight times by various Vancouver printers and booksellers (Gerson and Strong-Boag xxii). It found a major publisher in McClelland & Stewart, who reissued the text numerous times over the course of the century; recent editions have been published by Quarry Press and Vancouver-based Douglas & McIntyre. Glenn Willmott, in a discussion of “Johnson’s appropriation of heritage narratives to modern periodical and book forms,” observes that the circulation of Legends helped to memorialize Johnson as “an icon of a newly Canadian national identity, one that reconciled British imperialist and First Nations aboriginal heritages, and stood for the (hardly secure) authenticity of a Canadian cultural tradition” (“Modernism” 122). “Yet,” Willmott continues, “this iconicity must be curiously entangled with that of Su-á-pu-luck, her beloved anti-imperialist activist, who was far from interested in the nation in general and rather its political antagonist” (122).

Noting Johnson’s foregrounding of Su-á-pu-luck—a well-known public figure—as primary storyteller in Legends, Willmott finds in the book a dialectical affirmation and interrogation of an emerging Canadian culture claiming Aboriginal heritage, and the landscapes to which it is connected, as national property.

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97 In a study of Legends’ early publication history, Linda Quirk explains: Vancouver journalist Isabel MacLean rallied Johnson’s friends and colleagues, including several members of the Vancouver Women’s Press Club and the Women’s Canadian Club, as well as Lionel Makovski and Bernard McEvoy from the Daily Province newspaper, and the son of the former Prime Minister, lawyer C.H. Tupper. MacLean convinced members of the group to establish the Pauline Johnson Trust in order to provide much-needed income for their ailing friend by arranging for the publication of a selection of Johnson’s Squamish legends in book form. It was this group which arranged for the publication and distribution of several early editions of Legends of Vancouver and which later prepared a collection of poetry, Flint and Feather, for publication by the Musson Book Company of Toronto. (211)
Complicating Willmott’s argument even further, I would suggest that we recognize the appropriative drive informing *Legends*’ production and reception as not only a national phenomenon but also an urban one. As Linda Quirk argues, if the “early publishing history of this monograph is the story of a unique publishing enterprise, . . . it is also the story of a group of urbanites who seized the opportunity to promote the book as a cultural icon both to boost book sales and to enrich their young city’s cultural landscape” (206). Importantly, the claim to cultural property (and, more indirectly, to land) in the collection’s title is attributed specifically to Vancouver, and this attribution is reinforced in Bernard McEvoy’s 1911 Preface to *Legends*, in which he writes that “a poet has arisen to cast over the shoulders of our grey mountains, our trail-threaded forests, our tide-swept waters, and the streets and sky-scrapers of our hurrying city, a gracious mantle of romance. . . . Vancouver takes on a new aspect as we view it through [Johnson’s] eyes” (McEvoy v). McEvoy endows Johnson, here, with the power to effect what might be described, drawing on a phrase from Pierre Bourdieu, as a “cultural consecration” of the city; in *Distinction*, Bourdieu suggests that aesthetic representation can have the effect of “confer[ring] on . . . objects, persons and situations . . . a sort of ontological promotion akin to a transubstantiation” (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 6). Framed as an inaugural and transformative expression of local cultural identity, *Legends* was taken up enthusiastically by Vancouverites,98 who appear to have been hungry for the special relationship to place and community that the collection seemed to promise.

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98 As Johnson recounts in a letter to her sister, early sales of *Legends* in Vancouver were impressively brisk: “My book went out in the book stalls on Saturday at noon hour, & by Wednesday, not a single copy was left in the publishing house. Spencers (who is like Eatons in Toronto) sold 100 of them last Friday. There never has been such a rush on a holiday book here” (qtd. in Gerson and Strong-Boag xxiii). Indeed, as Quirk notes (211), this Vancouver demand meant that copies of the first edition could not be sent to Ontario, where Johnson had grown up, established her career, and still had a loyal following; writes Johnson in her letter: “Brantford telegraphed for 100 to be sent there, but Mr. Makovski could not let them
We know that Johnson wanted to call the collection *Legends of the Capilano*, a fact which reminds us that her primary interest was in honouring her Aboriginal friends, not in promoting urban boosterism or establishing the legitimacy of the settler city—projects that *Legends* ultimately enabled. That said, judging from comments made to her sister at the time of *Legends*’ initial publication, she was not dismayed by the way that the collection was being taken up by her fellow Vancouverites: “the reviews here have been magnificent,” she remarks; “all the papers seem to think that I have done great things for the city by unearthing its surrounding romance” (qtd. in Gerson and Strong-Boag xxiii). But is the “view” of the city-region that McEvoy describes in his Preface, and that is also suggested by Johnson here, the one that she in fact offers in the text? The representations of Aboriginal life that she produced over the course of her career were undeniably romantic and sentimental—indeed, she relied on the appeal of such an approach to capture mainstream audiences of her day. However, with her audience drawn in, Johnson often seized opportunities to make critical social statements: in their study of Johnson, Strong-Boag and Gerson foreground the productive interplay of acquiescence and opposition to social norms in her work, noting that her writing is characterized by repeated, “strategically crafted interventions in the ideological battle to legitimize the claims of First Nations (and also women) for respect and civil rights” (171).

This assessment is certainly true of *Legends*. We know that Johnson faced ongoing financial insecurity during her years in Vancouver, and that her writing, which she continued even as she struggled with cancer-related pain, was always produced with

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99 Gerson and Strong-Boag note that the change of title—made against Johnson’s wishes—to *Legends of Vancouver* “effectively erased the prominence of the Capilano, . . . even as it affirmed the legitimacy of the newcomers who had created an English-speaking city on the site of Aboriginal settlements” (xxxii).
the need and desire to please her mainstream settler market. Given this context for the stories’ production, it is unsurprising that we find Johnson employing, in *Legends*, a style and discourse that would have appealed to her audience, frequently taking on the role of tour guide in the local landscape, and invoking the rhetoric of urban boosterism in her descriptions of the city-region. However, the narrator also works to reinscribe a vital Aboriginal presence—contemporary and projective, as well as historical—into spaces that this rhetoric was endeavouring to “fix” (and secure for settler use and appreciation) as park, wilderness, and tourist destination. Moreover, Johnson does not allow her readers to remain comfortably settled in their experience of Vancouver but rather encourages them to view the city through the eyes of her Aboriginal characters. Ultimately, she represents Vancouver in a way that, while romanticized, would also have been disorienting for many members of her settler audience.

In the story “The Two Sisters,” for example, Johnson’s narrator employs the second-person “you” in setting the scene, suggesting an audience that shares—or might imagine themselves sharing—the view of the North Shore mountains that opens the story, while also ultimately encouraging this audience to see the scene in a new way. Johnson begins the story fairly innocuously by locating the mountains in relation to nation and empire (as Willmott [“Modernism” 118] and Rymhs [53] have noted), and also, at a more local scale, in relation to the city:

100 Johnson’s tour guide persona appears in other stories as well. In her story “The Siwash Rock,” for example, the narrator employs a guiding “you” as she explains to her readers how to find a rock formation near the titular geographical landmark. “If you penetrate the hollows in the woods near Siwash Rock you will find a large rock and a smaller one beside it,” she affirms (15). And in “The Recluse,” she directs her readers “about a mile citywards” to “the upper course of the Capilano River,” saying: “Leave the trail at this point and strike through the undergrowth for a few hundred yards to the left, and you will be on the rocky borders of the purest, most restless river in all of Canada” (17).
You can see them as you look towards the north and the west, where the dream- 
hills swim into the sky amid their ever-drifting clouds of pearl and grey. They 
catch the earliest hint of sunrise, they hold the last colour of sunset. Twin 
mountains they are, lifting their twin peaks above the fairest city in all Canada, 
and known throughout the British Empire as “The Lions of Vancouver.” (1) 

In Selling British Columbia, Michael Dawson notes that even during this early period 
western Canadian city boosters and tourism promoters tended, in advertising a city, to 
highlight its proximity to wilderness (a sign of both the possibility of escaping modern 
life and, paradoxically, the opportunity for economic development) as well as the beauty 
of the city itself (a sign of order, local pride, and wealth) (16, 24-25). Many of Johnson’s 
resident readers would, certainly, have been initially drawn to Vancouver by such 
rhetoric. In invoking it—and especially in “fixing” the mountain view as a spectacle of 
nature that seems to present itself for the appreciative consumption of lucky residents and 
visitors—Johnson creates the grounds for connecting with her readers, drawing them into 
the story.

Then, mid-paragraph, Johnson unsettles the cultural geography in which the 
mountains have been “mapped,” as well as her own relationship to her readers:

But the Indian tribes do not know these peaks as “The Lions.” Even the chief 
whose feet have so recently wandered to the Happy Hunting Grounds never heard 
the name given them until I mentioned it to him one dreamy August day, as 
together we followed the trail leading to the canyon. He seemed so surprised at 
the name that I mentioned the reason it had been applied to them, asking him if he 
recalled the Landseer Lions in Trafalgar Square. Yes, he remembered those
splendid sculptures, and his quick eye saw the resemblance instantly. It appeared
to please him, and his fine face expressed the haunting memories of the far-away
roar of Old London. But the “call of the blood” was stronger, and presently he
referred to the Indian legend of those peaks—a legend that I have reason to
believe is absolutely unknown to thousands of Palefaces who look upon “The
Lions” daily, without the love for them that is in the Indian heart, without
knowledge of the secret of “The Two Sisters.” (2)

In bringing an alternative place name and story into play—indeed, in productively
unworking and reworking local knowledge of place—Johnson constructs herself as an
active border figure, her “double-awareness of the etiology behind both names [“The
Lions” and “The Two Sisters”] signal[ing] her position between their respective
ideologies” (Rymhs 54). She also situates her beloved chief as a border figure,
emphasizing his ties to his home culture but also highlighting, in her reference to
Trafalgar Square, his knowledge and experience of colonial culture (Willmott,
“Modernism” 119).

Importantly, Johnson also pushes her settler audience—whom she no longer
refers to as “you” but instead displaces to the third person—into a sociocultural
borderland, refusing to allow the colonial mapping of the scene invoked in the story’s
opening page to become fixed and absolute, and querying the appropriative drive that
attended this initial appreciation of the view. In going on to share the legend of “The Two
Sisters” over the course of the story, she effectively refuses to allow her audience to
remain uninformed outsiders to this culture. And yet, she also leaves readers with the
feeling that hearing this story is just the beginning of entering into a landscape and
culture, and that, as newcomers, her settler audience cannot possibly experience the deep affection for place that her Aboriginal interlocutors feel. In describing the chief’s telling of “The Two Sisters” legend, Johnson re-situates the members of her settler audience, positioning them not (or at least not simply) as appreciative viewers in control of the scene, but rather as witnesses to the chief’s time-honoured story and to his deep love of place. Taken together, Johnson implies, these features distinguish the Aboriginal claim to land.

As this reading of the collection’s opening story suggests, Johnson repeatedly engages, in Legends of Vancouver, in various acts of displacement as she negotiates her relations to her Aboriginal interlocutors and settler readers, and their conflicting claims to space. She displaces Aboriginal narratives from their home context, form, and mode of dissemination, but she also displaces her settler audience, undermining the appropriative sensibility invoked in the title of the collection. Moreover, Johnson displaces the city itself, which figures in the text primarily as a lightly sketched (yet nevertheless powerful) entity, a postcard-style landscape in the distance. Her Aboriginal interlocutors gesture to Vancouver in very general terms, referring to it as “the great city of Vancouver” (99), the place where “great city bridges . . . over-arch the waters” (123), and “the distant city . . . that breathe[s] its wealth and beauty across [a] September afternoon” (31-32). Painful irony permeates these invocations of city-building rhetoric by Johnson’s Aboriginal characters, and yet at the same time such gestural references to the city in a sense keep it at bay, never allowing it to become a central focus in the narrative.

Significantly, only one lengthy description of the city appears in Legends, in the story “The Lost Island,” and this description too is from an Aboriginal point of view (as
interpreted, of course, by Johnson). The legend told in the story is set in the period prior to colonial settlement. A medicine man finds himself haunted by a dream of a future time when “a great camp for Palefaces” will rise up between the bodies of water we now call Burrard Inlet and False Creek (61):

He looked across a hundred years, just as he looked across what you call the Inlet, and he saw mighty lodges built close together, hundreds and thousands of them—lodges of stone and wood, and long straight trails to divide them. He saw these trails thronging with Palefaces; he heard the sound of the white man’s paddle dip on the waters, for it is not silent like the Indian’s; he saw the white man’s trading posts, saw the fishing nets, heard his speech. Then the vision faded as gradually as it came. The narrow strip of land was his own forest once more. (62-63)

Johnson, here, gives her settler readers a defamiliarized representation of their city, and encourages them to acknowledge similarities between Aboriginal and settler “camps”; the description, in other words, refuses the construction of absolute difference between Aboriginal and settler worlds. The story—indeed the collection as a whole—also counters the “organized forgetting” that tends to accompany colonial assumptions of entitlement (Blomley, Unsettling 112), situating the birth and growth of the city within a longer history of Aboriginal place making and storying.

For her own part, Johnson as narrator usually refers to Vancouver as a general location in relation to which she orients herself in edge spaces such as Stanley Park and the North Shore mountains. Such brief and cursory treatment of the city is rather surprising, given that Johnson took daily walks through Vancouver’s West End, a neighbourhood that was undergoing dramatic growth and change during the period, and
that would have provided much fodder for commentary. Among the many who witnessed Johnson on her walks through the neighbourhood was the young Ethel Wilson, who later remembered her, sick but determined, as a “sad beauty,” “walking very slowly and lost in somber thought” (qtd. in Gray 372). Wilson herself went on to become one of Vancouver’s most important mid-century literary chroniclers, depicting the West End and surrounding city in vivid detail. But Johnson, despite her extensive knowledge of the streets and quotidian life of the city, does not include such details in Legends, and instead effects what would have been, for her settler readers, a distortion of space by making the social and physical margins of the city the centre of her text. Johnson’s distorting approach can be understood as an intriguing, socioculturally engaged, but not unproblematic example of an emerging edge consciousness in the city. On the one hand, the approach invites us to wonder why Johnson avoided representing her Squamish friends in the city streets. At the same time, in effecting a distortion of space and allowing Vancouver only postcard-sized appearances in the narrative, Johnson pushes colonial readers to experience what it is like to be displaced to the abstract non-space of the view, and to be, for the most part, elided in a story of place.

Importantly, too, though she marginalizes the central city in Legends, Johnson still repeatedly testifies to what I would describe as civic engagement in her creative documentation of her relationships with her Aboriginal interlocutors. In a careful study, Deena Rymhs has examined the narrative frames of the legends, in which Johnson as narrator provides present-day context by detailing her encounters with Su-á-pu-luck and

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101 During the time that Johnson lived in Vancouver, the area of the downtown peninsula west of her rental apartment on Howe Street was filling in with “row after row of two-storey frame houses,” and mansions that had been built near English Bay (at the entrance to Stanley Park) during what has been described as the West End’s “brief gilded age” were beginning to be subdivided into apartments (Starkins, “West End” 80, 81).
the other Aboriginals who appear as storytellers. Reading the text through the work of Mary Louise Pratt, Rymhs finds a creative record of what Pratt calls “the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters” in contact zones (Pratt 7; qtd. in Rymhs 53). In making such “border” engagements an integral part of her daily life, Johnson treated the city as an open and dynamic space, in both sociocultural and physical terms—indeed, she devoted herself to cultivating it as such. Her approach can be read as an early example of an emergent “edge politics” in Vancouver, querying settler claims to space—and the dominant regime of private property in the city—through an emphasis on “ambivalence, uncertainty, change, overlap, and interaction” (Howitt 2001: 234; qtd. in Blomley 2004: 135).

In her analysis of Legends, Rymhs reveals how a sense of open, dynamic structure informs and shapes the narrative. Commenting on Johnson’s structural negotiation, in “The Two Sisters,” of the different names associated with the North Shore mountains, Rymhs observes that Johnson places colonial and Aboriginal stories of place “proximally, . . . assign[ing] them equal status and effect[ing] a synchronicity in her writing” (55). Going on to note a similar “interpretive unsettlement” in the story “Deadman’s Island,” Rymhs describes Johnson’s legends as “imbrication[s] of histories and voices” (56).

Rymhs notes not only Johnson’s handling of the conflict between colonial and Aboriginal relations to local sites, but also her foregrounding of the plurality of specifically Aboriginal perspectives (57): in the story “Point Grey,” for example, we learn that the Aboriginal name for Point Grey, Homolsom, mixes the languages of two tribes whose territories (we are told) met at the point (Johnson 67; Rymhs 57). In “The Deep Waters,” moreover, Johnson emphasizes the fact of proliferating versions, Aboriginal and western,
of the great flood myth (Johnson 39-42), and the “contingency [of these versions] upon place and world-view” (Rymhs 57). Rymhs also explores Johnson’s negotiation of oral and written narrative traditions. She finds that the stories in *Legends* bear the imprint of Johnson’s Romantic influences and that Johnson at times “defers to a specific, almost exclusive, literary terminology” (64); as well, Rymhs observes that Johnson sometimes explains the meaning of a legend in a manner that effects closure, rather than (as in oral narrative) treating meaning as implied and open to interpretation. But, Rymhs then goes on to highlight Johnson’s attention to the “gestures, manner, and context” associated with the telling of the stories (Rymhs 67), her registering of the “communicative silence” involved in her role as listener (68), and her emphasis on the fact that written language can only replicate the performance in a limited and incomplete manner (67).

I have outlined Rymhs’s discussion of the way that Johnson juxtaposes multiple histories and negotiates narrative forms because in these aspects of *Legends* I find what I would describe, retrospectively, as a collagist sensibility. Indeed, while Michael Turner rightly identifies Malcolm Lowry’s work as an important early example of such a sensibility informing local literary innovation, Johnson’s *Legends* is a key precursor, one that emerged at the tail end of—and in relation to—the city’s first major period of heady speculative development (and concomitant spatial and social restructuring). I find this sensibility not only in the text itself but also in the collaborative relationships between Johnson and her Aboriginal interlocutors that allowed her to produce *Legends*, and to

102 In her discussion of implied meaning, or *implicature*, in oral narratives, Rymhs draws on Dee Horne: “*Implicature* can … effectively displace readers by drawing attention to the gaps in their knowledge and understanding. In such instances, the implied meanings that elude readers may well give them insight into the displacement that diverse American Indians experience. Confronted by their own cultural gap . . . readers negotiate meanings, confront their assumptions, and deconstruct their reading strategies” (Horne 69; qtd. in Rymhs 63).
which the narrative testifies. It is evident, moreover, in the original context in which the legends were published. Commenting on Strong-Boag and Gerson’s observation that Johnson’s appreciative portrayals of Su-á-pu-luck “appeared in the weekend magazine of a newspaper [the Province] that was distinctively hostile to the Aboriginal cause” and to Su-á-pu-luck, in particular, as political agitator (Strong-Boag and Gerson 177),

Willmott remarks that the “same figure walks across the pages of the news to the pages of literature and takes on antithetical significance—an effect unique to the juxtapositional structure of specialized discourses in newsprint” (Willmott, “Modernism” 120). Given the current significant interest in the alternative arts communities, collaborative practices, and collagist artwork in post-war Vancouver (evident, for instance, in Turner’s, Watson’s, and Lum’s projects, and in the Ruins in Process: Vancouver Art in the Sixties archive), I would identify Johnson as a figure whose work, creative practices, and daily life at once complement this interest and encourage an expansion of attention in this turn to the past. Importantly, just as Watson finds, in the emergence of a collagist sensibility in the 1960s and early 1970s, strong connections between aesthetics, ethics, and politics, so too are such connections evident in Johnson’s case, with Legends arising out of her everyday negotiation of multiple communities and voices, taking a shape that is able to capture some of the nuances and complexities of this negotiation, and making a statement about the impact of colonial settlement and oppressive legislation against Aboriginals.

103 Strong-Boag and Gerson explain: “During the period 1907-9 Su-á-pu-luck was . . . regularly blamed [by the Province] for inciting a series of conflicts and rebellions, most notably those in the Nass and Skeena Valleys in Northern British Columbia. The Province’s coverage of his 1906 visit to London to appeal to the King . . . was dismissive and mocking, as was its account of his visit to Prime Minister Laurier two years later” (177).

104 Both Rymhs and Willmott note that “The Two Sisters” legend—in which the titular two sisters ask their father, the chief, to host “the great northern hostile tribe” at a peaceful feast (Johnson 5-6)—makes a strong statement about the colonial government’s banning of the potlatch. In his reading of the story, Willmott argues that
There is, too, a productive imbrication of temporalities in *Legends*. Reflecting on Johnson’s tendency to endow the legends with “a legendary timelessness” while emphasizing relationality and situatedness in the frame narrative, Willmott suggests that the effect of this approach “is to feel the present moment as a compression of the past and the future, as a kind of layering of contingencies and possibilities, a crossroads rather than a prison house” (123, 120). “What the legends say over and over,” Willmott proposes, “is that aboriginal power is lost only in the present moment and that it must be remembered and represented in order to be discovered again as history moves on. . . . [Johnson’s stories refuse] the closure implied by any one narrative chain of events or institutional economy” (122-23). In reflecting on Willmott’s reading of *Legends*, I am reminded of Yvonne’s question to the Consul in Lowry’s *Under the Volcano*—“Do you remember to-morrow?”—a question that itself links a lost past with future possibility through the ongoing act of remembrance. Johnson’s answer, it seems, is yes: what keeps *Legends* from simply gesturing toward an irrecoverable past or an imagined future endlessly deferred is, as Willmott suggests, the attention it pays to the work-in-progress of remembering, interacting, storytelling, listening. Such work, as it is represented in *Legends*, is utopian in the sense that I described earlier in this chapter—partial and incomplete, and aware of itself as such. Provisionality and self-reflexivity are, moreover, what make this work an ethical means of engaging in the world.

Because of Johnson’s sophisticated approach to cross-cultural relations, it is...
tempting to treat *Legends* as a starting point, in Vancouver, for the creative articulation of a politicized form of edge consciousness. But to describe it as a beginning is, I think, to disregard the process of formation that is highlighted in *Legends*, and that in fact defines its edge politics—that it is a product and configuring component of an assemblage of Aboriginal and colonial histories and futures, voices and forms, stories and dreams. In their discussion of assemblage theory, Stephen J. Collier and Aihwa Ong emphasize that “the temporality of an assemblage is emergent. It does not always involve new forms, but forms that are shifting, in formation, or at stake” (12). Deleuze, for his part, remarks that “[t]hings and thoughts advance or grow out from the middle[.] . . [T]hat’s where you have to get to work, that’s where everything unfolds” (161). To take up *Legends*, I would suggest, is not to return to a beginning; rather, it is to find ourselves still, again, already in between.

**Urban Displacement, Grassroots Resistance: Jane Rule’s *The Young in One Another’s Arms***

In a late essay titled “How the World Works,” published in the collection *Loving the Difficult*, Jane Rule describes a dinner party that she once attended at the UBC Faculty Club. The party’s host was Leon Koerner, who had funded the construction of the Faculty Club and overseen the selection of the site and architect (Rule 86). Koerner treated his guests to “an elaborate meal, roasted birds with their feathers restored, a huge salmon embossed with the university crest, a great variety of wines” (86). And, Rule recalls, as the guests sat down to the meal, he rose to give a speech:

“The sun never sets on the British Empire,” [Koerner] began, not well I thought.
“But it does set on British Columbia, and I have provided it for you.” He nodded to the waiters behind him who drew open the curtains of the tall windows.

The sun went down. I faintly heard somewhere nearby a toilet flush. (86)

Rule, here, reminds us of the role that the spectacle of the view plays in development projects and the social hierarchies that support them. Koerner’s endowment to the university is not just a building but a scene, nature on display, to be enjoyed in special seclusion by those privileged enough to find themselves seated at his dinner table. Rule was, or at least had become, one of those people: she was a teacher, writer, and organizer who worked in institutions, beginning as a typist but ultimately moving into work as a university instructor and administrator; however, she also worked tirelessly outside of institutions, especially as she found other means of earning a living. She thus enjoyed a degree of privilege and access to upper echelons of power, but never settled comfortably into those ranks, always listening for the toilet flushing in the background, aware of the invisible and unacknowledged structural contexts (physical, social, economic, environmental) that enable the spectacle of the view.

Rule’s childhood experience appears to have played an important role in fostering the critical border consciousness that she so clearly exhibits in the short passage from “How the World Works.” Growing up in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, she spent much of her childhood on the move with her family as they endeavoured to “outrun[...] the Depression” and then struggled to make ends meet during the war (Rule, “Choosing Home” 55). “[W]e lived in other people’s furnished houses while we waited for our own belongings to arrive, held up by a dock strike, a lost shipment,” Rule remembers. “We learned to move as lightly as ghosts in places where other people’s
clothes hung in the closets, other children’s toys were out of bounds on the screen porch” (55). She spent summers at her grandparents’ ranch in rural California, where she “nearly learned to milk a cow, pluck a chicken, shoot a rabbit, quilt, embroider, preserve, but those lessons atrophied over long suburban winters” when she and her siblings found themselves immersed, instead, in more middle-class social rituals and behaviours (56). Rule continued to move around as an adult until finally, in her thirties, she settled in Vancouver with her partner, Helen Sonthoff. The two lived in the same Vancouver neighbourhood for 20 years, before moving to Galiano Island in the mid 1970s.

Privileged enough to own a home, Rule was always interested not in enclosure and privacy but in making room for others, taking on students in winter and guests in summer, opening her doors to visiting neighbours and friends year round, and providing a meeting and work space for the community organizing in which she became involved (58-59). Being at home was always, as she put it, an expansion outward into neighbourhood, city, and—as she gained prominence as a writer and arts organizer (she was a founding member of the Writers’ Union of Canada)—the broader world. “[W]e helped establish [the local] Arts Club,” she remembers,

meeting many of the writers, painters, actors, musicians, and architects who were involved in shaping the cultural life of Vancouver, building its much needed theatres, galleries and museums. We wrote letters of protest against the design of the new post office, forced the Vancouver Sun to keep and then expand its books page to include reviews of Canadian books, aired our views on local radio stations, went to each other’s performances and openings, and imported artists from elsewhere. (59)
Along with their involvement in arts organization and activism, Rule and Sonthoff were also, as Marilyn Schuster reminds us, active in the women’s movement, helping to found “the first feminist consciousness-raising group at the University of British Columbia where they explored, along with other women (faculty, students, graduate students, staff), what it meant to be a woman in a male-dominated institution” (Passionate 202). For Rule, being in the middle of things (to return to Deleuze’s remark) meant always probing and dynamizing the edges of her various communities. Unworking social, institutional, and legislated boundaries so as to open up space and possible trajectories for others was, for her, an integral part of the work of community formation and expansion.

Though Rule eventually moved to nearby Galiano, she continued to think and write about Vancouver, making it the primary setting for the first two books—The Young in One Another’s Arms and Contract with the World—that she published after settling on the island. Both novels take the work of community formation as a central theme, and in The Young Rule situates this work specifically within the context of the threat presented to longstanding, primarily working-class neighbourhoods by pro-development boosters and city officials keen on redeveloping Vancouver’s inner core. Mike Harcourt et al. recall that by the early 1960s, after decades of being saddled with Depression-era debt, the “pent-up hunger” in the city “to return to the . . . Edwardian boom was palpable. Bill Rathie was elected mayor in 1962 on the slogan ‘Let’s get Vancouver moving!’”

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105 Rule started working on The Young in 1971, a few years before she moved permanently to Galiano (see Schuster, Passionate 203-05); The Young was published in 1977.
106 Peter Dickinson, in his study of Contract, discusses the dynamics of community depicted in this novel, which, as he explains, “tells the story of six friends in their thirties whose ‘corporeal alignments’ (Grosz’s phrase) with each other and with their city reflect their attempts to negotiate a place for themselves as artists and sexual citizens in an environment that is often actively hostile to both enterprises” (85).
However, as I explained in my discussion of this period in Chapter One, the enthusiastic call for redevelopment was met with considerable resistance. The 1960s and 1970s unfolded as a period of conflict in which developers and their political allies were pitted against an emerging coalition of neighbourhood residents (including many artists), liberal politicians, and middle-class professionals, who banded together to save older, largely working-class districts that had been targeted for clearance to make way for the buildings and infrastructure of the new Vancouver (see Harcourt et al.; Lee, “Gender, Ethnicity”; Watson; Hayes; Ley, New Middle Class; Ley et al.). While an initial phase of “urban renewal” (including the construction of the first section of a new interurban freeway) to the east of downtown did go ahead, resulting in the bulldozing of a section of the neighbourhood of Strathcona, activists were successful at blocking further plans for demolition and redevelopment in this part of the inner city. Along the south shore of False Creek, however, condominium development rapidly transformed the once working- and lower-middle-class neighbourhood of Fairview (see Ley, New Middle Class; Mills, “Fairview Slopes”; Mills, “Life”).

Rule, in The Young in One Another’s Arms, presents as her protagonist a middle-aged boardinghouse owner, Ruth Wheeler, whose home is slated for demolition by the city to make way for a bridge expansion. Rule does not name the street or neighbourhood in which the house is situated; indeed, while she does provide some geographical details that suggest her protagonist’s house is located along False Creek South near Burrard

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107 In her poem “Roots,” Dorothy Livesay describes the Vancouver of this period as a “[s]econd-hand city” with “second-hand stores” and “hand-me-down houses” (8). It was also, she continues in the poem, a “city where / under the thumb-print of rain / love rages / city where / Lowry walked / stumbling / on the beaches” (8). Livesay lived in Vancouver from the later 1930s through the 1950s, and again in the mid 1960s. As Trevor Carolan recalls, she spent a number of summers in a cabin on the beach at Dollarton; her neighbours included Earle Birney (who also vacationed there) and, of course, Lowry (Carolan 189).
Bridge (22), she appears to obfuscate the home’s exact location deliberately, taking
instead as a general issue the demolition of existing neighbourhoods. Over the course of
the novel she captures the decline of Ruth’s beloved neighbourhood as residents vacate
their homes; the old street becomes “a disaster area of razed buildings” and then, when
Ruth returns late in the novel, a site “walled in by high construction fences” that leave
Ruth stymied and confused, forced to gaze ruefully upward from the outside (131, 216).

In selecting a boardinghouse as the building under threat, Rule implicitly suggests
that she is not contesting increased population density per se: an old, single-family house
divided into suites, the boardinghouse is home to nine residents who sleep in single
rooms and share a kitchen and living room. Rule’s protagonist also speaks appreciatively
of the “sociable traffic” in her neighbourhood, preferring it to the quieter neighbourhoods
“to the west, still zoned for single-family dwellings” (33). “But,” Ruth goes on to think,
“it was a street too close to the center of this young city to stay that way” (33). What Rule
does repeatedly criticize is the alienating height of many of the buildings in the
restructured urban core, and also, more importantly, the fact that this new landscape
seems to enhance social seclusion. Looking out over the water at the highrises in the
West End, “a surprise growth of only ten years,” Ruth recalls that “before there had been
old wood frame houses, gradually abandoned by families but still creating arbitrary
families like her own” (34). At this point, she does go on to question the area’s
transformation into “one of the most densely populated areas in North America,”
querying what we would now call the ecodensity argument:

She had heard . . . that such a concentration of people conserved land and fuel, cut
down the need for transportation, and was a very civilized solution to population
pressures. She had never heard anyone who lived in an apartment argue such virtues, probably because they did not sit down at large dinner tables to argue about anything. She saw a single TV dinner in the window of a toaster oven, a thin film of gravy bubbling on the surface of a dry slice of turkey. (34)

Ruth’s criticism, here, perhaps seems dated in its dismissal of the environmental merits of dense urban living, but again I would stress that she is primarily resistant to highrise apartment living. Her main point, still, is that the new landscape is failing to foster vibrant communities of actively engaged citizens.

Rule’s concerns are, in important ways, exemplary of the period’s shifting attitudes toward city planning—a shift that was articulated most influentially by Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. As David Ley explains, by the post-war era, the highrise apartment and the urban freeway, the container and conveyor belt of the anonymous masses, had become . . . standardized products of central-city urban planning. . . . If Max Weber equated the growth of a rational, corporate society with the hollowing out of everyday life, the modern central city became almost the paradigmatic inscription of the disenchantment of the modern mind. (*New Middle Class* 20)

Countering the privileging, by modernist planners, of abstractly conceived, master-planned spaces (Le Corbusier’s vertical Radiant City is one of the more famous examples), Jacobs advocated human-scale planning and the recognition and nurturing of complexity in already existing spaces. Key to Jacobs’s approach was the understanding that space is made and transformed through the interrelated activities and practices of

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108 Jacobs moved to Toronto in 1968, and extended her critique to a Canadian context in the 1971 film *City Limits*, directed by Laurence Hyde, which focused on urban planning and change in her new home city (Ley, *New Middle Class* 28n12).
individuals—it consists, Jacobs proposed, of a “living collection of interdependent uses” (Jacobs 510).

We can see Rule’s own critique of the modernist dream city—of the city as utopian abstraction—beginning in the title of her novel, which takes up a phrase from one of the best-known literary invocations of a dream city, William Butler Yeats’s “Sailing to Byzantium.” The city in Yeats’s poem is artificial, an ideal form existing outside of time, a great “monument[] of unaging intellect” (Yeats 425). Yeats’s speaker, repulsed by the aging process—“An aged man is but a paltry thing,” a mere “dying animal,” he tells us—turns to the “hammered gold and gold enamelling” of Byzantium as the space that will take him out of his degraded body, out of nature, which is a realm only suitable for “[t]he young / in one another’s arms, the birds in the trees” (425). In her novel, Rule queries the reductive dichotomies (city/nature, youth/age, body/mind, new/old, time/timelessness, abstraction/materiality, utopia/reality) that structure Yeats’s poem, and that also tended to inform the dream cities of modernist planners, rising in master-planned newness on cleared ground.

Like Ethel Wilson—whose books Ruth reads to her ailing mother-in-law, Clara, early in the novel109—Rule uses the trope of the view to look critically at her city, at times capturing a particular scene in a manner that gestures to the city’s assembled, ever-shifting complexity, at other times reminding us of how the city and surrounding landscape tend to be structurally “fixed” and reduced through the view. Her protagonist, Ruth, is a much more attentive and thoughtful viewer than Wilson’s Mrs. Gormley, in “A Drink with Adolphus,” or Mr. Willy, in “The Window.” When, early in the novel, she

109 Rule’s partner, Helen Sonthoff, produced one of the earliest scholarly studies of Wilson’s work (published in 1965).
looks out into “heavy sea fog.” Ruth recognizes that it is “darkened and seasoned by the slash burning on the northern mountains, closed off from view” (26). While Mrs. Gormley might notice and then dismiss such details—indeed, while she might not bother to stop the cab for such a view—Ruth approaches the view as a witness, carefully registering the complicated geography in which her city is embedded. A short time later, looking out across the water toward West Vancouver, Ruth sees “waterside apartment buildings block[ing] the view of smaller houses behind them, and roads cut[ting] higher and higher into the wooded mountainside, great wounds with scabs of houses forming on either side” (34). But even Ruth, an attentive witness, experiences the distancing and abstracting effects of the view as captured from one of the city’s highrise towers: gazing out, she finds herself thinking, “it seem[s] less real than when she walked the beach,” and has to quickly remind herself that the beach is still there for her to roam (117). Late in the novel, when she encounters the construction fences surrounding the site of her old home, Ruth is confronted with plywood advertising panels featuring “an ugly, realistic mural of the city and the mountains” (217); against this simulacrum of a view Rule juxtaposes the complicated, three-dimensional reality of Ruth’s experience, dwarfed amidst “giant legs of concrete growing up out of the soil that must have been her garden. The road would lift up on them and flower over the bulbs” (217).

Like Jacobs, Rule urges an attentiveness to human-scale interrelationality in existing spaces-in-process; however, while Jacobs focused on the central city, Rule presents us with characters who are being displaced by urban restructuring, and who no longer find the city affordable or hospitable to the cultivation of healthy, diverse, engaged
Rule uses the boardinghouse, then a farmhouse at the edge of the city and, finally, a home on Galiano Island as the settings for her exploration of the complicated dynamics of such a community, and the question of how and where this kind of community might still survive and thrive.

For Rule’s protagonist, the cultivation of community begins at home; like Rule herself, Ruth treats her home as an open space, its residents forming an “arbitrary family,” as she puts it, a shifting and changing group of strangers turned housemates turned (in many cases) friends and lovers. Her small boardinghouse community is, in effect, a somewhat less radical but perhaps more sustainable version of the communal living experiments that were popular during the period. Most of Ruth’s boarders are socially marginalized in one way or another: all are relatively poor; Ruth’s mother-in-law is elderly and physically disabled (in fact, Ruth herself is disabled, having lost her arm in an accident); one boarder has impaired social skills and is likely autistic; another two boarders are Vietnam war resisters; one boarder is black, and also in the country illegally; and a few are either gay or bisexual (Rule portrays human sexuality and relationships as complicated and varied, not privileging a certain sexual orientation or, for that matter, “long-term relationships over other forms of intimacy” [Schuster, “Proud Life”]). Ruth is nominally in charge and respected as the coordinator of the home as well as primary cook and custodian, though eventually even these roles are to some extent usurped as her

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\[110\] I should emphasize that while Jacobs tends to maintain a focus on inner-city neighbourhoods, her activism and her theorization of urban community dynamics emerged in response to the same redevelopment processes as those involved in the displacement of Rule’s characters. As Jacobs wrote in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*,

[O]ur present urban renewal laws are an attempt to . . . wip[e] away slums and their populations, and replac[e] them with projects intended to produce higher tax yields, or to lure back easier populations with less expensive public requirements. The method fails. At best, it merely shifts slums from here to there, adding its own tincture of extra hardship and destruction. At worst, it destroys neighborhoods where constructive and improving communities exist and where the situation calls for encouragement rather than destruction. (353)
young boarders endeavour to move toward a more equitable approach to communal living (75). As Ruth tells one newly arrived boarder, “there’s just been a successful coup in this house. I’m still the head of state but without much domestic authority. We’re a kind of commune or family, depending on whose jargon you’re using” (99). As her remark suggests, Ruth does not “lay down rules and regulations except about drugs” (44); her boarders have “nothing to sneak about, neither a drink nor a lovemaking” (44). This “set[s] moods loose in the halls and stairway”—the house is, as Ruth affirms, a place of “blatant living,” unlike a highrise where lives are, she suggests at one point, stored away in tidy boxes (44, 70).

In my discussion of assemblage theory earlier in this chapter, I emphasized, following Helen Stratford, that recognizing and fostering relations as imbricated, open, and emergent, rather than fixed and rigidly defined, can open up new possibilities for affiliation and engagement. Ruth—who dislikes the way that highrise apartments impose strict, limiting structures on social relations—allows her home to be a space where tensions rise, fall, and shift, where relationships form and fail, where boarders come and go. Ruth understands community as precariously open—productively, if not always comfortably, so in the way that it accommodates difference, but more problematic in the lack of protection it provides for its more vulnerable members. This troubling dimension of what could be described as Ruth’s somewhat laissez-faire approach to community cultivation is highlighted when she allows the police to enter her home,

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111 Indeed, Rule’s conceptualization of community in the novel is presciently post-identitarian. Noting that “lesbian desire is neither idealized nor trivialized” in *The Young*—that it operates rather as an integral component of community relations—Marilyn Schuster proposes that “[t]o write such a narrative in the late 1970s might be understood as an effort by Rule to resist the utopian sisterhoods, communities defined by the politics of 1970s lesbian feminism that, in her view, were potentially as restrictive as the homophobia they were resisting” (*Passionate* 214).
which ultimately leads to the deportation of one of her illegal boarders. Part of Ruth’s trajectory, over the course of the novel, involves her exploration of how to foster openness in her community while also keeping that community’s most at-risk members relatively safe. Significantly, while this involves, late in the novel, standing up to the police who have once again come in search of one of her boarders (200), Ruth never allows her community to close in on itself in any rigid or permanent way. Safety and precarious openness remain always in tension, in ongoing negotiation.

Other forces in Ruth’s life are, however, closing in as the city remakes itself, and Ruth and her boarders are compelled to leave their inner-city home. Ruth does, initially, try to make a life for herself in a West End apartment tower, bringing Willard, her boarder with limited social skills, with her, as he is unable to make the transition on his own. In fact, Willard proves unable to make the transition at all, ultimately returning to the boardinghouse and barricading himself inside with a gun; he shoots and injures another boarder who arrives to talk him out, and is then shot himself—and killed—by police. Beyond her critique of the police as agents of the disciplinary state, Rule’s point here—which in my view is blunted somewhat by the overly dramatic quality of the scene—is partly that the city has failed to properly accommodate people like Willard. Rule’s most outspoken activist character in the novel, a boarder named Gladys, articulates precisely this point when she exclaims, “Do they think about people like Willard, those bastards? . . . They tear down whole hotels full of people like that, just barely sure of where they are in the first place, who don’t have a clue where else to go” (116). Still, Rule gives us characters whose fates are never simply products of the city or the systems that shape it. Certainly, their lives always take place within the structural
contexts of power, and are circumscribed by dominant socioeconomic processes in deeply troubling ways; moreover, as Schuster suggests, we can see in Rule’s characters “the operation of capillary forms of power that Foucault has defined as ‘the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals’” (Passionate 208). However, Rule creates characters with unique sets of traits (passions, quirks, flaws, vulnerabilities) that are not only the products of dominant forms of power: her characters’ lives unfold, over the course of the novel, through the interplay of power, agency, and accident.

Ruth, suggests Rule, was forced to come to terms with this dynamic at an early age, while growing up in a rural valley in California where a “great six-lane highway” passed through (17). All of the residents’ lives, including Ruth’s own, were shaped by this river valley crossed by an ever-expanding road:

If there had been books, she would have read them. Instead she read the seasons in the south fork of the Eel River, in the meadows at the edge of the redwoods, until she was old enough—was it fourteen or thereabouts?—to work along the road, ladling up plates of gravied meat for the truckers, turning hamburgers for the tourists, listening to the locals’ yearly doubt: “Where will the road go next year?” One straightened curve would take out a café, another a sawmill. “What the road doesn’t take, the river will,” people said, but they went on planting their gardens within reach of the spring floods and building their hopes along the twisting and straightening road. (21-22)

112 “Throughout the novel,” Schuster continues, “Rule refuses to resolve the tension between these two understandings of power: anonymous surveillance and imposition of ‘order’ from the state (which serves and is served by capitalist interests) and the capillary forms of power which permeate individuals, marking their bodies, their unconscious gestures, as well as their interactions with one another” (208; emphasis in orig.).

113 Rule’s descriptions of Ruth’s childhood home are inspired by her own childhood summers spent at her grandparents’ property along the Eel River in South Fork, California (see Schuster, Passionate 22, 205).
Ruth’s childhood river valley is not a fixed space of absolute difference in relation to the city; rather, Rule emphasizes that it is shaped by a similar combination of processes. Following Neil Smith in his Afterword to the third edition of *Uneven Development*, we might say that Rule treats “space as the product of nature, a nature that is itself more and more intensely produced, still very much alive, nature as a continuum of human and non-human events and processes” (250). Significantly, too, like the river valley of Ruth’s past, Rule also makes clear that Galiano, the bucolic island of her present, is already on the development map: as the young boarder Tom remarks, Galiano is a place where urban sprawl has been “postponed,” but “not . . . permanently daunted” (147); he also notes that “Macmillan Bloedel owns about seventy percent of the island in tree farms” (148).

Ruth, in middle age, still dreams of the highway of her childhood—“a river of cars spawning to impossible cities, to be seen as broken and battered fish on its urban shores” (17-18). As a young woman she had drifted northward along the highway until she finally arrived in Vancouver, and in this way “had been part of the debris, carried along like an uprooted bush or root—or so she dreamed it” (18). Even in Ruth’s dreaming there is no idealized space to escape to, no “outside” of the system. “One day,” Ruth muses near the end of the novel as she walks toward home, “the road would inevitably lift and flow over the water, flow over them all, but, as she had known from childhood, anyone left would go right on planting” (219). Hers is an already compromised hope—compromised by the intertwined geographies of capitalism and nature, which are both, in the novel, at times

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114 With police helicopters hovering overhead (part of the determined effort to find and charge Ruth’s illegal American boarder, who apparently “cooked books” in order to get by [199]), we are also reminded that the island remains under state surveillance, and that it is embedded in global-scale geopolitical conflict and attendant diasporic border-crossings and struggle.
equally unmerciful. But it is, also, an enduring hope, remade daily in and through the
tasks at hand.
Chapter Three: Reconsidering Urban Poetic Practice

Let us go then,  
heart and eye,  
to look as always,  
attend as always,  
look at the world and never  
out of it.  

It begins to fall down a little.  
We renovate and proudly show our friends.  

- George Bowering, *Kerrisdale Elegies*

The shoe store had all versions of designer  
runners that the market could bear as I  
looked down at the bathos of my own  

- Roy Miki, untitled poem in the sequence “Scoping (also pronounced ‘Shopping’) in Kits,” *Mannequin Rising*

In my previous chapter’s discussion of redevelopment in Vancouver’s central area  
during the 1970s, I foregrounded, via the work of Jane Rule, the impact of urban  
“renewal” and gentrification on the alternative communities that had come to thrive in  
inner-city neighbourhoods. These communities were still, when redevelopment began,  
fairly new to the inner city; as Caroline A. Mills observes in a study of the  
neighbourhood of Fairview,  

For most of [Fairview’s] ninety-year history [its] woodframe single-family houses  
[were] home to petty bourgeois and working-class occupants, some of whom were  
employed in the lumber mills and factories of the formerly industrial False Creek  
basin. . . . Over time, many houses were converted to rooming houses, occupied

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increasingly in the 1960s by artists, hippies, students, and transients who celebrated communal and countercultural life-styles. (“Life” 172)

The late-1960s emergence of the condominium as a housing form resulted in dramatic changes to the built environment and demographics of Fairview; by the mid 1970s, according to David Ley, vacancy rates had plummeted and, in the place of rental units, “there were some forty strata-title projects containing 880 self-owned apartments . . . , almost all of them built in the previous five years” (New Middle Class 1, 2). Many of the 1960s newcomers were ultimately displaced in the process of Fairview’s transformation, but Ley argues that their presence and activities contributed to the middle-class revaluation of inner-city neighbourhoods, effectively setting the scene for gentrification (175; see also Ley “Artists”); some members of the 1960s communities, moreover, actually became the middle-class buyers, renovators, and redevelopers of later decades.

As I shift my focus, in this chapter, to literary work produced in Vancouver during the past three decades, I remain interested in the contributions writers have made to the project of urban critique, and devote particular attention to the sophisticated conceptualizations of urbanity (a term I will discuss in detail in my next section) that have emerged in recent writing; however, I wish also to reflect on the role of writers in dominant processes of urban change—and to attend specifically to what writers themselves have had to say about their apparent complicity in these processes.

The texts that I have selected for examination were produced by four poets who have spent extensive periods of time living in and writing about Vancouver: George Bowering, Lisa Robertson, Meredith Quartermain, and Bud Osborn. Each of these writers establishes a strong connection to that traditional domain of the urban poet, the street, but
each also reconsiders the role of the poet as street-level observer. This role was
centralized most famously by Walter Benjamin, who associated the urban poet with
the rag-picker and the practice of *bricolage*. For Benjamin, the prototypical urban poet
was Charles Baudelaire—who, in his own interest in the rag-picker as a hero of the modern
city inspired the comparison—
but elements of this peripatetic urban figure manifest in
a broad range of poetic texts and literary personas, from William Blake and William
Wordsworth to the Beat poets and beyond. In my Introduction, I reflected on the work
of two writers, Roy Kiyooka and Fred Wah, who have contributed to Vancouver’s own
rich, if less lengthy, tradition of poetry inspired by the urban walk and the space of the
street. Like Kiyooka and Wah, the poets whose texts I take up in this chapter have all
been invested, to varying degrees and in distinct ways, in the tradition of the poet who
explores the fringe and forgotten spaces of the city, gathering and telling marginalized
stories. At the same time, however, they also reflect critically on their own position in
such spaces, and query the aims and impact of their work.

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116 Benjamin highlighted Baudelaire’s interest in the “heroic constitution” that, the latter felt, was necessary
“to live modernity” (Benjamin, “Paris” 103). Baudelaire found such a constitution in the rag-picker;
however, in using the practice of rag-picking as a metaphor for his own practice, Baudelaire claimed
heroism for the urban poet as well (Benjamin, “Paris” 108-09). See also Benjamin’s *Charles Baudelaire: A
Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (17-21, 79-81).

117 Raymond Williams, in *The Country and the City*, situates Blake and Wordsworth at the beginning of the
modern tradition of the poet as urban walker (233), though Rebecca Solnit, who cites Williams in her
history of walking, notes that London poets and walkers John Gay and Samuel Johnson were important
precursors (180-81). Later, in her discussion of Allen Ginsberg, Solnit emphasizes that while the Beats
were “passionate urbanists,” walking was not the only—and in most cases not the predominant—form of
“motion or travel” that they explored in their writing:

> [The Beats] caught the tail end of the 1930s romance of freighthoppers, hobos, and railroad yards,
> they led the way to the new car culture in which restlessness was assuaged by hundreds of miles at
> 70 mph rather than dozens at 3 or 4 on foot, and they blended such physical travel with chemically
> induced ramblings of the imagination in a whole new kind of rampaging language. San Francisco
> and New York seem pedestrian anchors on either side of the long rope of the open road they
> traveled. (190)

A very short list of other poets who have also contributed to this tradition might include Earle Birney,
Daphne Marlatt, Michael Turner, Wayde Compton, George Stanley, Sachiko Murakami, Roy Miki, and W.
H. New.
One of the epigraphs for this chapter is a quotation from Roy Miki’s recent poem “Scoping (also pronounced ‘Shopping’) in Kits” (2011), in which the speaker turns his attention from the sneaker display in a shop window to his own shoes: it is this shift of the critical lens from the urban scene to the urban artist—this recognition of the artist’s embeddedness in the scene he or she is creatively documenting—that I track in my readings of Vancouver-based texts in this chapter. Miki’s suggestion that this shift is bathetic—that there is a mock-heroic quality to the contemporary urban poet—is significant: the heroism that Baudelaire claimed for the modern poet is also in question in Bowering’s, Robertson’s, Quartermain’s, and Osborn’s work, though each of these writers answers the question differently, leaving us with distinctive portraits of the urban poet that encourage us to recognize the diversity within this social type. And yet, even as they develop their different portraits, all four exhibit a shared interest in engaging foundational ethical questions about how to live and relate to others in the city. The turn to self-critique is not, for these writers, a turn away from the city, or navel-gazing, or a tactic that simply casts doubt on the role of the poet; rather this turn seems to have become for them a necessary dimension of participating in, reflecting on, and writing about contemporary urban spaces and communities.

**Cultivating Urbanity**

In creating descriptions of experience and interaction in urban spaces, and in interrogating the ethics of this work, Bowering, Robertson, Quartermain, and Osborn demonstrate a particular commitment to the cultivation of urbanity, as defined by the
cultural critic Liam Kennedy. “Urbanity”—especially in its adjectival form, “urbane”—often denotes refinement or elegance of manner, wit, and polish, especially of city people. However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* reminds us that the word has also long been used simply to refer to the “state, condition, or character” of city life, and Kennedy develops his conceptualization of the term from this more generalized definition. For Kennedy—whose thinking is founded in the work of seminal American urban studies commentators Richard Park, Jane Jacobs, Richard Sennett, William Whyte, and Marshall Berman—“urbanity” refers to “the phenomenon of collectivity which emerges from the close proximity of strangers and face-to-face relations in public urban space” (Kennedy 3). It implies a valorization of “the multifarious forms of social interaction and interdependence in the city—the erotic and aesthetic variety of street life, the close encounters with strangers, the freedoms of access and movement in public spaces—positing these as the very essence of urban life and the necessary conditions of democratic citizenship” (3). Kennedy argues that a “crisis of urbanity” has occurred in American cities: the notion of pluralistic collectivity associated with urbanity is now, he suggests, “broadly questioned as the close proximity of strangers in the city refuses to cohere into a civic unity and public space becomes increasingly privatized, commodified and militarized” (3). He proposes that while a highly idealized notion of urbanity has been commodified for primarily white, middle-class consumption, the most pervasive affective orientation in the contemporary city is fear, which manifests as avoidance, denial, and the move toward enclosure.

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119 For the spark leading to my consideration of Vancouver-based poets’ commitment to cultivating urbanity I am indebted to Glenn Deer, who first brought Kennedy’s work to bear on Vancouver writing (“Remapping Vancouver” 131-33).
In contemporary Vancouver we do not find the entrenched racialized divides that are a defining feature of many American cities; moreover, Vancouver planners have sought, through a range of zoning and other planning initiatives, to foster a mixed demographic and vibrant sense of community in the central city (see Hutton, “Post-Industrialism”). However, despite its often-celebrated planning history—indeed, partly because of it—Vancouver has not escaped some of the characteristic negative impacts of later twentieth century urban change. An intensified culture of consumption has emerged in the city, accompanied by growing socioeconomic polarization and widespread gentrification (Barnes et al.; Blomley, Unsettling; Smith and Derksen; Ley, New Middle Class). Condominium marketers and retailers often draw on a commodified version of urbanity as a marketing tool—a version that ignores the necessary tensions of encounter integral to Kennedy’s conceptualization. Glenn Deer cites Douglas Coupland’s City of Glass—a collection of annotated photographs that bridges the guidebook and coffee-table book genres—as a key example of commodified urbanity in Vancouver. Coupland, Deer argues, portrays Vancouver as a city of “comfortable cultural fusions and leisurely

Geographer Dan Hiebert notes that Vancouver’s extensive network of secondary suites (i.e., rental suites) in a range of primarily single-family-housing residential neighbourhoods has encouraged not only a mixed socioeconomic demographic across the city but also, specifically, the integration of new immigrants into the social fabric; Vancouver City Council supported the continuing growth of this network when, on March 23, 2004, it officially approved a zoning bylaw change that made it legal to have a secondary suite in any detached home in the city (City of Vancouver, “Secondary Suites”). Of course, contemporary Vancouver is not devoid of racial tension, but there is a difference in its intensity and social-spatial configuration.

For example, the myYaletown website describes the neighbourhood of Yaletown—a former industrial district that became, in the 1990s, the poster child of Vancouver’s new residential downtown—as a trendy urban community comprising a mix of residential, office, restaurants, boutiques, cafes, and more. The elevated, brick-paved loading docks with their cantilever canopies now house sidewalk tables, providing shade and shelter for the patrons of the many dining and drinking establishments. . . . Originally Vancouver’s garment district, Yaletown still retains its links through its fashionable boutiques and local designers. Now added to this mix are: high-end restaurants, microbreweries, high tech companies, home furnishings, galleries, BMW’s Mini Cooper showroom, & hotel Opus [sic]: a contemporary boutique inn. (“Yaletown Reborn”)

In addition to the commodification of urbanity, another threat, in Vancouver, to active engagement in the public life of the city is (as we saw in Chapter Two) the spectacle of the view, which has produced a city built to accommodate and promote a passive, outward-looking gaze (Berelowitz 159ff).
imbibed vistas,” neglecting many of the more problematic or controversial aspects of city spaces and city life (Deer, “Remapping Vancouver” 139).

That said, in recent years a surge of interest among Vancouver residents in the cultivation of public space has started to open such limited versions of urbanity to interrogation. A major force in the project of critique has been a grassroots collective called the Vancouver Public Space Network (VPSN), which has become a respected public space advocacy organization in the city. The VPSN’s primary aims include “challenging the increase of advertising ‘creep’ in public places, promoting creative, community-friendly urban design, monitoring private security activities in the downtown core, [and] fostering public dialogue and democratic debate” (Vancouver Public Space Network). The organization’s rise to prominence—and the high levels of participation in many of its events and initiatives—are indicators of Vancouver residents’ enthusiasm for an expansive, inclusive, and convivial public realm, and of a need for concerted social action in response to the changing dynamics of the city’s streets and gathering spaces.

Local interest in the possibilities and dynamics of public space was also enhanced by debates related to the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, which brought to the fore issues such as surveillance and crowd management as well as the potential removal of homeless people from city streets during the two-week-long event (this tactic—which had been used by other host cities—was not, in the end, deployed in Vancouver). Ultimately, the 2010 Olympics, which saw unprecedented numbers of people congregating in downtown streets and designated “celebration sites” each day, seemed to suggest that the public life of Vancouver was vital and healthy. Residents continued gathering in the same way the following year when the Vancouver Canucks hockey team made a run for the Stanley
Cup. But in the case of both the Olympics and the Stanley Cup, crowds gathered in the streets in support and celebration of sameness (the Canadian Olympic team,\textsuperscript{122} the Vancouver Canucks NHL hockey team): neither event proved that Vancouver is a place where dissent and difference are recognized as vital and necessary dimensions of urban public life.

Vancouver made international headlines when, on June 15, 2011, a riot erupted following the final game of the Stanley Cup. The riot has been blamed on a wide range of factors, from “hysterical hockey hype,”\textsuperscript{123} to hopelessness and disenfranchisement under late capitalism, to (in an article about the role of social media in the riot) “anomie with a new, disturbing Internet era twist” (Markle; Leiren-Young). The riot itself deserves more room for discussion than I am able to provide here; however, I do wish to comment briefly on Vancouverites’ responses to the riot, which seem to capture both their enthusiasm for participating in the public life of the city, and, at the same time, a widespread unwillingness to grapple with the complexities and difficulties of urbanity.

On the day following the riot, many residents came into the downtown core to help clean up the city and contribute to spontaneous public art projects. But many Vancouverites (including significant numbers of those who contributed to the public art) also went to great lengths, in their commentaries on the riot, not simply to criticize but to completely repudiate those involved. As Jon Beasley-Murray observes, the portrait of

\textsuperscript{122} Though Vancouver hosted visitors from around the world for the Olympics, the streets during the Games were generally filled with Team Canada fans. As one journalist put it, “Vancouver has been dipped in a coat of red and white. It’s national pride on a scale the city has never experienced” (Lupick).

\textsuperscript{123} In an article that ran on the day before the riots in the Vancouver-based online publication The Mainlander, Lee Bacchus (a hockey fan himself) suggested that “hockey’s over-the-top fandom (and the same could be said for the Olympics) seems a frantic expression of . . . [the desire for] a human-scale community in which individuals feel purposeful and acknowledged.”
Vancouver that emerged in the aftermath of the riots was of a city “carve[d] . . . up into an ‘us’ versus a ‘them’”:

The double standards [were] everywhere evident on the boarded-up windows of the Bay that . . . [became] an impromptu shrine to civic pride and social scapegoating. . . . Graffiti claiming “We Love Vancouver” and “We are One Family” [was] unironically scrawled next to declarations that the rioters should “Get Out of Town and Stay There.” The city [was] to be made whole again by banishing its undesirables and denying that they ever had anything to do with an “us” that is pure and virtuous thanks only to this kneejerk demonization.

Fig. 5. Impromptu public art (detail), 2011, Hudson’s Bay Company, Vancouver. Photograph by Maia Joseph.
My own experience of viewing the post-riot public art (see. fig. 5, previous page, and fig. 6, next page) included feelings of sadness, love, anger, gratitude, and frustration—and in its capacity to invoke such a complex response the project was, I would argue, a productive piece of art. But given that one of the dominant messages in the artwork was, indeed, about a “real” Vancouver that excludes the rioters, I left feeling troubled. I agree that the rioters should be held responsible for their actions (via the legal system, not public shaming or vigilantism), but I would suggest that we are building something other than a city if a desire to disassociate ourselves and to “purify” our community holds sway.  

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In Imagining the Modern City, James Donald posits that the decline of urbanity identified by Kennedy, and recognizable in contemporary Vancouver, might be countered in part through the creation of “thick descriptions” of urban experience, arguing that the descriptive enterprises of a range of urban commentators—writers such as Charles Baudelaire, Charles Dickens, and Virginia Woolf, and scholars as various as Friedrich Engels, Georg Simmel, Robert Park, Walter Benjamin, and Jane Jacobs—have been crucial not only in developing an understanding of urban relations but also in nurturing urbanity in the streets and neighbourhoods of cities. Donald emphasizes the importance of continually creating new descriptions of urban experience, suggesting that such descriptions help city dwellers become better able to apprehend and appreciate “the always unpredictable, sometimes painful, and often intensely pleasurable give and take of everyday dealings with neighbours” (169). In other words, they help city dwellers

124 As Laura Moss argues in an opinion piece about the riots, "the riot was also the real Vancouver, albeit in a hyperbolized state. It happened here and it happened with angry young Canadians. We have to accept that before we can prevent it from happening again" (emphasis in orig.).
become creatively attuned to the project of being together—in difficulty, in complexity, in difference.

“Real cities,” Beasley-Murray remarks, “unlike [the] fantasy of a ‘real’ Vancouver, have social tensions, divisions, disagreements, off-days and on-days, that sometimes erupt in violence, sometimes not.” Bowering, Robertson, Quartermain, and Osborn do not provide clear-cut answers to the many questions that Vancouverites have about what it means to, and how they might still, gather in large numbers in public spaces. However, as we will see, these poets’ texts do engage in the work of attuning us to the challenges and possibilities of urbanity, encouraging us to think in expansive and critical ways about our everyday relations with others in the city.

Fig. 6. Impromptu public art, 2011, Hudson’s Bay Company, Vancouver. Photograph by Maia Joseph.
Poetry and Complicity

While writers’ descriptions of urban dynamics may indeed help us become better attuned to the project of being together, their work has often been neglected in popular and scholarly conversations about the city—especially in Canada, where scholars are only just now really beginning to investigate and reflect on this country’s important tradition of urban writing (Ivison and Edwards 8-12). And yet, while the work itself has received relatively little attention, the presence and practices of writers—together with other artists—in the city have been discussed quite extensively by scholars over the past three decades. Perhaps most importantly, a tradition of social science scholarship focusing on the role of artists in processes of urban redevelopment has grown steadily following the publication of Sharon Zukin’s study *Loft Living*, which figured the presence and work of artists in specific urban spaces as stimuli for gentrification.

The geographer David Ley, whose commentary on the gentrification process in Vancouver figured in my opening to this chapter, has been an important contributor to this scholarly conversation. Ley argues via theoretical apparatus supplied by Pierre Bourdieu, and drawing on data from Vancouver and other Canadian cities,\(^{125}\) that artists often transform neglected urban districts into spaces of high cultural capital, which tends to lead to economic valorization of these spaces, and thus to the inflation of property prices (“Artists” 2540). Ley pays particular attention to the aestheticizing practice of *bricolage*, reconceptualizing Benjamin’s portrayal of the artist as heroic rag-picker. In Ley’s interpretation (which is indebted to Graeme Gilloch’s notion of “redemptive practice”), urban artists create cultural capital by making meaning out of the

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\(^{125}\) Ley analyzes empirical data from Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, focusing in particular on census tract data from Vancouver and Toronto.
“commonplace” and “redemptively transform[ing] junk to art” (2540). In so doing, they confer value on the urban sites that provide the location or the raw material for their work, opening up the possibility for what investors might describe as “redemption” in the real estate market. In other words, artists, while often intending otherwise, play a part in making such sites more palatable to middle- and eventually upper-class buyers. Ley proposes that although artists tend to interrogate “the borders of conventional middle-class life,” they also function as the middle class’s “advancing, colonizing arm” (2533).

Ley’s study, in invoking Benjamin, is tangentially connected to the critique of the flâneur, that much-storied idle wanderer of city streets. Though the concept of flânerie circulated widely in nineteenth-century Paris, Benjamin has been credited with “almost single-handedly recover[ing] the figure of the flâneur for 20th-century criticism,” primarily through his work on Baudelaire (Gluck 53). The flâneur’s relationship to the city has been associated with idleness, voyeurism, social alienation and anxiety, and distraction; in Benjamin’s formulation, the flâneur ultimately meets “his destiny in the triumph of consumer capitalism,” his wandering of Parisian streets transforming into window shopping (Shaya 47). And even as writers and scholars have, in recent decades, expanded the potential and range of flânerie beyond traditional boundaries of gender, race, and sexuality, describing and imagining (among others) the female flâneur, the “ethnic” flâneur, and the queer flâneur, numerous critics have continued to emphasize a characteristic disjunction between this figure’s aestheticizing sensibility and his or her ability for meaningful and productive engagement in urban life.126

The critique of the flâneur, like the conversation that has figured artists as harbingers of gentrification, haunts artists working in and on the contemporary city,

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126 See, for example, studies by Mary Gluck, Anke Gleber, Anne Friedberg, and John Rignall.
problematizing the aims, effects, and merit of their work. As Ley’s study of artists and
gentrification makes clear, the positioning of many contemporary artists resembles that of
the nineteenth-century Parisian flâneurs who scraped together a living by producing
sketches, vignettes, articles, and poetic descriptions of city life for a bourgeois audience,
thus “occup[y]ing an uncertain social position” at the edge of the dominant class, and
serving as cultural translators and barometers for that class (Donald 45). Still, while a
degree of complicity in processes of urban change may be inevitable, the street remains a
necessary space of inquiry and action for many artists invested in urban ethics and
politics, given the threats to diverse and vibrant forms of public life described by critics
such as Kennedy and Beasley-Murray. Reading Bowering, Robertson, Quartermain, and
Osborn, I find that increased awareness of the fraught role of the urban artist seems to
have encouraged a more self-reflexive approach to the project of writing the city. In
taking up the role of the street-level, peripatetic observer, these Vancouver-based poets
acknowledge and explore their complicated position in relation to the transforming city,
producing texts that testify to careful reflection on urban poetic practice.

Remembering Bohemia: George Bowering’s “The Great Grandchildren of Bill
Bissett’s Mice”

I opened this chapter with a quotation from George Bowering’s long poem
Kerrisdale Elegies (1984), in part because the passage describes so well that attention to
the immediate world that has, traditionally, been such an important part of the urban
poetic project;127 moreover, in connecting the act of renovation to the practice of poetic

127 “Kerrisdale Elegies,” Stan Dragland notes, “radiates from [Bowering’s] house at West 37th and Larch
streets in the Kerrisdale neighbourhood of Vancouver . . . ; it issues from the study of that house where,
with his ‘toys—a pen, some lined paper, / my books open around me’ (‘Elegy 4’), [the speaker] writes. The
attention, the passage neatly introduces the role that Ley assigns to artists in the
gentrification process. However, in this section I turn to Bowering’s later long poem
“The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice,” from the collection Urban Snow
(1992), because while there is certainly a marked strain of self-consciousness in
Kerrisdale Elegies (as in much of Bowering’s work) (Dragland 121, 125), it is in “The
Great Grandchildren” that we find Bowering really beginning to articulate and explore
the complexity that has come to characterize the role of the poet in contemporary
Vancouver. “The Great Grandchildren” looks back to Bowering’s earlier days as a rather
naïve, idealistic young poet during the late 1950s and 1960s. One of the main settings for
these reminiscences is Kitsilano, a neighbourhood that was a major hub for Vancouver’s
youth and counterculture communities of the 1960s, and that, like Fairview, underwent
fairly early and extensive gentrification. Over the course of the poem, Bowering
meditates on his own experience of socioeconomic and spatial change in the city, the
impact it had on the local arts community, and the position of the poet in the “new”
Vancouver.

On the first page of “The Great Grandchildren,” Bowering remembers the
Vancouver that he first encountered when he arrived as a young man from British
Columbia’s interior, and the poetic sensibility that he nurtured then:

physical place, with its particular streets, trees, bushes, its human and animal denizens, is effortlessly
established in brief strokes” (125). These descriptions extend to the broader neighbourhood, too—Little
League games in the park, “mothers in velvet jogging suits” pushing strollers down the street (Kerrisdale
Elegies 6)—and, to a lesser extent, to other parts of the city (for instance, “the bars on Hastings Street / [where] dads and others down that lovely gold stuff” [115]). Through these small details, Bowering’s
speaker manages to capture the way in which Kerrisdale is at once urban and suburban. Located in the
southwestern corner of Vancouver, Kerrisdale lies some distance from the city centre, though it is still
closer and more integrated than actual suburbs such as Richmond, Surrey, or Coquitlam. It is home to many
middle- and upper-middle-class families living in detached homes; however, with numerous rental
apartments in high- and mid-rise buildings clustered around the main thoroughfare of West 41st Avenue,
the neighbourhood demographic has remained mixed. As Bowering’s ambling speaker reminds us,
Kerrisdale is also very walkable, further distinguishing it from traditional suburbs.
1958. I was all alone. I wanted to walk solitary
down by the waterfront, in black and white, mostly
black. I was gathering material, drowning myself in
atmosphere. The lonely American novelist.

I came down from the dry brown Okanagan Valley,
and came all the way down to the water. To be a
writer who mattered. The Okanagan Valley looked
like a western movie. This wet dark Vancouver looked
like the latest thing. It was mysterious and open, this
waterfront. It was not far from Hamburg and Burma.
It was instructive.

(It was romantic.)

It was romantic. I was alone, sitting in waterfront
beer parlours, a book open on the torn and wet terry
cloth. But I was listening, the solitary writer. (99)

Bowering recalls his initial experience as a writer in Vancouver with considerable
nostalgia (in fact, George Woodcock suggests in a review of Urban Snow that the
collection “reveals Bowering, for all his ironic play, as a nostal gist of the first power”); at
the same time, Bowering also develops and sustains a critical attitude toward this
nostalgia. The older Bowering seems at times to chuckle at his youthful dreams of

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128 While Bowering conceptualizes himself as a “lonely American novelist” in this section, the poem
includes a subsequent clarification (Bowering is Canadian, after all) in the form of a conversation with an
imagined interlocutor:

(I havent [sic] forgotten that at the beginning of this
memoir you called yourself The Lonely American Novelist,)

That’s all there was in 1958.

Hmm, ah!

First we all met one another and we were not lonely
any more.

(Ha!)

We were not lonely writers any more. Then after a
while we were Canadian novelists and Canadian poets.

(You were going to be Canadian literature.)

We were Vancouver writing. . . . (110-11)
becoming a “writer who mattered” (98)—at the young man who, with his friends, decided in all earnestness “to write a city and call it Vancouver” (101). Still, while he recognizes the naiveté of his younger days, as well as the wistfulness that colours his view of the past, Bowering does not dismiss either completely. Rather, his poem productively combines critical distance with the conjuring work of reminiscence.

Bowering arrived in Vancouver as a solitary writer, but he quickly started creating a community: he was a founding member of what became one of Canada’s best-known—if not always critically appreciated—groups of experimental poets, TISH, and he also cultivated relationships with a range of other writers and members of the local arts scene. In “The Great Grandchildren,” he remembers this community through brief descriptions of encounters on the streets and in the rented rooms of Kitsilano (though the community extended well beyond the borders of Kitsilano, with another hub of activity in Vancouver’s downtown). As Eva-Marie Kröller observes, “Although Vancouver lacked virtually all prerequisites for a ‘scene’—collectors, galleries, critics, an adequate budget—energetic and courageous individuals conspired to create a rich and lively

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129 Along with this local community, the members of TISH made many international connections, thanks to the help and guidance of UBC English professor Warren Tallman. As Frank Davey (another TISH co-founder) explains in his Introduction to the collected issues of the TISH poetry newsletter, The impulse to create TISH had been sparked by [American poet] Robert Duncan during three nights of lectures, July 23, 24, and 25, 1961, at the Vancouver home of Warren Tallman. Tallman . . . had begun in 1959 to make contact with the San Francisco poetry scene—partly at the suggestion of his wife who had known several of its poets during her college days. His efforts had brought Duncan to Vancouver to give readings in December 1959 and February 1961 . . . . After the second reading Tallman encouraged various students, including Bowering, Wah, Jamie Reid, David Dawson, Gladys Hindmarch, and myself, to cooperate with him in financing a special lecture visit by Duncan for that July.


The TISH poets were criticized by some commentators for being “subservient” to their established American peers (Doyle 101). Tallman, however, has described the situation differently, suggesting in his characteristically affectionate and humorous manner that the “TISH poets, fully supported by numerous friends of like inclination fromblewointment press, Talonbooks, and BC Monthly, were, in polite guise, thoroughgoing literary delinquents who lifted everything they could lay hands on from their incredibly naïve American visitors for purposes of their own imaginations” (115).
locale” (George Bowering 13). A particularly resourceful community, its members largely controlled the means of producing and circulating their own art—they printed their own poems, displayed their own paintings, and made their own music. Moreover, as Bowering recalls in his poem’s series of reminiscences, it was a community in which spirited discussion and debate were encouraged, and its members were creatively attuned to what James Donald would describe as the arts of urbanity, of living with and relating to others in a particular urban place.

Bill bissett—the writer whose name figures in the poem’s title130 and whose artistic activities are remembered in an extended section of the poem (105-07)—might perhaps be described as the patron saint of Vancouver’s artistic counterculture, at least for members of Bowering’s generation. Bissett was a publisher (founder of blewointment magazine and Blew Ointment Press), a poet who defied social as well as linguistic conventions, and an innovative performer who incorporated chanting and dancing into his literary readings. Ontario writer and critic James Reaney has described bissett as “a one-man civilization” (qtd. in Barbour); TISH alumnus Jamie Reid remembers him as a “wild bohemian” predating “the Beatles and Bob Dylan, a beatnik, a real one and really here in Vancouver” (14). Over the decades, bissett sustained that countercultural spirit unwaveringly, remaining a fringe figure in Canadian poetry while publishing more than 60 books and continuing to write and perform in his highly individual style. “While others change and adapt, compromise and take on new public personae,” Reid reflects, “bill bissett only seems to emerge as more and more of what he was before” (13). Linda Rogers, editor of a collection of essays on bissett, concurs. “Unlike many revolutionaries,

130 Though Bowering capitalizes bissett’s name throughout the poem, when naming him I adhere (except at the beginning of sentences) to bissett’s own practice of foregoing capitals.
who become the status-quo as the social dialectic evolves, bissett has stayed on the cutting edge,” she observes. “Far from becoming an anachronism, the archetypal 1960s person advocating sex, drugs, and rock and roll, . . . bill stands for freedom, the universal principle that is the very life force itself” (11-12).

Bowering’s poem cultivates a nostalgic yearning for the passionate (in bissett’s case, often ecstatic) idealism that fueled the lives and poetry of Vancouver’s early 1960s bohemia. But “The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice” is also about the change, adaptation, and compromise that Reid notes in his assessment of bissett’s distinctiveness, the social dialectic that Rogers refers to in hers. The poem remembers a community that—like many post-war bohemian communities elsewhere in North America and Europe—began to unravel, whose sense of “mission” somehow lost steam. It describes a community whose members (those who stayed in Vancouver) gradually found themselves living in a very different city than the one they had envisioned and endeavoured to realize in their living and writing.

Bowering weaves a narrative of Vancouver’s physical and socioeconomic restructuring into the poem, beginning with a description of the city’s waterfront:

. . . in the late Fifties the waterfront was for ships and high piles of lumber, for men in dark knitted caps working on vessels with red stars on their funnels. Vancouver was a sea port. All through downtown a young newcomer could smell the salt. That’s gone. Downtown is bank towers. Downtown is Toronto. (98)

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131 In his memoir of his friendship with bissett, Reid recalls how international events of the post-World War II era, from the bombing of Hiroshima to the assassination of John F. Kennedy, inspired, among young Vancouver artists and other members of the city’s bohemian community, “a sense of mission, because we felt we had to act to save the future, but also a sense of recklessness, because there might not be a future despite our utopian efforts” (14).
Bowering notes that the effects of post-industrial urban change have extended well beyond the city’s commercial and (formerly) industrial districts to the neighbourhood that Bowering and many of his poet and artist friends called home:

All the streets named after trees would plunge steep into Kitsilano’s tidy bay. Pine Street. Chestnut. Maple. Yew trees are for poets in graveyards; we all know that. All these tree streets are lined with expensive condos now. Two decades ago they offered cheap housing and warehousing for students and out of work marijuana boys and girls. How ignorant Vancouver was, how innocent.

Nowadays how can you avoid a voice, says You got water. You got mountain views. You got valuable real estate. (101-02)

Juxtaposing Kitsilano’s earlier artist and extended bohemian community with this later version of the neighbourhood, Bowering hints at the inability of that earlier community to effect enduring change in a city that has been increasingly defined by the rhetoric and realities of real estate speculation and development, and in which the arts of urbanity nurtured by Bowering’s friends and neighbours have to a significant extent been usurped

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132 David Ley et al. describe Kitsilano’s changing landscape in *Vancouver and Its Region*, pinpointing (as Bowering does in his poem) the early 1970s as a key transitional period for the neighbourhood:

In Kitsilano, both Greenpeace and SPEC (the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation) had offices on the counter-cultural strip of Fourth Avenue in the early 1970s, together with the Divine Light Mission, health food stores, and coffee shops like the Soft Rock Café, where conversations on ecology and mysticism urged a limit to economic growth and its attendant evils. (237)

The social and physical landscape of Kitsilano was, Ley et al. observe, soon replaced by “condo fever,” as “1,500 condominium apartments [were] built in the neighbourhood between 1971 and 1976. The world of young professionals . . . , with its designer icons of clothing, food, furnishings, and leisure, led to a transformation of Fourth Avenue and, in turn, other inner-city districts” (237). In “The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice,” the image of a bulldozer ripping bissett’s Kitsilano house down becomes, for Bowering, a personal symbol of this transition:

. . . One morning we woke up to hear and went to the window to see: a driver under a metal roof butted Bill’s old place down in less than an hour.

The quiet mice had to find a new place to live. (106)
by a more commodified version of urban life. Bowering and some of the other young poets from this period (e.g. Daphne Marlatt, Fred Wah) did go on to successful literary careers; however, Bowering suggests that despite such accomplishments (indeed, partly because of them) the omnipresent reality of an almost unrecognizable Vancouver troubles the present work of the urban writer. Certainly, it makes the project that Bowering and his friends initiated in their youth decidedly less simple and clear. Toward the end of the poem, Bowering makes as though to offer guidance on this subject, inviting an unnamed poet interlocutor, and by inference his readers, to “[c]ome for a walk with me,” but the place where he leaves his addressees, a few stanzas later, is marked by ambivalence:

It is not as easy as it was thirty years ago, but you can still get to the waterfront. If you can get into it you can still wear your old blue rain coat. There are triangular sails in Burrard Inlet now. The Pacific Rim hotels look over everyone’s shoulders. Big city. Isn’t [sic] this just what you wanted? It looks a lot better in the dark rain. You can smell the sea when you’re this close now, but it doesn’t [sic] smell like the sea.

You have a choice. Step into the oil rainbow water

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Writing in the 1990s about the “Yew Street” section of “The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice,” W. H. New argues that what Bowering’s poem implicitly recognizes, and commercial advertising openly articulates, is the way the 1990s enterprise of land sales fuses town planning with social status. For example, the real estate pages of the Saturday, 3 October 1992, issue of the Vancouver Sun newspaper provide these instances of new housing developments advertising their names and seeking purchasers and tenants: Queen Anne Green, Regent’s Gate, St James House, Orchard Hill, Foxborough Hills, Parkgate, Murrayville Glen, Tiffany Ridge, Blossom Park, Belmont Ridge, Westwood Place, Forest Edge, Highpoint Gardens, Summit Pointe, Meadow View, Vista Ridge, and Hyland Grove. . . . While these names all draw directly on land terminology, there is little about any of them that suggests (as “Kitsilano,” “Port Moody,” and “Coquitlam” do) historical or geographical specificity (though even they displaced the Squamish and Musqueam words that once named sites in the vicinity of ‘Vancouver’: Whoi-Whoi, for example, or Ulksen, or Snaaq). The names of the new housing developments project instead the aura of being computer-generated for their semiotic value, for the resonance of power and position that they carry with them from a given social hierarchy. Paradoxically, for the generation of the 1990s—who sometimes claim to be committed to the future, ecological internationalism, and political “correctness”—such terms promise a guaranteed lifestyle by reinscribing the presumed status and elegance of Englishness (or, in the case of “Pointe,” an artificial Frenchness): humourlessly, they draw on the discourse of old empires—which is precisely the language that Bowering’s generation, celebrating in the vernacular the “Kitsilano” waterfront, was attempting to free itself from. (Land Sliding 209-10)
and look ridiculous. Or turn around and walk up the slope. Get into the fairly new Toyota. Go drop in on a writer you met in Vancouver in 1958. Tell each other you matter now and you are still the latest thing, and it was a good idea after all. (111)

Combining a critical stance with the mode of poetic attention that was so important to his younger self, the closing stanzas exemplify the mixed approach that shapes “The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice” as a whole. One particularly effective way that Bowering suggests a dynamic relation to his younger self is by weaving in brief, sometimes onomatopoeic references to the jazz and pop music of his first years in the city, and by quoting snippets of his earlier writing; the poem is polyphonic, improvisational, and founded in an ethic of careful listening. Bowering even attends to that smallest and quietest of creatures, the mouse, as he repeatedly makes room in his memoir for these small creatures who lived at the edges of his and his friends’ lives (105-06). In so doing, he implicitly recalls a poem by Bissett, “we live in a hundrid yeer old house,” in which Bissett writes of a home in which:

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thers space now for moths
n berees
a huge spidr web almost covring
a side window
mice n creeking floor (14)
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Bowering appears to lament the fact that awareness of dynamic otherness (which the mice in his poem come to symbolize) seems to be increasingly undermined in and by the “big city”—by the city that celebrates economic growth and its attendant spatial

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134 Reflecting on the work produced for the TISH poetry newsletter, Frank Davey describes it as poetry that “involves the poet in recognition and surprise, . . . lead[ing] him to more than he knew or planned” (“Introduction” 10). While spontaneity and openness characterized the Bowering lyric in the 1960s, Roy Miki observes that extensive work with the long poem in the 1970s taught Bowering “how to renew the lyric in complicated forms that maintain a vital tension between order and process, craft and language, self and otherness” (“Editor’s Note” 233).
reconfigurations regardless of the ways that such growth may alter relations among residents and between residents and their environment. (Bowering hints at the devaluation of proximity and interaction—key characteristics of urbanity, in Kennedy’s formulation—in his poem’s image of houses on a gentrified Kitsilano street guarded against mice by “white cats with different-coloured eyes” [106].)

However, while Bowering generally condemns the ways that Vancouver has changed en route to becoming a “big city,” he also acknowledges a degree of complicity in the processes that have effected this transformation. Such acknowledgement is evident in the poem’s final stanzas, where he highlights the allure of “big city” experience that originally drew him and his small-town friends to Vancouver (“Big city. Isn’t / this just what you wanted?”), and where he implies that his artist friends have drifted from their bohemian roots—they are, now, people who might own a “fairly new Toyota.” Earlier in the poem, too, Bowering implicitly gestures toward this complicity when he recalls the cultivation of “cool” that was an integral part of his friends’ bohemian lifestyles. He highlights this element in his description of his initial arrival in Vancouver (cited earlier), where he invokes film genres—the Western and film noir—and where he describes his youthful desire to perform a particular role, a brand of cool drawn partly from Hollywood outcast characters, partly from the tradition of the urban artist. Later in the poem, Bowering returns to this idea when, reflecting on his and his friends’ dreams of (artistic) success, he remembers how

we learned another way of being young hotshots. We learned to be a group. We learned how to be dangerous. Gentle and dangerous, and smoking cigarettes. (101)
In cultivating this sense of “cool,” Bowering and his friends were signalling the “outsider” status central to the TISH philosophy: coming from working-class and small-town backgrounds, and writing from a city that was, at the time, less influential in the art world than it is today, the TISH group saw themselves as living and writing from the fringe; however, in their cultivation of “cool” they were also endeavouring to establish a certain appeal—and hence a measure of social status. Bowering and his friends were well-educated, culturally aware youths (mostly white young men, too, which enhanced their status and power, as Pauline Butling notes [“TISH” 57]) who were able to make cultural capital out of their socioeconomic marginalization. And, while it is important not to overestimate their power and influence—artists and other bohemian types were undeniably viewed with at least suspicion, if not outright derision, by many Vancouver residents, as Bowering recalls in the poem (109-10)—their presence and activities did enhance the visibility of working-class Kitsilano, and endowed it with a degree of gritty glamour. In other words, if we return to Ley’s formulation of the relationship between artists and gentrification, they played a role in conferring value on a previously overlooked district of Vancouver.

Still, while Bowering begins, in “The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice,” to articulate the (largely inadvertent) role played by the artist community of his youth in

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135 The responses of Vancouver residents described by Bowering—and engagingly captured by Stan Fox in his 1967 CBC documentary What Happened Last Summer?, which examines the emergence of Kitsilano’s bohemian community—are comparable to the traditional American disposition toward artist and intellectual communities described in Neo-Bohemia by Richard Lloyd, who cites Richard Hofstadter’s foundational study Anti-Intellectualism in American Life: mistrust, if not outright hostility, has traditionally characterized the idle-class disposition toward artists and intellectuals in the United States . . . , and the scope and appeal of bohemian enclaves were quite limited for much of the twentieth century. . . . Greenwich Village was as much a target for media condemnation as celebration during its bohemian heyday. (Lloyd 113) Lloyd goes on to warn that, “[i]f indeed the arts and the artist’s lifestyle now appeal to a much wider United States audience, one should still not get carried away by declaring the death of the American mistrust of the cultural class” (114).
processes of urban change, he only takes this dimension of self-critique so far. He does not acknowledge, for instance, that he and his friends represented a fairly new demographic (one with a certain amount of social, if not economic, power) in what had been a largely working-class neighbourhood. As Zukin observes in *Loft Living*, artists are not the only victims of gentrification—their initial arrival in a neighbourhood often depends on earlier displacements, usually of working-class residents or businesses in economic decline (15). Richard Lloyd, in *Neo-Bohemia*, notes that “[b]ohemias old and new are nested communities, embedded in initially poor or working-class neighborhoods where the bohemian participants are a minority of the overall population. . . . Problems of coherence, membership, and authenticity are present virtually at the creation of these entities” (238). Later in “The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice,” we find Bowering again failing to acknowledge his own community’s place in a more complicated social and spatial history as he comments on how many displaced writers have moved east across the city:

We were Vancouver writing. That is what we still are. There are still writers and their machines behind those windows, but those windows are now in Little Italy, not Kitsilano. (111)

Here, in focusing his attention on the displacement of writers and their efforts to establish themselves elsewhere, Bowering overlooks the fact that the presence of artists in Little Italy (and Vancouver’s Commercial Drive / Grandview-Woodlands neighbourhood more broadly) has helped raise the visibility and profile of this formerly working- and lower-middle-class district, which is now gentrifying.

Drawing on Michael Herzfeld’s notion of “structural nostalgia,” Lloyd suggests that a key cause of the “artist-as-(original-)victim” interpretation of processes of urban
change is the persistent belief inherent in bohemian communities that a more “authentic” bohemia (one in which “counter-hegemonic resistance to capitalist domination” was possible [239]) has already passed. Such fetishization of the bygone bohemia can tend to remove it from the complexities of its broader historical context. Certainly, though he aims to establish a critical relation to his nostalgia, Bowering does seem to fall into this trap—he even makes sure to establish the precedence (and “authenticity”) of his own, comparatively small group of artists from the many hippies (or the “LSD crowd,” as Bowering refers to them [110]) who moved into Kitsilano in the later 1960s.

That said, while he does not abandon the idea of a more “authentic” bohemian past, Bowering does query the idealized notion of the urban artist operating in an unproblematically oppositional mode. It is, after all, in the act of reflecting on the work to be done in a complicated and compromised present that Bowering concludes “The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice.” Walking (and then driving, in that “fairly new

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136 As Rebecca Solnit observes in her essay “A Real Estate History of the Avant-Garde,” artist evictions have long been part of the mythology of bohemia. Remarks Solnit:

Bohemia begins with an eviction. Or at least, Scènes de la vie de bohème, the book that introduced the word and the idea into popular consciousness, does. “‘If I understand the purport of this document,’ said Schaunard re-reading an order to leave from the sheriff fixed to the wall, ‘today at noon exactly I must have emptied these rooms and have put into the hands of Monsieur Bernard, my proprietor, a sum of seventy-five francs for three quarters rent, which he demands from me in very bad handwriting.’” Henri Murger’s stories about a quartet of starving Left Bank artists were published serially beginning in 1845, turned into a wildly successful play in 1849, and gathered together in 1851 as a bestselling book (Puccini’s 1896 opera La Bohème is, of course, based on Murger’s work). Murger’s stories about bohemia succeed in making poverty and its accompanying hunger, insecurity and occasional homelessness charming. (79-80)

137 Jamie Reid, in his memoir of bissett, plays this game too, but—rather ironically—for him the downtown (Robson Street) hub of the late 1950s and early 1960s arts scene was the “original Vancouver bohemia” (“the real early bohemia”), preceding Kitsilano (16). Of course, such place-entrenched descriptions of early Vancouver bohemias fail to capture the fluidity of movement between spaces. By focusing on Bowering’s relationships with other artists, Eva-Marie Kröller effectively evokes the porosity of space in her study George Bowering: Bright Circles of Colour. Kröller also notes the way Bowering uses metaphor, in his poetry, to convey movement and connectivity, as well as the limitations thereof:

Etymologically, a “metaphor” is a “change of place,” and with their insistence on means of communication such as telephones (“Telephone Metaphysic”), cars (“Driving Past”), bicycles (“Motor Age”), bridges and streets (“Tuesday Night”), and the radio (“Radio Jazz”), Bowering’s TISH poems spin a web of connections across the city, although they are usually deferred, tenuous, or imagined, blockages signaling boundary or margin. (22)
readers away from the waterfront view, he leaves us in the process of encounter and debate. The work that he proposes, for present-day Vancouver poets, involves critically examining the role of the urban writer, past and present, and identifying the aspects of that work that remain valuable or worthwhile—that continue to make it “a good idea after all.”

Lloyd’s otherwise excellent study elides such a recognition and evaluation of the potentialities of artistic practice: in *Neo-Bohemia*, he states that because “subcultural innovation” tends to be co-opted by “capitalist interests,” he decided not to “look[] at artists as a resistant subculture,” but rather “to think of artists as useful labor, and to ask how their efforts are harnessed on behalf of interests that they often sincerely profess to despise” (239). While Lloyd’s work is valuable, I am concerned that he shifts the focus of the conversation about artistic practice away from the *generation* of critical ideas and modes of engagement, and toward innovative *adaptation* to the terms and limitations of global capitalism. Bowering, by contrast, asks us at the end of “The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice” to turn our attention to the generative potential of poetic practice, while at the same time not blinding ourselves to the realities of life in a city increasingly shaped by global capital.

**The Afterlife of the City: Lisa Robertson’s *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture***

The generative potential of localized urban poetic practices receives sustained attention in the work of poet and critic Lisa Robertson, who lived and wrote in Vancouver for more than two decades. Like Bowering, Robertson documents the physical and socioeconomic transformation of Vancouver, and also like Bowering, she
includes in her project a turn to self-critique, especially regarding the ways that her own nostalgia shapes her responses to the city. Robertson explains that the essay-poems\textsuperscript{138} collected in \textit{Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture} “reflect Vancouver’s changing urban texture during a period of development roughly bracketed by the sale of the Expo ’86 site by the provincial government and the 2003 acquisition by the province of the 2010 Winter Olympics” (\textit{Occasional Work} n. pag.).\textsuperscript{139} “I watched [Vancouver] . . . dissolve in the fluid called money,” she remarks (1): “In this period of accelerated growth and increasingly globalizing economies, much of what I loved about this city seemed to be disappearing. I thought I should document the physical transitions I was witnessing in my daily life, and in this way question my own nostalgia for the minor, the local, the ruinous; for decay” (n. pag.). Repeatedly throughout the essays, Robertson shifts from providing an account of the changing city as she has experienced it, and moves into a self-conscious probing of the practice of poetic description and her position as a poet-critic.\textsuperscript{140} The collection offers not only an intricate, idiosyncratic portrait of Vancouver (Robertson includes historical studies of particular sites, riffs on features such as the city’s diminutive fountains and abundant blackberry vines, and playful commentary on the leaky condominium problem\textsuperscript{141}), but also a

\textsuperscript{138} I usually refer to Robertson’s \textit{Soft Architecture} pieces simply as “essays” because that is how she herself describes them (\textit{Occasional Work} n. pag.). However, as I will explain later in my discussion of these pieces, they are also poetry.

\textsuperscript{139} For an overview and discussion of this period in Vancouver’s history of development, see Chapter One.

\textsuperscript{140} I describe Robertson as a “poet-critic,” rather than simply a “poet,” because of the hybrid nature (part essay, part poetry) of her \textit{Soft Architecture} work.

\textsuperscript{141} A range of design, building, and economic factors converged to produce what is commonly referred to in Vancouver as “the leaky condo crisis,” which began with the condominium building boom in the 1970s and peaked in the 1990s. Poor or inappropriate construction left many homeowners facing costly repairs and decreased property values. Mandatory licensing, best-practices guides, a stronger warranty program, and greater vigilance on the part of consumers have all contributed to the abatement of the crisis (Boei B2), but the issue has not disappeared entirely. In June 2009, for example, the developers of the Olympic Village were subject to allegations that their buildings—the construction of which had been fast-tracked to ensure completion for the 2010 Winter Games—might prove susceptible to mould and mildew (Austin).
sustained investigation of what it means to come into contact with and make meaning in an urban environment.

When she began to produce her Soft Architecture work in the later 1990s, Robertson had long been deeply engaged in avant-garde poetics in Vancouver, specifically as a member of the Kootenay School of Writing (KSW). KSW was founded in 1984 following the closure of the writing program at David Thompson University in Nelson, BC, “as part of an economic ideologically driven ‘restraint’ program that had been introduced by the right-wing provincial government the previous year” (Butling, “Literary Activism” 242; Butling, “Writing” 85). There has been some debate about whether it is possible to generalize the approach of poets affiliated with KSW (Butling “Writing”), but many experimented with disjunctive forms of poetics that reflected concerns with “the social/economic marginalization of the artist and class oppression” (Butling, “Literary Activism” 243; Butling, “Writing” 86). In their introduction to the KSW anthology Writing Class, Andrew Klobucar and Michael Barnholden emphasize the “close relationship KSW maintained with labour movements” (28), and foreground “its search for a politically relevant and class-conscious aesthetic” (4). They note that most KSW members resisted the “romantic vision of the artist’s political exclusion from mainstream society,” a vision founded on the “equivalence between social exclusion and individual autonomy within the state” (33): “Rather than signifying an artist’s sovereignty from the constraints of capital, social exclusion signified to KSW writers little beyond class oppression. . . . The school’s primary political concerns focused

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of March 2011, 62 condo owners in the Village (now called The Village on False Creek) were suing the City of Vancouver for “poorly built and badly designed” units; “leaky windows and ceilings” are among their complaints (“Olympic Village Condo Owners File Lawsuit”).
instead on whether language, in art or writing, could effectively displace a system that works for the few at the expense of so many” (33). Such concerns resulted in a degree of tension between KSW and conventional leftist groups. Klobucar and Barnholden point to responses from the left to *East of Main*, a poetry anthology published in 1989 that included language-centered poetry produced by KSW affiliates:

Brian Fawcett, in his review of the anthology, reproved language writing (and, by extension, KSW work) for abandoning a more practical communicative alliance with the labour movement. Applauding language poetry’s self-styled rejection of the more spiritual, expression-based verse of the Naropa school, Fawcett was quick to temper his comments with a firm critique of the confusing political ambiguity he found in their work. (Klobucar and Barnholden 32)

Nevertheless, while KSW poets tended to resist the notion of the urban poet as heroic individual, and found themselves having to think carefully about their particular social positioning as artists, they did, like Bowering and the poets of his generation, generally see themselves as writing in opposition to mainstream culture and society.

Broadly speaking, neither movement developed directly out of a recognition of the problematic complicity of the urban poet in social and spatial change. Pauline Butling, in her review of *Writing Class*, queries Klobucar and Barnholden’s focus on class politics in their assessment of the Kootenay School of Writing. In arguing that Klobucar and Barnholden overlook other political dimensions of the KSW body of work—most notably the feminist politics of some affiliates, including Robertson—she multiplies the forms of opposition manifesting in KSW writing, but does not undermine the notion of KSW as a chiefly oppositional movement. Robertson herself, reflecting on
the interests of KSW in 1997, describes an emphasis on “the aesthetics of the margins—whether they are socialist-worker margins, feminist, or avant-garde experiments in formalism, or simply an area that isn’t central to the Canadian literary cultural paradigm” (qtd. in Ainsworth).

But by the later 1990s not only had the idealism of the TISH poets long faded, but even the more overtly politicized, disjunctive approach typical of much KSW work had lost, if not some of its early vigour, at least the sense of promise that accompanies the development of a new strategy or approach. Moreover, tension with traditional leftist groups had emphasized the particular positioning of urban artists within the broader underclass—many were living on the edge of, or in, poverty, but all possessed a measure of social capital and engaged in a form of labour that distinguished them from other groups. Impacted also by the ongoing conversation about the artist and gentrification, the role and positioning of the poet in Vancouver had become increasingly complex.

A response to this situation can be discovered in Robertson’s cultivation of her “Office for Soft Architecture” persona, which embeds a complicated engagement with the notion of the artist’s complicity in urban restructuring. The Soft Architecture moniker recalls both the term “soft gentrification”—whereby a neighbourhood is invaded and restructured by apparently fairly benign, local forces, rather than the “hard” forces of global capital—and also Jonathan Raban’s book Soft City, an early treatise on the post-industrial urban experience, in which Raban celebrates the “soft,” malleable qualities of the city that make it “amenable to a dazzling and libidinous variety of lives, dreams, [and] interpretations” (Raban 9). David Harvey, in The Condition of Postmodernity, later

142Of course, many Kootenay School writers were, like Robertson, still writing in the later 1990s and into the new century. Indeed, KSW continues to thrive today as a politicized, avant-garde writing collective.
charged Raban with a lack of self-consciousness regarding his own privileged social
position and point of view (3). Robertson’s decision to refer to herself as the Office—not
as an individual subject—implies a critical relation to the lyrical “I”/eye that in urban
literature comes down to us from Baudelaire.\footnote{Robertson has explained that one of her reasons for writing under the persona of the Office was “to
escape the author called ‘Lisa Robertson’” (“Lisa Robertson” 33) (see also Rudy 227n13).} Moreover, by cultivating the Office persona, and by including prefatory notes listing the commissioning bodies and research
tasks associated with each essay, Robertson also foregrounds the work of the artist as work. In so doing, she emphasizes a sense of engagement in the Artistic Mode of
Production, the term Zukin uses to describe artists’ implication in a combination of
institutional, industrial, commercial, and social demands and desires. When Robertson
then remarks, at the beginning of one of her essays, that “[i]t suits us to write in this raw
city,” her framing of her work as the Office allows us to read that “suiting” as the
assuming of a particular professional identity, even as we also read the statement as an
articulation of a more personal, affective relation to the city.

Robertson’s Office for Soft Architecture persona also remembers the Office for Metropolitan Architecture and the writings of founding architect Rem Koolhaas. Her project is inspired by, but also in some ways inverts, what Koolhaas termed his “retroactive manifesto” for New York City, in which he sought to resurrect and develop a blueprint for the ideal forms of architectural modernism in Manhattan. While Koolhaas focuses on structural design, Robertson, suspicious of stories that privilege “structural deepness,” attends instead to architectural style and various forms of urban texture, to the “pigmented, glazed, plastered, [and] carved” surfaces of the city (Robertson, \textit{Occasional Work} 17, 129). Such a focus allows Robertson to investigate the space where the
perceiving body meets the surfaces of the material world. If we can say that she rather playfully “goes corporate” in cultivating her Office persona, she also returns the notion of the corporate to the scale of the body. Moreover, where Koolhaas attempts to retrieve the ideal structural forms of the past and develop new ones, Robertson advocates a more immediate and intimate relation to time and space, attending to the details of everyday experience in the city, and to the poet-critic’s work of observing and describing this experience. She proposes that through careful interpretative description of the city, the poet-critic—while not escaping complicity in dominant socioeconomic processes—might contribute to the opening up of the possibilities of urban life.

Operating in the realms of the body, affect, and everyday routine, Robertson is interested in how subjective experience is shaped by, but also exceeds or undermines, the dominant scripts of the city. In “The Value Village Lyric,” for example, a trip to a second-hand garment store finds Robertson probing and pushing the limits of the figure of the flâneur, who (Benjamin argued) was ultimately distracted by the ubiquity of consumer goods in shop windows, slipping into what Robertson describes elsewhere as “the listlessness of scripted consumption” (Occasional Work 234). “We cannot fix our object,” Robertson writes in her Value Village piece:

We are anxious and bored and must shop. With this scribbled grooming we thatch ourselves anew.

We want an impure image that contradicts fixity. Something deliciously insecure: the sheath of a nerve. We go to the House of V to encounter the glimmering selvage of the popular. We handle retrospect labels and fibres. We analyze cut. We study change. We believe that the tactile limits of garments mark
out our potential actions. . . . The garment italicizes the body, turns it into speech.

(213-14)

Here, Robertson affirms complicity in a commodified version of urbanity while at the same time, in exploring the complexity of the experience, thinks outside of the script of consumption, suggesting that clothing can serve as a space—limited but intimate and generative—for exploring and articulating agency and ethics. Inspired by designer Lilly Reich’s remark that “clothes may . . . have metaphysical effects” (qtd. in McQuaid 17; qtd. in Robertson, Occasional Work 16), Robertson treats clothes as inhabitable entities to be studied, interpreted, and selected for their ability to express a particular sensibility, a feeling of relation to others and to the world. She also suggests that in handling the various clothes on display, we might begin to understand how, as Renu Bora puts it, “touch and physical pressure transform the materials one would like to know, assess, love” (99). Thatching the body, clothes demarcate a material but also metaphysical and affective threshold between self and other, self and world. As a Soft Architect, Robertson advocates the exploration of such relational spaces, encouraging a turn toward the question of how to engage with and in the world beyond the self.

Another significant threshold space in Robertson’s project is the text itself. Robertson refers, as I noted, to the pieces in her Soft Architecture collection as “essays,” and certainly they are essays in that they provide analysis and commentary on particular topics in prose form. They are, however, essays crafted with the care and skill of a poet. Victor Shklovsky memorably described poetry as having a “roughening” quality and function, a stylistic and formal texture that invites “prolong[ed] attention” (725-26). Robertson, in her Soft Architecture work, uses dense, highly connotative and often
sensual language, and pays keen attention to sound and movement, creating pieces of urban description in which “[s]ociology becomes ornament, like a decorative scar-work” (Occasional Work 218). Acutely aware of the ways in which language constructs subjects and their relations with the world, Robertson does not settle into the stance of the authoritative eye witness or the empiricist collecting and communicating facts; rather, she recognizes and is interested in investigating the ways that description “makes difference,” and thus “makes meaning” (Spiegelman 25). She both engages in and foregrounds what Willard Spiegelman, in How Poets See the World, terms “laborious observation” (25),

encouraging sustained attention to that threshold space where city transforms into text, and to the role of the poet-critic in this process of transformation.

Robertson, in effect, recognizes that her work as an urban poet-critic takes on cultural value through the art of description—the art of creatively re-presenting the city, producing paper notes that assign or reassign value to particular urban sites and materials. “Practice description,” Robertson advises in the collection’s first essay, and then adds: “Description is mystical. It is afterlife because it is life’s reflection or reverse” (16). In using the term “afterlife” to describe the practice of description Robertson is indebted to Benjamin, who in The Arcades Project spoke of the “afterlife of works” in positing a dialectical connection between his descriptive montage of Paris’s past, and political awakening in the present. Robertson, re-working Benjamin’s formula, proposes that descriptive practices in the present can open up the space of the “future conditional” (149). The practice of description, for Robertson, includes not simply mimetically

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144 Spiegelman borrows this phrase from the poet Charles Tomlinson.
reflecting but also reflecting on the city—contemplating its histories, its present conditions, its possible futures.

Robertson, in other words, responds to her swiftly changing city by positing a form of heightened spatial awareness that is also an opening in time, a temporal re-orientation of self to world that makes room for contemplation. Subsequent to her advice to “practice description,” she remarks: “We recommenders of present action have learned to say ‘perhaps’ our bodies produce space; ‘perhaps’ our words make a bunting canopy; ‘perhaps’ the hand-struck, palpable wall is an anti-discipline; ‘perhaps’ by the term ‘everyday life’ we also mean the potential” (16). She continuously probes this threshold relation between the observing poet and the urban world—the space where, she proposes, ethical inquiry into the questions of how to live and relate to others is cultivated, where might be built “a latticework for civic thought” (239). Robertson suggests that her work, as poet-critic, is to “produce new time”—to foster an alternative, more contemplative temporality in the midst of (indeed, in defiance of) increasingly rapid change in the city (218). Her duty is also to “read” the city, to observe and describe it, to “deliriously misinterpret” it, diversifying and circulating the potential scripts, styles, and tropes for dwelling and building (59).

Throughout her Soft Architecture pieces, Robertson repeatedly attends to and interrogates the seeming triviality of poetic description, emphasizing its “ornamental” quality—like an apparently “illegitimate, superfluous” blackberry vine it “garnish[es]” and “garland[s]” and “swag[s]” (125, 127)—and arguing that this quality does not, in fact, divorce it from the realms of ethics and politics. Robertson arrives at her conceptualization of urban description through a commitment to feminist politics that
manifested, in her earlier work, in textual play with the ornamental qualities of classical rhetoric and genre. Stephen Collis observes in his study of Debbie: An Epic, XEclogue, and The Weather that Robertson “opens classical genre and rhetoric to its ornamental use of gender (shepherdesses, Nature as feminine, rhetorical nostalgia and sincerity),” demonstrating that such ornament is not merely superfluous or excessive but rather “the crucial site of the classical text’s ideological content” (156). Collis shows that as a feminist poet-critic, Robertson is interested in revealing and querying the morphological power hiding in “surface” features, whether these are the tropes used to “decorate” language, or the clothes that shape bodies, or the textiles, walls, and screens that demarcate spaces of domesticity, of dwelling.

Robertson continues to develop this approach as an urban poet-critic in her Soft Architecture essays, arguing following Gottfried Semper in The Four Elements of Architecture that the “skin” of the city, “with its varieties of ornament, [is] specifically inflected with the role of representing ways of daily living” (Robertson, Occasional Work 129). She reveals or imagines the ideological content of a range of surface features: fountains “radiate a public logic of civic identity,” or they are “corporate fantasies,” or they gently “alleviate our cares” by producing “minor happiness,” depending on how they fountain and how we look (54-55). The second-hand shirts at Value Village are “lyric structures cast aside”; they are also “profit” (217). The blackberry vines that “transform[] chain link and barbed wire [fences] to undulant green fruiting walls” are “Fordist,” aiming to “maximize[] distribution,” and they are also “democratic” (127); as Robertson reads it, the blackberry vine “is an exemplary political decoration” that “trac[es] a mortal palimpsest of potential surfaces in acutely compromised situations, . . .
show[ing] us how to invent” (130). “This,” she says, “is the serious calling of style” (130).

In encouraging ethical inquiry and gesturing to potential political stances through her practice of attentive, generative description, Robertson makes a provocative contribution to the conversation about the artist’s role in urban restructuring—a conversation that has tended to separate aesthetics from ethics and politics. David Ley, for instance, begins his article on artists and gentrification by discussing the political dimension of Vancouver visual artist Carole Itter’s work; however, he then argues that the aestheticization of the city by artists such as Itter “redeems” particular sites for actors in the property market. He concludes by suggesting that the inadvertent role the artist sometimes plays in urban restructuring constitutes a “deeper irony” than any of the politicized juxtapositions that Itter deploys in her art (“Artists” 2542). Ultimately, it seems Ley’s focus on what he calls, after Bourdieu, the “field of gentrification” proves rather totalizing: his model tends to assume that, while the artist often plays a role in transforming perceptions of a particular neighbourhood, it is only a passive, aestheticizing role, rather than, potentially, an actively critical one that might encourage resistance to, or questioning of, particular forms and processes of urban change.

Conversely, other commentators, while acknowledging and examining the aesthetic dimension of urban art, demonstrate a tendency to privilege that art’s engagement, or lack thereof, with politics. Art historian Rosalyn Deutsche, for instance, argues in her important book *Evictions* for what she describes as “a genuinely responsible public art” that, “in [Henri] Lefebvre’s words, ‘appropriate[s]’ space from its domination by capitalist and state power” (xvi). Deutsche is particularly critical of art that can be
easily taken up to portray gentrification as the preservation of tradition, or that in some way promotes or inspires a “retreat from the social” (xvi) (in other words, art that aims “to transcend urban social conditions” [xvii]). Emphasizing that aesthetics of whatever kind are always political, Deutsche directs her critique toward art that pretends to embody “ideals of aesthetic autonomy” (xvi). While I do not disagree with Deutsche’s argument, I find that her concern with the potential social effects of such art ultimately leads her to declare a rather contained and somewhat joyless purpose for urban art.

Robertson, in her Soft Architecture essays, refuses to avoid elements of art that are perhaps more easily commodifiable—those that inspire pleasure or carry connotations of leisure or relief. Instead of ignoring fountains she riffs on possible interpretations of these civic ornaments, returning them to the domain of ethics and politics. For her, the surface textures of the city are “indexical euphorias” (15): she treats even utilitarian or maligned features of the city such as scaffolding and blackberry vines with a descriptive exuberance that attends to potential ideological content and that teaches readers to see these features with a joyful, but not uncritical, hope.\footnote{In Robertson’s attitude toward leisure we find an echo of Malcolm Lowry, in “Forest Path,” who interrogates the divide between designated spaces of work (the city) and leisure (the squat); in so doing, Lowry expands our understanding of these spaces (especially the squat) and of the kinds of lives and relations with others that exist—and are possible—there (see Chapter Two).} In writing about an Arts and Crafts-style mansion in the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby, she offers a history of the Arts and Crafts movement that remembers the style’s origins in a radical politics, while charting its transformation into a privileged and moneyed “lifestyle” (97). As a poet-critic, Robertson “face[s] the reaching middle” between the material and the metaphysical, the political and the pleasurable (17), interlacing each of these in her “latticework for civic thought.”
To summarize Robertson’s reconceptualization of the role of the urban poet-critic, it might be best to turn to her meditation on that sign of “perpetual renovation of Vancouver’s leaky condominiums”—scaffolding (152). Scaffolding, Robertson observes, “wanders among solidities, a mobile currency that accretes and dissolves and shifts according to the secret rhythms of the city’s renaissance and decay” (165). It plays a part in “diagramming change,” a web of bones sketching the shapes of buildings, an instrument in restructuring and renovation (165). But scaffolding is also an open, dynamic, transitory system, and as such functions as “the negative space of the building” that it sketches (165). Robertson assigns the scaffold—and the poet-critic—the task of making visible what the urban environment is, what it is not, and what it could be. The poet-critic, in Robertson’s revisioning, is not a mere pawn in a particular trajectory of restructuring in the city, nor is she a force of heroic opposition. Her role is generative, “add[ing] to our ideas new tropes, gestures learned from neighbours, . . . and the vigour of our own language in recombination” (184). In other words, she expands the possibilities of urban change.

Published together in a tiny book, written using the royal “we” as personal pronoun but in an “unevenly deluxe” style that “foregrounds its own overreaching” (Scappettone 74), Robertson’s essays do work that is, as she puts it, both “strong and weak,” reinvigorating the role of the urban poet without fully redeeming it (17). But Robertson’s repeated deflation of her project—as weak, as minor, as trivial, as “unheroic” (218)—is worth considering further, especially since her essays emerge from

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146 In an interview with Robertson, Kai Fierle-Hedrick remarks: “What I like about how you use ‘we’ is that yours is that royal ‘we,’ the inclusive ‘we,’ but it’s not royal at all, but rather it’s quite private” (qtd. in Robertson, “Lifted” 43). Robertson responds: “Whatever pronoun a work is organized around, you have to trouble it” (43).
and to a considerable extent sustain that sense of ambivalence that Bowering led us to in
the closing stanzas of “The Great Grandchildren of Bill Bissett’s Mice.” It seems
significant that Robertson ultimately left Vancouver, and that in her introduction to the
2006 Coach House edition of the Soft Architecture collection (the essays were first
published together by Clear Cut Press in 2003) she remarks, “When I try to go back,
nothing happens” (1). Moreover, when reflecting on her Office for Soft Architecture
years, Robertson suggests that in the process of watching and describing her city
“dissolve in the fluid called money,” she herself “became money” (1). Such a moment
gestures evocatively toward the compromised position of the city poet—that creator of
paper-note descriptions—within larger processes of change, and suggests the inevitability
of being reduced to a sign of capital.

Rooted Responsibility: Meredith Quartermain’s Vancouver Walking

But if Robertson made a call to describe the city and then, ultimately, moved
away from this urging, another Vancouver poet nevertheless responded to her call.
Robertson’s essays inspired long-time Vancouver resident and poet Meredith
Quartermain in her own city writing project: Quartermain has cited her fellow poet’s Soft
Architecture work in interview, and she chose the Robertson quotation “Description is
mystical. It’s afterlife because it’s life’s reflection or reverse” as the epigraph for her
collection Vancouver Walking. Both poets are invested in the modernist tradition of urban
peripatetic poetics, treating words as “tool[s] of perception and . . . tool[s] of
contemplation,” to borrow Ann M. Pendleton-Jullian’s phrase (493), and generating thick
descriptions of urban experience with the aim of exploring engagement in city life
(Donald 170). However, the approaches of the two poets differ in notable ways. Robertson tends toward an often irreverently playful approach to urban description that allows her to produce creatively dissenting readings of city spaces. As I have noted, this approach also has the function of undermining her project—hers is, as she says, “a dissidence [that] slowly unspools” (1). Quartermain, on the other hand, generally refuses the ambivalence that emerges in Robertson’s pieces, favouring an intensely earnest approach, though her poems certainly do not lack humour or inventive wordplay. They do, however, attest to a sustained serious purposefulness informed by the terms and necessities of everyday routine, and by the particular parameters of her poetic practice.

A heightened interest in the lived experience of the poetic process was already clearly evident in Quartermain’s earlier work. Her 2002 collection *A Thousand Mornings*, for instance, documents daily meditations that arose as she sat, each morning, at her window. Another collection published the same year, *Wanders*, comprises 19 poems inspired by, and responding to, 19 poems by fellow Vancouver writer Robin Blaser—they are the product, in other words, of an ongoing conversation. In then preparing the first two sections of the *Vancouver Walking* collection (the third, “Coast Starlight,” is devoted to a train trip south, through the western United States), Quartermain brought her interest in poetic process to the urban walk, and specifically to her lived experience of particular walks in the city of Vancouver, most routes beginning from or returning to her home community of Strathcona, one of Vancouver’s oldest neighbourhoods.147

A number of these walks were apparently conducted for a mundane purpose, such as a trip to buy coffee beans, as in the poem “Walk for beans,” or to the library to borrow

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147 Since publishing *Vancouver Walking* in 2005, Quartermain has continued her reflections on urban experience and poetic practice in the book *Nightmarker* (2008).
books, a walk she describes in “Backwards from Pender Lake.” At the same time, these walks played a central role in a larger poetic project, which Quartermain has described in interview as a “6-month period of research and mapping expeditions in the City of Vancouver.” She has further explained in a public talk that in preparing to write her walking poems, she travelled each of her routes twice: the first time, she took notes on what she saw along the way; then, some time later, she walked the same route again, this time documenting the mental process of reflection arising in response to the perceived landscape—thoughts inspired by her diverse literary and historical interests, and often by her extensive reading and archival research on local history. In then creating a poem about each route walked, she combined items from both sets of notes, using observations of street signs, architecture, trees and wildlife, trash, and people to anchor (like a foot touching pavement) her forays into meditation. Through this process, she created densely textured poems that register her experience of spaces encountered in her daily navigation of the city, and that foreground her active, ongoing engagement with local public history and with contemporary sociopolitical dimensions of life in Vancouver.

This sustained sense of purpose is a key element in Quartermain’s reconceptualization of the role of the peripatetic urban poet. This figure, especially as it emerged in relation to flânerie, has commonly travelled through the city as a “dreaming idler” (to borrow Benjamin’s phrase)—an ambling wanderer moving through spaces as a relative outsider transgressing social boundaries, and even in familiar spaces retaining the distance of a voyeur. The concept of wandering has given foundational shape to countless urban art projects and experiments—perhaps most famously to the practice of dérive by Guy Debord and the Situationists, who set out to resist the dominant regimes of the city
by drifting through its streets, a project that one of Debord’s biographers, Vincent Kaufmann, has described as “a form of pure and radicalized modernism, art reduced to [the] . . . principle of mobility” (115). Robertson, for her part, sustains this trope of drifting, of wandering, in her essays, declaring that as a Soft Architect she “drifts and plays and enunciates” (Robertson, Occasional Work 218). But Quartermain, while still cultivating the combination of “spontaneous response” and “premeditated alertness” often associated with the practice of drifting (Donald 185), highlights a comparatively rooted relationship to place, and specifically to a home community, thus marking in her practice a significant divergence from the tradition of flânerie and other related forms of city walking. By foregrounding the relationship of her poetic practice to her everyday routine in her home neighbourhood, she is able to emphasize that, though she is still inevitably an observer, and even to an extent a voyeur, she is also fundamentally implicated in the community through which she walks.

Quartermain stresses this sense of implication by texturing her poetry with references to street and other place names. She describes her surroundings with a

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Interestingly, Quartermain seems to set herself apart from other recent manifestations of the female flâneur (or flâneuse), instead returning to and revising older forms. After all, as Robertson’s work suggests, contemporary explorations of female flânerie have tended to celebrate fluid, deterritorializing movement that transcends or undermines the city’s dominant structures and processes (for critical discussions of Canadian examples, see studies by Barbara Godard and Dominic Beneventi). As Karin Schwerdtner and Karen Bamford note, such explorations of female mobility have proliferated as part of the critique of traditional “feminine models of stasis” constructed in relation to masculine models of mobility (7).

During the rise of the (typically male) flâneur in the 19th century, most women faced considerable restrictions to public perambulation, and generally walked in public only to shop, to engage in social or charity work, or—in the case of working-class women—to get to and from their place of employment; those who did transgress by walking more freely or for other purposes experienced greater marginalization as a result of their behavior. (For examinations of the 19th-century female walker, see studies by Deborah L. Parsons, Mica Nava, Anne Friedberg, Judith Walkowitz, Elizabeth Wilson, Griselda Pollock, Rachel Bowlby, and Janet Wolff, among others.) Though she of course does not face the same restrictions as her nineteenth-century female counterparts, Quartermain returns to the notion of walking as a practice embedded in everyday routine, investigating both the possibilities and the limitations of this experience of rooted movement.
familiarity that can seem alienating to a reader with less local knowledge, describing offhandedly such sites and features as “the giant redwood at Maclean Park” (6), “the gulch where the working girls hang” (8), and “the place on Keefer that’s always open” (59). This sense of an informed and particularized relationship to place is enhanced by her research into local history, which allows a briefly noted name to trigger a meditation on its political, social, and historical contexts, or those of the site that it names. Many of Quartermain’s walking poems consist of extended series of such meditations sparked by place names and other momentarily observed site features. For instance, in the opening to the poem “Thanksgiving,” Quartermain begins by very briefly noting her location on Gore Avenue, then offers a condensed, highly specific description of the location’s early development history, making a commentary on the appropriation of Aboriginal land and also the effect of development on wildlife:

Gore Avenue—track of an old skid
Surveyor General of British Columbia
ran from a True Lagoon
to a place between first and second narrows
the Spanish said people called Sasamat
—no translation—
teals, widgeons, shovelers, buffleheads,
scoters, redheads, golden-eyes
blue herons and the *Branta canadensis*
 lagooned at Ka wah usks—Two Points Opposite
sawmills, sewage, shacktown
till the railways paved it over. (3)

Such commentary is common in the poems, with Quartermain emphasizing the history of racist and patriarchal governance in her community, and the local impacts of industry and capitalist expansion on human and other forms of life. The commentary also tends to slip in and out of the present tense, as in “Walk for beans,” which describes an ongoing neighbourhood tradition of small businesses making do:
Victoria and Hastings
  gas station, public school, Owl Drugs & Post Office
  Sandwich Farm. Lattes.
  lunch counter tacked on the back of the building
  anything you can sell to keep going

Lowertown 1920s
Rosa Pryor started her Chicken Inn:
  I couldn’t afford to buy but 2 chickens at a time—
  I’d run my husband over there to buy the chicken
  he’d just cut them up right quick
  I’d wash them
  get them on frying
  I’d commence talking, “Oh, yes, yes, so and so and so,”
  talk to take up some time
  I’d see him come in, then I’d say
  “well, I must get those chickens on.”
  I’d get him to pay
  Say to my husband “Now, you get 2 more” (25-26)\(^\text{149}\)

Another of the many instances of such slippage occurs in “Backwards from Pender Lake”:

  walking past Pender Lake chain-link,
  abandoned trailers of white hard-hats
  Concord Pacific’s International Village—
  land taken AGAIN from people—
  like Whoi-Whoi and Snaaq from the Squamish
  for a song. (73)\(^\text{150}\)

Here, Quartermain compares recent gentrification in her long-established community to early colonial land grabs—a key aim, in the poems, is to contextualize recent urban development within what she perceives as a lengthy history of appropriation and oppression.

\(^{149}\) As she acknowledges in a footnote, Quartermain is here quoting from Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter’s *Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End*, a collection of transcribed oral histories told by Strathcona residents.

\(^{150}\) Whoi-Whoi was an Aboriginal settlement in the area of what is now known as Lumberman’s Arch in Stanley Park (see Jean Barman’s *Stanley Park’s Secret*). Snaaq was an Aboriginal settlement on False Creek; the Squamish still retain a small section of reserve land at the foot of the Burrard Street Bridge. In her story “Goodbye, Snaaq,” Lee Maracle tells of the appropriation of Snaaq by European settlers, the history of Aboriginal land use in the area, and the impact of the loss of the settlement (see my discussion of “Goodbye, Snaaq” in Chapter Four).
Thus, while Quartermain emphasizes the way that her poems emerge in relation to
the constraints of everyday routine in a home community, she also highlights the role of
informed, contemplative, critical choice in determining what and how one sees and
responds, foregrounding the reciprocal relation between perceiving subject and urban
world. In so doing, she queries the idea of an autonomous public realm, and of the public
realm as a built space, whether a park or a street or a square or a building; instead, her
poems demonstrate that “publicness happens” (Donald 182)—it begins in and is
sustained through dynamic interaction between subject and city, and must be
consistently, carefully enacted by local residents. Quartermain’s play with the noun/verb
“record” in her poem of the same name emphasizes this point. She questions the notion of
the public record as a static, delimitable, and archivable entity, and instead foregrounds
her own practice recording (or describing) her urban world, a subjective practice
embedded in everyday experience that involves reflection on her position and relation to
others within the physical and social geographies of the city:

Record,

that I picked up the trash can from the lane
and put it back in the garage.
that there is a lane.
that it runs between houses on squared plots of land.
that garbage trucks empty trash cans—men driving—men
picking up trash all day,
5 days out of 7—their verve, their thoughts,
their touch and smell, the universe
of their eyes picking up trash

so they can live on a rectangle in a house that’s squared,
and put out trash
in their lanes. (66)
The poem continues with a series of similarly reflective “recordings” by an implicated, critical speaker, culminating with a final line which “records” “that the public world is here”—that publicness exists in those moments when the speaker sets herself in conscious relation to the city and its other residents (68).

In documenting this “interface” between subject and city, to borrow terminology from Elizabeth Grosz (108), Quartermain emphasizes its private as well as its public dimension. It **matters** that her poetry can have an alienating effect on its readers—the text functions as a trace of particular research done, of streets routinely walked, of an individual life lived, rather than serving as a mimetic representation or narrative of such facts. Quartermain thanks Ezra Pound, in her acknowledgements, for “blowing apart [her] syntax” (117), and alludes in her poetry to his *Cantos*; indeed, throughout *Vancouver Walking* she tends to privilege what Hugh Kenner, commenting on Pound, describes as “constellated words,” rather than “syntactic connections” (68). Her particular structuring of word-constellations allows her to suggest the movement and pace of her walk and thought, and she employs words and phrase fragments to index her lived experience of interaction in and with an urban community and its history, without allowing readers to feel at the centre of this experience. The endnotes appended to particular poems, which clarify historical, literary, and geographical references, enhance this feeling, as they are incomplete, with certain notes apparently included or omitted according to the author’s whim; while some poems are heavily endnoted, others have few or no notes at all, despite the presence of references in the poem that likely leave many readers desiring further explication. Here again, the text indexes—rather than providing full access to—the work

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151 See Chapter Two for a discussion of Grosz’s use of the term “interface.”
of the poet. From a reader’s perspective, the poems mark or attest to Quartermain’s own
otherness—a relation to the city that is always partially, inaccessibly private. Her poems
exhibit her own engagement and demand the engagement of the reader, and at the same
time they also keep readers at a remove, cultivating the strangeness that is vital to city
life, and that is a necessary condition of pluralistic urban collectivity. In this sense,
Quartermain diverges from two of the key modernist projects that inform her work—
Pound’s Cantos and that epic collection of textual fragments, The Arcades Project: while
both of these projects attempt, however unsuccessfully, to encapsulate a city (in the case
of Benjamin) and a world (in the case of Pound), Quartermain’s project retains a
smallness and a privateness, shaped as it is by the poet’s recognition of the limitations
and particularity of her position.

Quartermain further emphasizes limitation and particularity by foregrounding
bodily experience in her poems; for this reason Grosz’s term “interface” is especially apt,
as Grosz uses it to refer to the way that the body functions as a threshold between subject
and world, arguing that the body is both self-produced and involuntarily marked from
without, a “hinge” between the city (including other city dwellers) and the subject (Grosz
109). Quartermain’s attention to bodily experience is particular notable in “Backwards
from Pender Lake,” that poem describing a trip home from the Central Branch of the
Vancouver Public Library. In “Pender Lake,” Quartermain repeatedly mentions the
“pounds of books” that she carries on her back, and the “too touristy” “yellow pack” that
contains them (73). The books literally weigh her down; they seem to impact the pace of
her walk, and hint at imposed limits on her walking—lugging books, she is not in a
position to drift aimlessly or endlessly about the city. Certainly, both the books and the
yellow pack function as symbols of social class, of cultural and at least a small degree of economic capital. Such symbolism is clear when Quartermain compares her own pack to the garbage bags carried by two “pickers,” contemporary versions of Baudelaire’s and Benjamin’s rag-picker, whom she passes on the street:

The pickers or picketers, if only they could,
waked beside me—skeletons in yard-sale pants,
broken nylon zippers—
green garbage bags of tins grubbed from trash bins.
Beside my yellow pack with its buckled straps and books. (74)

But, in emphasizing the weight of the books (“how heavy the books” [75]), which she carries dutifully home on her back, Quartermain connects this social symbol to notions of burden and responsibility, implying that they play a role in her relative rootedness and sense of implication in her home community. In a late stanza, she suggests the books’ role in informing her particular reading of the city:

We crossed Georgia Street.
The Strait George Vancouver called after the mad king.
In my pack, three books by George Bowering. (75)

Here, with a playful rhyme, she connects a brief meditation on local history to Bowering’s postcolonial literary treatments of early Vancouver, a selection of which are apparently packed in her bag.¹⁵²

Both of the passages quoted in the preceding paragraph highlight Quartermain’s complicated understanding of urbanity, of what it means to be together in city spaces. The mode of relationality that Quartermain explores in her poetry is informed at once by agonistic friction (heightened by her cultivation of her particularized point of view and

¹⁵² Bowering himself plays with overlapping Georges of Vancouver in his work (see Burning Water and George, Vancouver: A Discovery Poem). In her later book Nightmarker, Quartermain makes a nod to Bowering in the voice of “Geo,” who in epistles scattered throughout the text signs off as “Geo, Vancouver.”
her awareness of her social positioning) and by a conscious turning toward—a walking with—the other. In her statement that “The pickers or picketers, if only they could, walked beside me,” she insists on communal attachment, however brief, acknowledging both the desire for and the difficulty of solidarity (73). Later, walking toward Georgia Street, she observes

a man and a woman in jackets and leather shoes.
I wanta see all the Benzes, he said
on familiar terms with them,
like people who drive Beamers, not BMWs.
We crossed Georgia Street. (74)

Without abandoning her investment in the critical articulation of social difference, Quartermain nevertheless also allows a sense of “we-ness” to emerge in proximity to others. Quartermain’s agonistic polis is thus also a space of “‘civil’ [concitoyenne] coexistence,” as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it (Being 31), and demands the difficult ethical work of sharing specific spaces with a range of different strangers.

In Vancouver Walking, Quartermain reconceptualizes the peripatetic city poet, transforming the idle wanderer into dutiful community dweller. Like Robertson, she demonstrates a dedication to research that enables informed public engagement. However, she diverges from her fellow poet by foregrounding more rooted forms of perambulation, observation, and contemplation, producing poetry that testifies to a thoughtful, critical, implicated relationship to a very particular urban space and community. Quartermain also seems inspired by Robertson’s emphasis on the smallness of the poetic project; however, where Robertson combines grandiosity and self-deflation to suggest her complicated position as an urban poet-critic, Quartermain articulates this complexity through a project that, in its purposefully limited scope and mobility, its
element of unassuming privateness, and its connection to the mundane routines of everyday living, lacks even a gritty or compromised sense of glamour. If Quartermain produces—and becomes a symbol of—cultural capital in and through her work as an urban poet, she also challenges reductively aestheticized perceptions of her role and lifestyle.

Quartermain makes an important contribution to the conversation that characterizes the artist as a stimulus for urban redevelopment, because she insistently queries the terms that some scholars, and also actors in the property market, assign to the artist as symbol of cultural capital—Ley, for instance, figures the artist as a decorator setting the stage for middle-class consumption in and of particular sites, however unintentional this set-dressing might be. Quartermain does not deny her social position, but she aims to problematize and expand the limited range of connotations and meanings assigned to it, foregrounding those dimensions of the lived experience of a socially engaged city poet that often disappear in the discourse that links artists to processes of urban restructuring.

I have situated Bowering’s, Robertson’s, and Quartermain’s texts quite specifically in response to Ley’s study of the artist in processes of gentrification, partly because Ley draws on data from, and focuses his analysis on, Vancouver, and partly because his three decades of work on urban restructuring is so central to the scholarship on this subject emerging from geography and urban studies. My intent is not to undermine Ley’s work—though I would argue that at least in some neighbourhoods with longstanding arts and cultural communities (e.g. Strathcona, the Downtown Eastside, Grandview-Woodlands), urban restructuring is playing out in more complicated ways
than Ley’s succession model suggests, thanks at least in part to the resistance work of a range of community coalitions that have often included artists. But with that said, my primary aim, in interrogating Ley’s argument, is to highlight some of the necessary limitations of the social science scholarship on artists and gentrification.

In developing his argument, Ley relies heavily on Pierre Bourdieu’s work—especially the social theorist’s formulation of the relationship between cultural and economic capital, and between the aesthetic disposition and social distinction (Ley emphasizes, in his study, the degree of distinction conferred on “the creative individual, the artist, the anguished performative genius” [“Artists” 2532]). In arguing, via Bourdieu, that artists aim to acquire a degree of cultural capital through the aestheticization of previously undervalued urban sites and materials, Ley affirms Bourdieu’s analysis of the conditions that allow “an autonomous artistic field, exemplified in the slogan ‘art for art’s sake,’ to exist,” proposing that aesthetic value is “socially produced in a ‘game’ involving the artist, the art-world and also the social conditions producing the art-world” (Ley, “Artists” 2532). Though Ley develops his theoretical approach from Bourdieu’s work in Distinction and The Field of Cultural Production, Bourdieu’s The Rules of Art, a book—

\[153\] Ley argues that

[t]he population that follows artists does not enter the field haphazardly, but in a succession that is shaped by their proximity to the aesthetic disposition and cultural competency of the artist. . . . Typically, social and cultural professionals and pre-professionals are early successors to artists, including such cultural producers as intellectuals and students, journalists and other media workers, and educators to be followed by professionals with greater economic capital such as lawyers and medical practitioners, and finally by business people and capitalists. All the while, disposable income and property prices rise, with gentrification eventually representing significant reinvestment in the inner-city housing market. (“Artists” 2540)

\[154\] See Derksen (“Uncommon Competition”) for a general assessment of the role of the Vancouver arts community in organizing against gentrification, and Vidaver for an example of the way that art informed the Woodsquat protest, a local activist response to Vancouver’s lack of social housing.

In a recent study, co-authored with Cory Dobson, of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside and Grandview-Woodlands neighbourhoods, Ley does complicate further his description of the gentrification process, pointing to a range of factors—including resident activism—that have helped slow gentrification in these parts of Vancouver; however, the study does not reconsider Ley’s earlier thesis about artists.
length examination and discussion of the emergence of an autonomous artistic field in nineteenth century Paris,\textsuperscript{155} deserves a place in this conversation, especially considering the extent to which the artists of this period in Parisian history continue to inform and inflect the contemporary practices of city poets. In \textit{The Rules of Art}, Bourdieu describes a radical rupture between aesthetics and ethics in his analysis of the historical conditions of the formation of the artistic field, insisting that a break between the two was necessary in order to ensure the relative autonomy of the social game organizing the field. This break, he suggests, emerged in relation to “the pitiless elimination of all ‘received ideas,’ all the typical commonplaces of any group and all [marks of] . . . adherence to or support for one or another of the attested positions or position-takings,” tactics which accompanied the establishment of autonomy (\textit{Rules} 111-12). He also argues that the break was marked by the tendency, among artists, toward “a posture of impassivity, indifference and detachment” (110). Commenting on the life and work of Gustave Flaubert, the artist figure at the centre of his historical study, Bourdieu argues that “[a]estheticism taken to its limits tends towards a sort of moral neutralism, which is not far from an ethical nihilism” (110).\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{The Rules of Art} extends ideas developed as lectures and articles and published in \textit{The Field of Cultural Production}.

\textsuperscript{156} Bourdieu’s discussion of Flaubert’s tendency toward “moral neutralism” in \textit{The Rules of Art} builds on his earlier analysis in \textit{Distinction} of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. In \textit{Distinction}, Bourdieu argues that [t]he aestheticism which makes the artistic intention the basis of the “art of living” implies a sort of moral agnosticism. . . . The aesthetic intention can only contradict the dispositional norms of the ethos or the norms of the ethic which, at each moment, define the legitimate objects and modes of representation for the different social classes, excluding from the universe of the “representable” certain realities and certain ways of representing them. Thus the easiest, and so the most frequent and most spectacular way to “shock [\textit{épater}] the bourgeois” by proving the extent of one’s power to confer aesthetic status is to transgress ever more radically the ethical censorship (e.g. in matters of sex) which the other classes accept even within the area which the dominant disposition defines as aesthetic. Or, more subtly, it is done by conferring aesthetic status on objects or ways of representing them that are excluded by the dominant aesthetic of the time. (47)
In a rigorous critical assessment of *The Rules of Art*, Allen Dunn responds by suggesting that “neutralism and hence nihilism” are in fact “inevitable . . . for anyone who refuses to situate himself or herself in a framework of values”—including Bourdieu himself (106). Dunn sees Bourdieu as caught in “the stoic and melancholy spectatorship of [his] sociology” (109), condemning from a distance the artist caught up in the art world game—a game in which, according to Bourdieu, “the ideology of creativity serves only to mask the forces of social determination” (Dunn 88). Dunn suggests that in privileging the position of the distanced, objective social theorist, and insisting on reading Flaubert through the lens of his particular theoretical model, Bourdieu fails to see and address an integral dimension of the text—Flaubert’s forays into the ethical space of human relations; indeed, Bourdieu suggests that such a dimension has been evacuated from the work.157

Literary historian Paul Bénichou’s remarks on the sociological perspective seem pertinent here. Bénichou proposes that

the stumbling block of sociological criticism, which makes it so dangerous from a literary point of view, is the difficulty of maintaining a sense of the inherent life of works, as they are felt by authors and readers, in the models that sociological criticism inevitably ends by producing. . . . [I]n fact it often happens that literary sociology possesses self-assurance only to the extent that it mutilates that for which it claims to account. (334)

157 As Dunn explains, Flaubert's negation of the social world is not as complete as Bourdieu would like, and part of the power of his work derives from his ability to combine a skeptical distance with more intimate and sympathetic views of humanity. For example, Bourdieu praises Flaubert's use of free indirect discourse as a technique for distancing and objectifying his characters. . . . [But] Flaubert also uses this technique to achieve a closer proximity to his characters, . . . and it is the combination of distance and proximity that makes the technique so dramatically effective. (106-07)
It is indeed this “life” of the literary work that Bourdieu seems unwilling—or at least that his theoretical model seems unable—to capture or engage fully. Ley, for his part, acknowledges that “[t]here is, of course, immense personal creativity in art works, and here it seems as if, partly for his own disciplinary objective of establishing sociology over against philosophy in the French academic canon, Bourdieu (1993) tends towards an over-socialisation of the artistic project” (“Artists” 2532). However, Ley pushes such reservations aside, returning to the development of his argument by affirming that Bourdieu “is surely correct to state that a hagiographic celebration of individual artistic genius is a hugely incomplete analysis—for art is part of a much broader social terrain, reminiscent of Sharon Zukin’s narrower, but evocative term, the artistic mode of production” (2532). In focusing on the artist as a specific social type and relying on Bourdieu’s somewhat limited conceptualization of the artistic field, Ley sidesteps the problem posed by “the inherent life of works” to the Bourdieu model.

In the texts that I have examined so far in this chapter, poets have repeatedly complicated the idea of the artist as a specific social type (and certainly as an “individual artistic genius”) as they have developed approaches and forms they find appropriate for describing the experience of life in contemporary Vancouver, and for exploring the ethics and politics of urban community. The word “life,” along with its supplement “afterlife”—the term Robertson borrows from Benjamin to describe the mode of critical and careful contemplation that poetry encourages—emphasize the generative potential of poetic engagement, and in so doing invoke the problem of agency that many critics have addressed in their responses to Bourdieu’s work. As both Ley and Gary Bridge (another scholar of the aesthetics of gentrification who also makes use of Bourdieu’s theories)
acknowledge, Bourdieu’s tendency to over-socialize human subjects limits his ability to fully apprehend and assess the agency of those subjects (Bridge 207).

While Bridge attempts to develop a theory of rational action to help explain some of the strategies of gentrifiers, Ley remains fairly faithful to Bourdieu’s perspective, emphasizing that “while agency matters, it is an agency that is already structured by the rules of the field. So, for example, the economic valorisation of the aesthetic disposition is intrinsic to relations in the cultural field” (“Artists” 2541). This may be true, but it leaves us still with the need to assess what kinds of actions—including strategically resistant actions—might indeed be possible within such imposed limitations. As Dunn observes in his discussion of Bourdieu, the “objectification of various arenas of social struggle may help us better understand which goods are at stake, but it does little to facilitate our choices, however limited those choices may be” (110). Poetic contemplation and articulation, as the authors that I have examined thus far conceive it, situate both poet and reader in dynamic relation to the lived experience of gentrification and other forms of urban change, inviting critical, generative engagement with the ethics and politics of interaction in particular sites and within imposed limitations.

**Affected Advocacy: The Poetry of Bud Osborn**

I want to move, now, to a discussion of Bud Osborn, a Vancouver poet and social activist whose persona and work, perhaps more than any other contemporary local writer, emphasize dimensions of the artist figure and artistic practice that tend to be elided in accounts of urban restructuring. Osborn invites us to rethink the relationship between art, activism, and gentrification, and to query the notion that urban artists function as a
colonizing arm of the middle-class. A former drug user who, during his long struggle with addiction, at one time lived on the streets of Vancouver, Osborn rose to prominence in the mid 1990s as a key figure in the efforts to draw attention to the emergency health crisis among injection drug users in the Downtown Eastside, becoming an influential member of this impoverished but culturally vibrant community, which is located on the eastern edge of Vancouver’s downtown core, adjacent to Chinatown and Strathcona (some of Quartermain’s perambulations extend into the Downtown Eastside and Chinatown). As part of his activist work, Osborn served as a director of the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board and as a member of the Carnegie Community Centre Organization Board, and helped found community organizations such as the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), From Grief to Action (FGTA), Political Response Group (PRG), and Creative Resistance. Along with his activist work, Osborn also writes intensely affective, testimonial-style poetry; his first solo collection, Lonesome Monsters, was published in 1995, followed by Oppenheimer Park (1998), Keys to Kingdoms (1999), Hundred Block Rock (1999), and Signs of the Times (2005). Osborn’s poetry and his activism are closely linked, with the former offering a space for awareness raising and community building, and also for articulating the ethics and politics of relationality and collaboration that inform such activities.

Osborn’s life and work challenge the figuration of the artist as mere catalyst or pawn in processes of gentrification—an idea that remains pervasive in social science scholarship on restructuring. The notion is perpetuated, for instance, in a recent textbook

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158 See Chapter One for a discussion of homelessness, urban development, and housing-related activism in the Downtown Eastside.
159 The Carnegie Centre, located at Hastings and Main streets, is a central gathering place and a hub for social, educational, and recreational programs in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood.
titled *Gentrification*, the first book to summarize the scholarship on gentrification “in one comprehensive, accessible volume” (Lees et al. xxi): at one point in the text, the authors describe the activist response to restructuring in the Mission district of San Francisco as “a rare case of artists in a gentrifying neighborhood uniting with working-class families and tenants to protest against gentrification” (262). That is not to say, however, that there has not been a push by some scholars in the social sciences to reinvigorate and complicate the category of the artist in this discourse: perhaps most notably, economist Ann Markusen has foregrounded in a study of artists and urban development the fact that “[m]any artists . . . participate actively in politics, voting in high numbers and using their skills in visual and performance pieces in political campaigns. . . . They remain a powerful source of articulated opposition to societal status quo” (1922). Markusen’s portrait comes much closer to describing the significant number of artists who, in Vancouver, have often contributed to activist responses to local development. Osborn provides an important example of such engagement; moreover, given that he is a long-time resident of the Downtown Eastside and has lived through some of the same struggles as many of its other residents (poverty, homelessness, addiction), we can conceptualize Osborn’s experience, and his writing about that experience, as resisting the notion of a clear divide between artists and working-class or underprivileged residents facing the threat of displacement, and also the idea that artists are fringe members of the dominant, encroaching class (Ley, “Artists” 2531-32).

Importantly, Osborn’s poems have played a role in a range of community events, especially those connected to local social justice issues. Sometimes the poems have been

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160 Though Markusen does not respond specifically to Ley’s argument, she similarly argues for greater attention to diversity among urban artists in terms of socioeconomic background and community affiliations (1937).
read by Osborn himself at rallies and gatherings, sometimes by other orators as a means of introducing, or emphasizing key ideas in, particular speeches. Significantly, Osborn’s poetry has, at times, taken on specifically ceremonial purposes: for example, he wrote and performed poems for both the ground-breaking of the Downtown Eastside-based Portland Hotel Society’s new facilities, and for the opening of Insite (also located in the Downtown Eastside), the first publicly funded supervised injection site in North America. Osborn has also used poems as a means of communicating with those who oppose his activist efforts: while fighting to turn the former Woodward’s department store into social housing, he mailed the building’s then-owner, Kassem Aghtai, a poem about the issue, which resulted in an (ultimately unproductive) meeting between Aghtai and Osborn in Aghtai’s office (Campbell et al. 75). Osborn’s *Signs of the Times*, which brings together selected new and previously published poems, includes annotations detailing the creation and reception of some of his poetry, attesting to the dynamic relationship between Osborn’s writing, his social activism, and the various communities that this work touches.

One of the communities that Osborn’s poetry has reached is the academic community—some literary critics (including this one), of course, but also scholars of geography, sociology, and urban studies. Perhaps most notably, Osborn read his poem “raise shit: downtown eastside poem of resistance” at the Inaugural International Conference in Critical Geography (1997), as part of a workshop titled “New York – Vancouver: gentrification and memory,” which featured Osborn, gentrification researcher Neil Smith, and BC poet and novelist Peter Trower (Blomley, “Poetic Geography” 279).

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161 The Portland Hotel Society provides permanent housing and professional support to people with addictions and mental illnesses.
The poem was eventually published in an issue of the scholarly journal *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, preceded by an introduction by Vancouver-based geographer Nicholas Blomley, who subsequently also discussed “raise shit” in *Unsettling the City*, a book which draws on the conflicts over space in the Downtown Eastside as a case study in the politics of property as they manifest in the contemporary city.\(^{162}\) Interestingly, Lees et al. also cite “raise shit” in their book *Gentrification*, using an excerpt from the poem as an epigraph for a section on the history of restructuring in the Downtown Eastside; in fact, the passage appears just a page after their comment about the rarity of artists uniting with working-class residents to protest gentrification (263). The authors do not, however, provide specific context for the poem’s production or discuss its inclusion in their text.

Blomley, for his part, does attempt to establish a more productive relationship between the literary work and his scholarly study. In his introduction to the poem in *Society and Space*, he emphasizes the complexity of the built and lived neighbourhood evoked in the text, highlighting Osborn’s description of

> an area that is frequently demonised and marginalised by dominant interests, apparently intent either on dismissing the very real problems of many of the residents, or on facilitating the gentrification of a prime piece of real estate, blocks away from the commercial core of Vancouver, itself undergoing rapid change linked to the shifting geographies of globalization. As Bud’s poem reminds us, the area faces some urgent problems, including the continuing loss of affordable housing, the marginalization of the large First Nations population,

\(^{162}\) See Chapter Two for my discussion of Blomley’s interrogation of the ownership model of property and its dominant role in configuring relations in urban space.
epidemic levels of HIV/AIDS, violence against women sex-trade workers, and the 
criminalization of much of the population. However, the Downtown Eastside is 
also testament to the success of community organizing, activism, and “goddam 
meetings” [Osborn 1998: 285]. [As Osborn’s poem documents,] a number of 
large development proposals have been defeated, such as a proposed casino, or 
developer Brad Holme’s condo project; and many units of affordable housing, as 
well as community spaces such as the Carnegie Centre or Crab Park, have been 
created. (“Poetic Geography” 279)

Blomley also emphasizes the analytical dimension of the poem, pointing to the way that 
Osborn “deliberately works in (and reworks) academic insights” (279). One important 
interlocutor of Osborn’s is Neil Smith—especially key are Smith’s concept of the 
revanchist city and his critique of the motif of the “new urban frontier” in 
gentrification discourse (see Smith, New Urban Frontier). Osborn also situates the

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163 In The New Urban Frontier, Smith highlights and critiques the way that Old West imagery has been applied to the more recent context of gentrification in American cities:

In the language of gentrification, the appeal to frontier imagery has been exact: urban pioneers, urban homesteaders and urban cowboys became the new folk heroes of the urban frontier. In the 1980s, the real estate magazines even talked about “urban scouts” whose job it was to scout out the flanks of gentrifying neighborhoods, check the landscape for profitable reinvestment, and, at the same time, to report home about how friendly the natives were. Less optimistic commentators indict the emergence of a new group of “urban outlaws” in connection with inner-city drug cultures. (xvi)

As one of the epigraphs for his poem, Osborn quotes Smith’s argument that “the myth of the frontier is an invention that rationalizes the violence of gentrification and displacement” (Smith, New Urban Frontier 22; qtd. in Osborn, “raise shit” 280). Osborn also cites Smith in the poem itself:

and gentrification has become a central characteristic
of what neil smith perceives as
“a revengeful and reactionary viciousness
against various populations accused of ‘stealing’ the city
from the white upper classes.” (raise shit” 280)

164 At one point in “raise shit,” Osborn specifically acknowledges the role of scholars in the struggle over urban space in the Downtown Eastside, referencing Ley, Blomley, Smith, Kris Olds, and Jeff Sommers in a poignant (yet also playful) passage that testifies to Ley’s long-standing influence and authority while also positioning him in relation to the marginalized voices of Downtown Eastside residents:

I remember attending a kind of gentrification summit
called by a vancouver city planner
history of displacements in the Downtown Eastside in relation to a range of colonial and diasporic histories.¹⁶⁵ Blomley notes in *Unsettling the City* that “raise shit”

is prefaced by a quotation by the sixteenth-century scholar and priest, Bartoleme de la Casas, describing the violences of colonialism, including the ways in which “towns, provinces, and whole kingdoms have been entirely cleared of their native inhabitants” [Casas, qtd. in Osborn, “raise shit” 280]. Osborn is careful to link the politics of dispossession and resistance in Vancouver to a global process that has driven the populations “from land they have occupied / in common / and in community / for many years” [Osborn, “raise shit” 280], naming the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, the Ogoni in Nigeria, the Dalits in India, and a long list of other indigenous populations. (104)

In other words, as both Blomley and Kofi Campbell observe, Osborn tends to combine a grassroots focus—which he sometimes articulates (not unlike Quatermain) in part through references to people, places, and events that are identifiable only by residents or by those involved in the issues shaping and fracturing the Downtown Eastside (certainly, this is the case in “raise shit”)—with a sustained awareness of the ways in which his particular experience connects to localized struggles for social justice elsewhere.

In keeping with a style and approach characteristic of such grassroots struggles, Osborn’s poetry is heavily influenced by spoken word poetry and by the oral culture of

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¹⁶⁵ Such contextualization isn’t confined to “raise shit”; see Kofi Campbell for a reading of Osborn’s poetry collection *Hundred Block Rock* through the lenses of postcolonial and diaspora studies.
the street. As reviewer Adam Beardsworth observes, some of Osborn’s poems “recall the lyrical style of 1960s folk protest songs”; Beardsworth notes that Osborn has collaborated with musicians on oral performances of his readings, and has released his poetry on CD (154). Another reviewer finds comparisons with grunge music and church sermons (Vermeersch 1999). (Certainly, a Christian influence is central to Osborn’s ethics, an issue I will return to later.) I would argue that some of his most arresting poetry is shaped by intense, driving rhythms associated with spoken word and musical styles such as rap and hard rock. Clearly, Osborn’s poems are made to be spoken aloud, and even in their written form they retain that sense of authenticity that tends to be attributed to speech.

And yet, Osborn is also usually carefully attentive to the layout of his poems on the page, often creating texts that articulate spatially the poem’s argument or tone of delivery. Take, for instance, the poem “hundred block rock” (a reference to the area centering on the intersection of Main and Hastings streets, at the heart of Osborn’s neighbourhood), from the collection of the same name:

blue teardrop tattoos  
what’s the plan  
tear it down  
let ’em drown  
too much reality  
fixin in the alley  
blood streamin’  
girl tweakin’  
hundred block reelin’  
vancouver’s first  
western world’s worst  
hiv  
public health emergency  
fuck ’em around  
till their lives burst (Hundred 102)
Like this single stanza, the entire text of the poem runs in diagonal lines, marking the page rather like the track marks that sometimes scar the arms of injection drug users, testifying to the reality of experience at the level of the body while enhancing the pulsing emotion of Osborn’s argument about the effects of displacement and systemic neglect. Osborn employs the space of the page differently—but still to productive effect—in “raise shit,” especially in a section where he lists the names of local community members:

jeff and muggs and eldon and kathleen and frank and maggie and carl and lori and duncan and margaret and mark and sonny and ken and fred and sheila and liz and tora and terri and ian and chris and bob and leigh and jen and shawn and darren and sarah and irene and cathy and ann and lorelie and nick and linda and lorraine and john and joanne and judy and allison and sharon and deb and marg and dan and jean and don and libby and carol and lou and dayle and mo and barb and ellen and sandy and tom and luke and gary and travis and bruce and paul and deidre and jim and so many others. (283)

We might say that “raise shit” is a poem that actively contests what Blomley, in *Unsettling the City*, argues is an all-too-common assumption implicit in urban development rhetoric—that poverty areas exist as “terra nullius, devoid of people who could have any claim to [the] space” (Blomley 90). In the stanza of accumulating first names, the challenge to the assumption of *terra nullius* takes place in the specific identification of neighbourhood residents, but also in the poem’s form and style: the text spreads in thick blocks to the margin of the page, leaving very little white space. As well, the repetition of the word “and” throughout the stanza highlights the interconnectedness of this community, while at the same time refusing hierarchization—each name simply emerges on the page one after the other (notably, too, Osborn uses first

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166 The use of multiple conjunctions in succession is a rhetorical strategy termed polysyndeton; it tends to have the effect of slowing the rhythm of a sentence or passage, and is thus often employed to add emphasis.
names only, and always lower case). In other words, Osborn expresses a particular community stance and ethic through the combined form and content of his poem.

Indeed, in Osborn’s deceptively simple and straightforward poetry, a complicated interplay often takes place between the realms of interpersonal ethics and politics. The poems are, of course, a space where Osborn makes direct statements related to his grassroots leftist political positioning, and articulates solidarity with other residents and activists, but he also attends time and again to moments of antagonism, friction, and communion between human beings—moments that might give rise to political affiliation or alignment, but that would be better described as ethical than political. Often, he uses poetic description to crystallize, without resolving, the complicated tension or ethical dilemma that emerges in a particular encounter. For example, in “one of them,” a poem from the collection *Hundred Block Rock*, Osborn recalls the experience of working at the reception desk of a shelter, and describes the dilemma of having to turn away a mentally ill and often violent man, remembering that in the past, he himself had been “always on the wrong side of the desk / in more trouble than anyone else / and certain assholes I had to talk to / for food or a place to stay / had no idea / what / my life / was like” (90).

Osborn develops only a single narrative thread in this poem, offering a spare description of the encounter, which eventually results in the man’s departure:

> “it’s tough” I say
> hustling him out the door

> and he gives me a look that says
> “you don’t understand
> or give a shit”

167 Osborn employs the same strategy in his poem “gentrification,” though in this later poem he replaces names with descriptions of small domestic and street scenes, each connected by the twists of ampersands—perhaps an even more evocative articulation of community interrelatedness than the repeated “and” of “raise shit” (*Hundred* 34-39).
8 empty beds
a pot of coffee
a stack of sandwiches
still there after he heads down the street
into the rain
into the dark

I lock the door
sit down on the couch
light a cigarette
and read the paper

no problems

no problems at all

one of them. (93)

Here, Osborn’s self-consciousness regarding his social position is clearly evident, as he
details the relational friction that emerges with even a minor increase in social authority
and capital.

Osborn probes more specifically the ways that his small degree of literary success
has complicated his relations with others in “royalties,” another spare poem from
_Hundred Block Rock_, in which he describes first an encounter in the street with a friend
from the neighbourhood, and then a conversation with his publisher as they sit together
drinking coffee; both interactions culminate in Osborn’s recognition of the often ironic
complexities of his social position. In the poem, the neighbourhood friend asks about the
success of Osborn’s book and expects the impoverished poet to lend him money,
becoming angry when the still-struggling Osborn tells him he has none. In the second
encounter, Osborn listens as his publisher tells him about an assortment of financial and
personal woes, and then reflects: “I thought of my poor publisher / and laughed in
misery’s solidarity / after all / what other kind of publisher / should a poet of low-life

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trouble have / than mine? / and I was glad / that for once / I was the one / who paid for our coffee” (98).

As such poems suggest, a sustained exploration of the emotional and ethical complexity of communal relations is central to Osborn’s work. Solidarity is never simple, as Osborn makes clear in “raise shit”:

our words and our presence create
a strange and profound unity
outraged at each other
disappointing each other
reacting against each other
resenting each other
unhealed wounds dividing us
when to be about unity
is to be caught in a crossfire
of conflicting understandings ambitions and perspectives. (284)

Nor, for that matter, is the work of advocacy and mediation that Osborn has taken on for his community:

how much compromise?
how to organize?
where to fight?
more sirens and screams and break-ins
welfare cuts
more murders and suicides
more bodies on the sidewalks and in the alloys and parks
space and places for poor people shrinking
and the ambiguities of advocacy
the rumours
the well-founded paranoias
the political manipulations
exploitations confusions deliberate obfuscations
and seductions of the gentrification system
the backroom deals somewhere else
in office towers and government offices
meetings and more meetings. (“raise shit” 285)

If the artist figure is often conceived as a pioneer explorer on the marginalized fringes,

Osborn as artist instead uses his poetry to describe and reflect on a significantly different
experience in such spaces—that of a spokesperson for a marginalized urban community, exploring the unfamiliar terrain “of power politics / of turf wars / of meetings and committees and subcommittees / . . . the agencies / the bureaucracies / the manoeuvring for advantage” (“complaint of an advocate,” Hundred 121-22). At the same time, Osborn also emphasizes that the role of community spokesperson involves the difficult, deeply emotional, and always ongoing work of testimony and witnessing within the community itself.

The poem “the passion of the downtown eastside,” from Hundred Block Rock, highlights the push and pull of Osborn’s two worlds. In this poem, Osborn emerges from a board of directors meeting at the Carnegie Centre and, gazing into a nearby alley, watches a man dumpster diving, and then a woman, high on heroin, dancing:

      and I see a woman wearing a sleeveless white blouse with large purple polka dots and a short white skirt with blue stripes
      she’s barefoot and has a multitude of bruises up and down her legs and black needle marks on the backs of her knees like a swarm of ants feasting on something sweet
      and there are needle tracks on her arms and on her jugular vein and she has open sores and cuts and scratches and a white gauze bandage around one wrist the bandaging of a kind I’ve known to cover stitched and slashed wrists. (79)

A friend leaving the same meeting stops momentarily beside Osborn to watch, but then dismisses the scene and leaves. Osborn, however, feels a call to observe, and to translate the woman’s dance, as well as his reflection on it, into lyric. For him, the work of witnessing and testimony is intrinsically wrapped up in the practice of poetic contemplation and description.

The ethics of encounter that Osborn describes in such moments of witnessing are reminiscent of the Levinasian conceptualization of facing and alterity—indeed, Osborn’s poem “see my face,” from Hundred Block Rock, seems to speak Levinas’s language. For
Emmanuel Levinas, the inassimilable alterity of the other emerges in the face-to-face encounter: through the face one is visited by alterity, one experiences the epiphany of alterity (Levinas, “Meaning and Sense” 95). In “see my face,” a sex worker approaches Osborn in a convenience store; after a moment of idle chatter, during which time he gives her some change to buy a cigarette, she pulls back her hair and demands that he look at her face:

“I got attacked tonight
see my face”

she pushes back long brown strands of hair
“two women jumped me”

I look at
the wounds
and blood
across her cheek and nose and ear and neck (Hundred 106)

As Osborn implies in his poem, the presence of the face, Levinas proposes, is a call and an imposition: “a face imposes itself upon me without my being able to be deaf to its call or to forget it, that is, without my being able to stop holding myself responsible for its distress” (Levinas, “Meaning and Sense” 97). Indeed, Levinas says elsewhere, the face is a call to “measure [one]self against infinity” (“Philosophy” 58). Osborn conceptualizes his own encounter in similar terms, ending “see my face” with the following stanzas:

the hebrews said you could not look
on the face of god
and live

but if you could
I think god’s face
would look a lot
like hers (107)
The poem reads as an account of an intense emotional experience that the poet has weathered, not without being changed. The woman who demands that he “see [her] face” stops him in his tracks and, in Levinas’s terms, “surprise[s] at the bottom of [his] ego an unequivocal sincerity and a servant’s humility” (“Meaning and Sense” 99). Osborn leaves his readers in that moment of deep and transformative surprise.

Osborn’s ethics of encounter are informed more specifically by his intense Christian faith than even his reference to Hebrew traditions suggests. Indeed, the language of love and compassion, of suffering and exile, that Osborn frequently employs in his descriptions of witnessing and advocacy are clearly connected to his devotion to the story and teachings of Jesus, whom he conceptualizes as both a role model and a spiritual companion. This aspect of Osborn’s poetry makes it somewhat less palatable to the largely secular worlds of academic and popular criticism (and to this critic specifically), but I highlight it expressly for this reason. After all, if we are to understand urban poetic practice as properly generative, and urban poets as more than manifestations of a specific social type, then it is crucial to attend to forms and elements of urban description that do not fit neatly within or in relation to the canon of urban poetics.

Osborn often either implicitly or explicitly invokes his Christian faith in poems that seem to have been written in moments or periods of extreme frustration with the socioeconomic system broadly speaking (see, for example, “No Matter How Vicious the System Is” in Signs of the Times), or, as in “complaint of an advocate,” with the particular difficulties of activist work. His faith evidently helps him cope with this frustration, while also providing a language and set of tropes with which to articulate his experience and reach out to particular members of his community. Perhaps rather
problematically, in “complaint of an advocate” Osborn seems almost to manifest a martyr complex in describing the emotionally exhausting work of activism. Nevertheless, he productively revises the Biblical story of Jesus cautioning the scribes and Pharisees on the Mount of Olives against throwing stones (John 8: 1-9) in order to describe and understand his particular position and role. “An advocate today,” he writes,

must be
a stone catcher
catching stones
with your nerves
your heart
your skin
your life
catching stones intended for those like
the western world’s worst

the ray of hope that is in my soul
the high threshold for pain burned into my bones
remembers despite myself
who I am
and where I stand
when the stones
are being
thrown
who I am
and where I stand
when the stones
are being
thrown. (Hundred 127-28)

Here, Osborn presents himself not as a passive victim, but rather implies that he is equipped with the skill, comparative privilege, and requisite personal history to take on the role of community advocate and spokesperson. Through poetic practice, he is able to explore the complicated ethics of the role that he has chosen, while also, ultimately, giving voice to a self-conscious yet firm political stance.
Certain aspects of Osborn’s poetry distance it from the “high culture” tradition of urban poetics engaged by Bowering and especially Robertson and Quartermain, and yet, in important ways Osborn returns to and re-envisioned this tradition. Among the four poets whose work I discuss in this chapter, Osborn comes closest to taking on the role of the poet as urban hero gathering and telling the marginalized stories of the streets. But because of his particular background and relationship to his home neighbourhood, he invests this role with new and different meaning, cultivating a version of urbanity informed by intense emotional intimacy (though still also by an awareness of alterity) and a sense of profound responsibility toward other members of his community. And, though he certainly displays a considerable amount of angst and frustration, Osborn shows much less trepidation in taking on the role of the poet as spiritual authority—of the consecrated writer investigating and sanctioning particular social values—that Paul Bénichou suggests emerged with the advent of modernity in France, and that was taken up, in different ways, by the Parisian writers who lay the foundation for urban poetic practice (though this dimension of artistic practice is often elided or dismissed by Bourdieu in his study of the period).

However, as a spokesperson and intermediary, Osborn is always looking to displace his authority and confer it on those for whom he speaks. In his poem “A Binner is a True Spiritual Guide” (dedicated to locally well-known binner Carl MacDonald), Osborn (like Quartermain) invites readers to look to and reconsider the figure of the ragpicker, with whom the poet has enjoyed a long companionship in the urban imaginary, thanks in particular to Baudelaire and Benjamin. Osborn writes:

a binner approaching a bin
anticipates
something valuable
will be found
among the discarded
rejected
trash and useless
objects
of our society

a binner is not afraid
to be seen
in deep and intimate relationship
with what others
avoid
like the plague. (Signs 23)

The poem echoes Baudelaire’s prose commentary on the rag-picker, which Benjamin
cites in Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism: “Here we have a
man who has to gather the day’s refuse in the capital city. Everything that the big city
threw away, everything it lost, everything it despised, everything it crushed underfoot, he
catalogues and collects” (Baudelaire, qtd. in Benjamin 79). Connecting the notion of
redemptive urban practice identified by Baudelaire to the contemporary activity of
binning, Osborn foregrounds, in his characteristically spare verse, the ethical relation that
he finds at the heart of this practice, which is so often conceived or interpreted primarily
for its aesthetic or economic value. Moreover, in his simple observation that “a binner
sees possibility / where others / see the need / for a clean-up campaign,” he encourages
readers to rethink what is meant by the idea of an urban aesthetic (Osborn, Signs 23).

Though the binner is, strictly speaking, a collector/“redeemer” of objects, Osborn implies
an extension of the binner’s approach to relations between people; his poem argues in
favour of a deep and unflinching humanism. Osborn asks us to rethink how we envision
the things, spaces, and beings of the city, linking this seeing not to a rigid or puritanical
morality, nor to a disengaged experience of aesthetic form, nor to the lens of profit and
exchange value, but rather, first and foremost, to an awareness of intrinsic life or potentiality—an awareness that can only be fostered, to borrow Levinas’s words, through a relation of humility and unequivocal sincerity.

To conclude, I’d like to turn to a significant insight of Ley’s on the role of the artist in processes of urban restructuring. Ley reminds us that “to blame artists for the gentrification that so often follows their residency in a district is a misplaced charge; it is the societal valorisation of the cultural competencies of the artist that brings followers richer in economic capital” (“Artists” 2541; emphasis added). In this chapter, I have proposed that we rethink what it is that we valorize about urban artists and their work, suggesting—following scholars such as Dunn and Bénichou—that our tendency to perceive the artist and artwork through the frames of cultural and economic capital sometimes blinds us to the inherent “life” of art and artistic practice. In an era in which creativity is increasingly valued as an economic driver or catalyst in the growth of cities—and in which economist Pier Luigi Sacco has written that Vancouver must continue to strengthen its “cultural identity” with the goal of “transform[ing] its good knowledge-related fundamentals into a form of strong competitive advantage” (5)—I think it particularly important to foreground this other dimension of value, and reconnect our thinking about creativity to the notion of an art of living in the city. From Bowering’s playfully critical nostalgia and Robertson’s “illegitimate, superfluous” pleasure, to Quartermain’s earnest purposefulness and Osborn’s intense emotional commitment, each of the poets discussed in this chapter approaches the project of urban living differently. All, however, endeavour to resist the reduction of the arts of urbanity to trend or “lifestyle,” entering instead into productive critical dialogue with a long tradition of
urban description and artistic practice, and advancing the idea that cultivating a poetic mode of attention can help foster ethical relations in city spaces.
Chapter Four:
Producing, Consuming, and Mediating Culture in the City

The creation of this strategic cultural plan signals that the City of Vancouver has made support of and investment in the creative sector a priority. The economic impact—the return on every dollar spent—of support of the arts, culture, and cultural tourism has been well documented. It must be noted, however, that the intrinsic value of the arts and culture cannot and should not be underestimated. Arts and culture are prerequisites for healthy individuals, neighbourhoods, communities, and society. . . . Whether an individual is a practicing artist, an audience member, volunteer for a cultural institution or a worker in the cultural sector, he or she is part of building community and contributing to the economic and social health of the City.

- Creative City Task Force, Culture Plan 2008 - 2018

The point would be to offer a vision of hope and possibility that doesn’t foreclose despair and exhaustion.

- Ann Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings”

While in Chapter Three I brought the work of Vancouver-based writers to the debate about the presence and practices of artists in urban landscapes, in this final chapter I consider what Vancouver literary texts might contribute to the related, but broader conversation about the role of the cultural economy in urban change. Artists do not disappear from this conversation, but they make up only one component of the much larger “cultural sector” of workers. Richard Florida has popularized the notion of a cool, trendy, fairly wealthy creative elite taking on an increasingly powerful socioeconomic role in particular cities; however, workers in the cultural sector—which includes artisanal and technological production, small-scale craft work and large-scale manufacturing,
creative and information services, and entertainment—in fact make up a much more complex demographic, ranging from managers, professionals, and successful entrepreneurs to workers employed in a variety of unstable or low-income jobs (Scott, “Cultural Economy” 310; Scott, Cultural Economy of Cities 2-3; Zukin, Cultures 12-13; Zukin, Landscapes 206). This diverse sector has emerged as an area of interest for urban planners and policy makers because “culture” has come to be recognized as both an economic driver and as a pillar of sustainable city making. Workers in this sector bring cultural, social, and varying degrees of economic capital to the city; they tend to be invested in urbanity as a lifestyle or as an art and ethic of living; and many possess skills and tools for cultivating or communicating social values, customs, and ideas to the broader urban community.

In Vancouver, geographer Thomas Hutton has observed what he tentatively identifies as a “cultural turn” in the local economy, which has recently seen significant growth in a range of cultural services and industries (New Economy 243). Similarly, economist Pier Luigi Sacco has highlighted what he describes as Vancouver’s “vital

168 In their introduction to a recent collection of essays on the cultural economy, Helmut K. Anheier and Yudhishthir Raj Isar explain that “the notion of ‘cultural economy’ is umbrella-like, used to embrace a range of different understandings” (3). As a working definition, they propose that the term describes “an economic system for the production, distribution and consumption of cultural goods and services through market as well as non-market mechanisms” (3). To define the term “cultural” more specifically, they turn to geographer Allen J. Scott, a chief contributor to the scholarship on the cultural economy; for Scott, “cultural” includes, in this context, “all those forms of economic activity producing outputs with significant aesthetic or semiotic content, or what [Pierre] Bourdieu (1971) has characterized as symbolic outputs” (Scott, “Cultural Economy” 307).

169 As Sharon Zukin notes, culture supplies the basic information—including symbols, patterns, and meaning—for nearly all the service industries. . . . The sociologist Daniel Bell used to tell a joke about a circus employee whose job it was to follow the elephant around and clean up after it; when asked, she said her job was in “the entertainment business.” Today, we might say she was in “the culture industry.” Culture is intertwined with capital and identity in the city’s production systems. (Cultures 11-12)

170 As is evident in Nancy Duxbury and Eileen Gillette’s literature review on the topic, “culture” tends to be understood slightly more narrowly in scholarship in the sustainability field, usually referring to art/craft, pedagogical, and community building practices and projects focused on the cultivation or communication of sustainability-oriented ideas and values.
cultural environment in practically every field of interest,” though Sacco emphasizes that the city’s cultural economy is still embryonic (5). Vancouver’s municipal government, moreover, has demonstrated its continuing interest in nurturing the local cultural economy, having commissioned a “Creative City Task Force” (comprised of city councillors and representatives from the cultural sector) and then approved a 10-year Culture Plan, which—as my epigraph highlights—emphasizes both the “economic impact” and “intrinsic value” of arts and culture in the city (Creative City Task Force 4).

While such a plan is evidently very much committed to the idea that strengthening the cultural economy is “good” for Vancouver, some commentators are continuing to grapple with what a growing cultural sector might mean for the city, and are questioning what constitutes a “vital cultural environment.” In a recent essay, for instance, Vancouver-based critic and writer Jeff Derksen worries that the privileging of an “economic imperative” in contemporary cultural policy might “run some of the more resilient forms of culture out of town”; using the example of Vancouver’s artist-run centres, he argues that some forms of cultural practice are “based exactly on a strategic separation of the artistic (or creative) from . . . the economic”—a separation that opens up a space for the critique of economic processes and power (Derksen, “How High”). In proposing to foster both “economic” and “intrinsic” forms of culture, Vancouver’s Culture Plan seems to avoid the narrowing of creativity and culture that concerns Derksen; however, it does not acknowledge the possibility that “economic” and “intrinsic” imperatives might, at times, conflict. Moreover, given the need for arts and culture advocates to establish and maintain fairly widespread support for their projects, policy documents such as the Culture Plan as well as the broader public discourse about
the “intrinsic” qualities of culture tend to elide some of the more difficult and at times highly politicized aspects of cultural work.

With these concerns about contemporary conceptualizations of culture in mind, my aim in this chapter is to reconsider what it means to engage in cultural work in the city. To do so, I bring to the conversation literary representations of cultural work by Timothy Taylor, Nancy Lee, and Lee Maracle. Each of these Vancouver-based writers explores and negotiates two overlapping conceptualizations of “culture” in their texts—culture as mode and object of production and consumption in a field of economic exchange, and culture as a space for articulating and exploring aesthetics, ethics, affect, and politics (in other words, what the literary critic Carlo Rotella describes as the “statistically unmeasurable processes of culture” [87], which Vancouver’s Culture Plan clearly aims to nurture, but which are difficult to capture and assess). I have chosen to look at Taylor’s novel Stanley Park (2001), Lee’s short story collection Dead Girls (2002), and Maracle’s short story “Goodbye, Snauq” (2004) because these three texts offer productive representations of a range of cultural practitioners—restaurateurs and reviewers, librarians and journalists, teachers and students; in these representations, the texts present opportunities to consider how and why cultural practitioners engage in, and in some cases prevent or limit, the important work of community building. They also allow me to examine specific ways in which the efforts of these workers unfold in, and contribute to the shaping of, urban landscapes.

Importantly, all three authors specifically investigate the role of cultural practitioners in mediating community crises, each choosing to explore this work in relation to real events. Taylor takes on an incident that has a degree of cult status in local
history—the murder of two children in Stanley Park—using it as a symbolic example of the failure to mediate cultural trauma in the city; Taylor also situates his story in relation to the large-scale and entrenched crises of homelessness and poverty in contemporary Vancouver. Lee and Maracle similarly take on large, sensitive issues, each attending to traumatic “events” (and I use this term in a temporally expansive sense) that have reverberated particularly intensely in Vancouver. Maracle addresses the history of colonial oppression and appropriation that is at the foundation of Vancouver’s formation as a city and community, while Lee responds to the disappearance and murder of women from (or connected to) Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. In introducing the important issues of community crisis and healing to the conversation about cultural work, all three writers remind us that perhaps the most significant value indicator of a culturally vibrant city is a widespread sense of implication (affective, ethical, political) in relation to people and place (Rotella 87). They also remind us that such vibrancy is only sustained and extended if citizens become lay cultural mediators, taking up the project of understanding and realizing urban community.

In their introduction to the essay collection Practicing Culture, Craig Calhoun and Richard Sennett observe that culture

is made and remade in almost imperceptible small ways as well as occasional large bursts of innovation. . . . [It] is an always incomplete, never entirely systematic weaving of achievements together. . . . It is projects by which people try to persuade, entertain, lead, deceive, and arouse the passions of others. Because it exists in projects, it exists also in struggles—to get ahead, to redefine beauty, to promote morality, to resist ideological hegemony. Culture, as E. P.
Thompson famously said of class, is a “happening.” It isn’t just there. It doesn’t last forever. But neither is it altogether subject to our conscious control and creative choices. (7)

In this chapter, I emphasize and explore the idea that the creation of culture is an incomplete, ongoing, incremental process, and reflect on the difficulty of capturing and appraising this process. I focus on individual efforts to produce, consume, and mediate culture in ways that foster the greater social good, considering various factors that contribute to the failure or success of such efforts. And, finally, I suggest that it is important to think carefully about what we term cultural “achievements,” and how we assign value to existing and emerging landscapes of cultural consumption and production in the city.

“Creative Virtue”? : Timothy Taylor’s Stanley Park

One of the most well-known and widely read literary explorations of Vancouver’s cultural economy is Timothy Taylor’s Stanley Park, a novel about a young chef trying to establish a restaurant in the city. More than any of the other texts that I examine, Stanley Park might be said to have contributed to the “shaping” of the conversation about local culture and community: the novel, a Giller Prize nominee, has been featured in popular forums such as the CBC Canada Reads competition and the Vancouver Public Library’s One Book, One Vancouver citywide book club, giving it comparative prominence in the local and national imaginary. Taylor displayed keen marketing instincts in his decisions to explore the “trendy” topic of restaurants and food, and to set his novel in Stanley Park, perhaps the most well-branded leisure and tourist space in Vancouver. But what makes
*Stanley Park* more than simply a strategically targeted book is the way that it delves into major issues in the local conversation about culture, exploring connections between cultivated taste, consumption and production, career advancement in a creative field, and polarized social relations in a globally inflected urban economy. As I read it, *Stanley Park* encourages readers to ask what it means to do cultural work that produces positive change in Vancouver—change that, perhaps, contributes to economic growth, but also, just as importantly, to the social and environmental sustainability of the city-region.

While the cultural sector is often championed as a key to the economic and social health of cities, some researchers have found that growth in this sector has been connected to troubling “countervailing trends” (Scott, “Creative Cities” 12). Like the overlapping services sector (see Sassen), the cultural economy tends to generate significant numbers of unstable, low-pay jobs, and thus linked to the widening gap between rich and poor, and to the increasing marginalization of low-income city residents, who are often displaced from gentrifying areas (Scott, “Creative Cities” 12). In focusing on restaurants and cultures of taste in the city, Taylor specifically engages this dimension of the cultural economy debate: as sociologist Sharon Zukin has observed, restaurants often function as “outposts and mediators of gentrification in specific neighborhoods,” playing a key role in establishing “a new organization of consumption based on cultural capital” in previously marginalized or undervalued urban spaces (*Landscapes* 195, 202). Zukin argues that the presence of innovative new restaurants or more traditional upscale establishments such as the “French” bistro draws middle- and upper-class consumers into previously ignored neighbourhoods, and encourages a “re-viewing” of the area with what Zukin describes as an “inquiring and aesthetic . . .
attitude” (204, 209). Zukin terms such consumer behavior reflexive consumption, using the word “reflexivity” primarily to describe practices of aesthetic interpretation, and generally eliding the possibility of an *ethical* dimension to consumer practices. Zukin finds it sadly ironic that while many city dwellers have trouble covering basic food expenses, “more affluent, choice-ridden consumers are increasingly preoccupied by new means of consumption—and new anxieties about how to choose between them” (*Landscapes* 202).

In *Stanley Park*, Taylor clearly focuses on the anxieties of reflexive consumption, and also of production—for, as Zukin reminds us, cultural workers both produce and consume new urban landscapes of cultural consumption (*Landscapes* 201-02). In concentrating on gastronomy and entrepreneurship in his novel, Taylor projects a decidedly middle- and upper-class target audience of readers invested in fairly commodified urban lifestyles. But while Taylor codes his text in relation to particular taste cultures, he also attempts to unsettle these class-based codes, and encourages his readers to question what adherence to them means. For Taylor, the interpretive activity of reflexive consumption is not only driven by the desire for social distinction; it is also informed by ethical inquiry, by a sense of investment in the greater social and environmental good. It is important to acknowledge that Taylor’s novel does not operate

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171 Zukin goes on to situate the relationship between new cuisine and gentrification within the context of globalizing economies:

Both gentrification and new cuisine represent a new organization of consumption that developed during the 1970s. Both imply a new landscape of economic power based, in turn, on changing patterns of capital investment and new relations between investment, production, and consumption. A new international division of labor, greater trade and more travel, the abstraction or removal of traditional activities from local communities: all these consequences of the global economy make available a new range and quality of experience. At the same time, the disappearance of old sources of regional and local identity impoverishes others, leading to a new pursuit of authenticity and individualization. (*Landscapes* 214)

172 While Zukin tends to overlook this dimension of consumer behaviour in her studies of gentrification, she does explore it more specifically in a later study on shopping, *Point of Purchase*, in which she offers a fairly sympathetic portrait of reflexive consumption as an ethical practice and community-building activity.
in the realm of radical political critique: it does not, for example, call for a complete
rethinking of global, regional, and local systems of food distribution, which at present are
environmentally unsustainable and leave many people hungry while providing many
others with more than they need. However, Taylor does not unquestioningly celebrate
dominant attitudes toward taste and food consumption and production either. Instead, he
opens such attitudes to examination, questioning both their social and environmental
sustainability. In other words, he enthusiastically takes part in, but also carefully
interrogates, the game of social distinction that is so integral to the development of new
landscapes of cultural consumption in cities.

A more detailed examination of the novel’s central narrative can help illuminate
this interplay of engagement and interrogation in *Stanley Park.* Taylor’s protagonist,
Jeremy Papier, is a young chef who has trained and apprenticed in France, and who
decides, upon returning to his home city of Vancouver, to establish a French-influenced
restaurant called The Monkey’s Paw Bistro. Inspired by his immersion in regional French
cooking and by his French mentor’s dedication to serving a special weekly meal to local
farmers and townspeople, Jeremy conceives of The Monkey’s Paw as a celebration of
“[h]igh-end urban rubber-boot food” (48), offering what he describes as “the simplest,
most direct and local cooking possible” (48). But that phrase—“high-end urban rubber-
boot food”—articulates the conflict at the heart of Jeremy’s venture. It is informed by his
idealistic desire to bridge class divisions and make food for the diverse array of people
who populate his downtown Vancouver neighbourhood (52), regardless of income or
social status. However, the strictures of the market, as well as his dedication to the
aesthetic standards of his profession, push him to produce dishes that impress so-called
“foodies” and that attract diners with deep pockets in order to stay afloat. Jeremy has, after all, been trained in a trade and is competing in a market that require nightly exhibitions of cultivated taste. He is driven to meet market standards and the standards of culinary value by purchasing high-end goods and developing as his signature style an extremely selective and expensive conceptualization of what one food critic in the novel terms “local bounty.” This particular culinary formula leaves Jeremy little room to manoeuvre financially, and causes him to neglect, to some extent, his goal of to catering to the “rubber boot” segment of his clientele.

Eventually, Jeremy gets into deep debt and turns for help to Dante Beale, the owner of a Starbucks-style chain of coffeehouses. Dante buys Jeremy out and exchanges the young chef’s idealistic, if naïve, culinary ambitions for a much less earnest vision of market-researched culinary luxury, establishing a restaurant named Gerriamo’s in The Monkey’s Paw’s place. But throughout the period in which Jeremy increasingly sacrifices control of his culinary and entrepreneurial endeavours to Dante, he also spends more time in Vancouver’s Stanley Park, where his father, a professor of anthropology, is collecting the stories of homeless people who shelter there. Jeremy starts to cook for the park residents, learning how to make a very different brand of “urban rubber boot food,” and gradually rethinking his culinary ethic. As chef of The Monkey’s Paw, Jeremy was rather puritanical in his devotion to his selective version of the “local”—prawns from the Queen Charlotte Islands, lamb grown on Salt Spring Island, and so forth. But this vision is unsettled by his discovery, in the park, of a cuisine and economy shaped by much more limited means of procurement, combining everything from starlings caught in makeshift traps to found packets of salt.
For the opening night of Gerriamo’s, Jeremy decides to secretly use ingredients from the park—including raccoon and squirrel—in the dishes he serves to the restaurant’s upscale clientele. The meal is a performative challenge to the commodified cosmopolitanism celebrated in Gerriamo’s trendy menu, and at the same time it is also a critical response to Jeremy’s own previous celebration of a select and elitist version of “local bounty” at The Monkey’s Paw. Through this foray into “taste-jacking” (391), which is soon revealed by a particularly nosy food critic, Jeremy highlights and questions the consumption practices, socioeconomic distinctions, and polarized class system that his work as a chef has relied upon. The meal functions as a statement about the failure to make ethical inquiry an integral dimension of reflexive consumption, and also articulates Jeremy’s own deepening desire to address issues of social justice and environmental sustainability through his cooking. He succeeds, at least for an impactful moment, in pushing the diners into embodied proximity with the community he has come to know in the park, calling for a more complicated understanding of local food systems and ecologies, and telling a story about interrelationality and interdependency largely disregarded by people like Dante Beale, whose wealth, Jeremy at one point notes, has apparently enabled “liberat[ion] from all human constraints” (310).

Jeremy is, unsurprisingly, fired after this evening of “taste-jacking,” and as the novel closes he begins a new, independent restaurant project. With inspiration and advice from acquaintances established through the park community, Jeremy opens The Food Caboose, a restaurant that is an exercise in relative smallness and humility. Operating apparently without waitstaff or kitchen help (except for his girlfriend, who sometimes lends a hand on her day off), he serves the same reasonably priced, fresh-sheet meal to a
single nightly seating of 24 people. Jeremy does not offer raccoon or starling at The Food Caboose—he basically offers a slightly simpler version of The Monkey’s Paw menu—but he does articulate through his cooking and dining space what has become, over the course of the novel, a more carefully considered ethic. Moreover, Taylor continues to emphasize, in his depiction of this final restaurant, that the economic environment in which Jeremy operates does not properly accommodate the work that he does. To make ends meet, Jeremy runs his new restaurant outside the law as a kind of speakeasy, with no licenses or street signage. He relies on what he refers to as “a Byzantine reservation system” (420): the initial guests are friends of the restaurant, who then refer other friends; to dine at The Food Caboose, one must have a reference. The hope is that the reference system will supply guests who both appreciate and respect the terms of the particular dining experience that The Food Caboose offers.

Still, though Jeremy has evidently assessed and reconceptualized his culinary and entrepreneurial vision, his final restaurant venture remains troubling. In fact, a number of concerns about his particular brand of anarchist entrepreneurship might be raised, but what concern me most are the reservation system and the restaurant’s rather problematic relationship to local space. There is, after all, no guarantee that the reservation system will foster relations across socioeconomic lines—indeed, it will likely end up merely producing a mirror image of the elitist socioeconomic network that it apparently aims to subvert. Moreover, situated as it is on the edges of two long-marginalized Vancouver neighbourhoods, the Downtown Eastside and Chinatown, the restaurant seems to hold very real potential for functioning as an outpost for gentrification, as Jeff Derksen has suggested in his particularly stringent critique of the novel (see Derksen, “National
Literatures”). The Food Caboose might not be visible at street level, but the restaurant still brings in clientele who can afford the reasonably priced—but certainly not cut-rate—meals that Jeremy crafts, and thus plays a part in creating a new landscape of consumption in the neighbourhood. Also, Jeremy’s choice of an abandoned old building as the site for the Food Caboose suggests the attitude that the neighbourhood is “terra nullius, devoid of people who could have any claim to that space”—an attitude that (as I noted in my discussion of Bud Osborn in Chapter Three) researchers have linked to gentrification (Blomley, *Unsettling* 90).

That said, one of the strengths of *Stanley Park* is that the novel as a whole seems to foster such ambivalent responses as my own. Perhaps most significantly, Taylor encourages readers to question their identification with—even their trust of—his protagonist, as Travis Mason has noted in his discussion of Jeremy’s rather egocentric, and certainly skewed, interpretations of some of the well-known paintings that appear in the novel (Mason 14-18). Mason also observes that while Jeremy’s negotiations of his “relations to other [people], to political ideologies, and to a sense of place” may become increasingly sensitive and nuanced over the course of the text, they remain necessarily limited and contradictory (29). In a novel that seems centrally focused on the honing of reflexive attitudes toward cultural consumption, Taylor creates a complicated, flawed protagonist whom readers are invited both to learn from and to question, drawing on their own interpretive abilities to assess his ideas and actions.

Considering Taylor’s novel in relation to Vancouver-based planning and policy research, I find it particularly productive to read *Stanley Park* alongside Pier Luigi Sacco’s recent report “An Approach to Cultural Policy in Vancouver,” in which Sacco
explores strategies for enhancing the city’s cultural economy. Choosing the food and wine industry as a chief example in his discussion, Sacco assumes some of the attitudes toward cultural consumption that scholars such as Zukin and Derksen critique in their discussions of socioeconomic polarization and gentrification. He argues that a thriving local cultural economy relies on significant levels of connoisseurship and other forms of cultural competence among a wide cross-section of the local population. “Only if I acquire the proper capabilities and if I integrate them into my behavioural scheme harmoniously,” writes Sacco,

will I be able to give the experience of quality wine tasting the right meaning, which I could also recognize in terms of a willingness to pay for a given bottle. And only if the pool of prospective buyers has enough such capacity will wine producers guarantee themselves viable profit margins to afford to invest in quality R&D activities.

If all this happens, we witness the onset of a virtuous circle of talent and competence: that of buyers paving the way to an increased competence of producers and sellers, which in turn fosters that of buyers, and so on. The virtuous circle attracts new consumers, and lures new talent into pouring their creative virtue into this specific field which is rewarding both economically and professionally. (6)

Taylor does not completely undermine this idea in Stanley Park; however, the novel does function as a challenge and a corrective, foregrounding ways in which circles of competence can become less than virtuous. Sacco emphasizes the need to develop what

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173 Sacco’s report was commissioned by Vancity Credit Union and championed by Vancity board member Bob Williams, a former planner and politician.
he describes as “a richer menu of choice” in the local landscape of cultural consumption, a transformation that, in his view, would amount to the expansion of personal freedom for consumers (7). Taylor, on the other hand, asks just what “cultural richness” should mean, and which individuals are actually included in this transformation of the cultural landscape. *Stanley Park* does not offer easy answers to these questions—indeed, in my own anecdotal assessment, it seems to leave readers unsettled and anxious. However, it does highlight the incompatibility of the social, environmental, and economic objectives of some cultural work, and it encourages city dwellers faced with a growing “menu of choice” to become more ethically engaged reflexive consumers.

To be fair to Sacco, I would speculate that an ethical dimension is simply assumed—rather than ignored—in his suggestion that consumers need to acquire the “capabilities and . . . behavioural scheme” necessary to help nurture a rich and thriving local food and wine industry. After all, Sacco, an Italian, is most intimately familiar with a culinary tradition similar to the one in which Jeremy was immersed during his training in France, where the notion of eating regionally is integrated into the culture, has a longer and more richly articulated history, and is intrinsically connected to ethical concepts such as the care of the self and the enhancement of the social good. But while both Sacco and Jeremy dream of bringing a European culinary tradition and sensibility to Vancouver, Sacco seems to imagine an uncomplicated synthesis, whereas Taylor explores his protagonist’s struggles to transition to a very different landscape of cultural consumption and production. Taylor recognizes, and seems responsive to, the fact that he is writing

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174 This does not mean that French and Italian regional culinary traditions are not open to ethical and political critique—indeed, they most certainly are. Culinary cultures in these countries are, like those in North America, increasingly impacted by globalization, and face similar challenges of equitable participation and distribution.
about a city where the concept of eating and cooking regionally is not as deeply rooted in the local culture (or the local economy), and where, importantly, aspects of western European culture tend to function symbolically as markers of social status. “French” and “Italian” cuisine mean something different in Vancouver (and in North America more generally) than they do in France or Italy: cooking that falls under one of these labels (or that includes elements of one of these culinary traditions as part of a culinary fusion) tends to be more closely linked to notions of social distinction, and more loosely associated with (though not necessarily divorced from) the ethical principles that emerged as part of the tradition in its home context.

Jeremy’s struggle to establish a new regional culinary tradition (a tradition informed by his experience in France, but shaped by local food markets and customs) is exacerbated by the fact that Vancouver, like most contemporary urban centres, relies heavily on global food markets, and has only a fairly rudimentary local system of food production and distribution. Taylor offers, through his protagonist’s attendance at an event called Seasons of Local Splendour, a rather cynical send-up of the fetishization of local production that can occur as a result of this fractured relationship between consumption and production. Seasons of Local Splendour brings chefs and vintners together at a Fraser Valley farm to serve their regionally sourced offerings, and encourages browsing visitors, nibbling on crudités, “to have [their] own personal epiphany about the relationship between working farms and the food that [they] eat.”

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175 Of course, each of these labels registers differently, and carries a distinct (and ever-shifting) set of connotations.
176 Thank you to Richard Cavell, whose comments on an early version of this chapter helped me think through this problem.
177 Taylor has noted that Seasons of Local Splendour is based on Feast of Fields, an actual, well-known harvest event held in the Vancouver city-region each year (“Foodville” 26).
(258). Taylor is not entirely critical of this kind of event: his protagonist acknowledges that it has something important to teach, though it does so in a rather contrived manner (258). But his satirical treatment of the event is typical of his approach to examples of what Zukin would term the mediation of culture. In Stanley Park, Taylor repeatedly uses satire and caricature to recast often transparent, unnoticed spaces and acts of cultural mediation as open to interrogation and contestation, inviting readers to think about how experience is framed in the local landscape of cultural consumption and production.

For Zukin, cultural mediation—especially by members of what she calls “the critical infrastructure for cultural production and consumption” (Landscapes 201)—plays a key role in contemporary urban change. Cultural mediators help narrow the gap between systems of consumption and production by providing information about products available for consumption, and thus influence the choices consumers make about what, where, and how to consume. Zukin explains further:

increasingly selective consumption is more broadly mediated by those who communicate information about new consumer goods and services. These men and women perform several important social roles. . . . They staff the new service careers in publishing, restaurants, advertising, and cultural institutions on which [the city centre’s] economy depends. And by means of their creative products—especially their reviews—they provide an aesthetic critique that facilitates upscale consumption. They supply the critical infrastructure for downtown’s transformation. (202)

In Stanley Park, Taylor offers a decidedly satirical portrait of Zukin’s favourite example of a cultural mediator, the restaurant reviewer, inviting readers to chuckle at—but also to
think critically about—the role that this figure plays in shaping the city’s emerging cultural landscape. We only encounter Taylor’s first restaurant reviewer, “the alliterative Anya Dickie” (as Jeremy’s father, the Professor, describes her [28]), through the “purple prose” (13) that she uses to sing the praises of The Monkey’s Paw Bistro. Still, even as Taylor foregrounds Dickie’s overly enthusiastic style and encourages readers to laugh at it along with Jeremy and his father, he also highlights the reviewer’s mediating power, especially her ability to influence even highly critical readers. After all, not only has Dickie’s assessment of The Monkey’s Paw—under the headline “Crosstown Celebrates Local Beverages and Bounty” (13)—raised the profile of the restaurant in the local culinary landscape (“That review helped us,” Jeremy admits to his father. “We were in deep trouble there for a while” [28]), but it also seems, to some extent, to sway the Professor in his opinion of The Monkey’s Paw: “Local bounty’ is rather good,” he remarks reflectively as he chats with his son. He does not buy into the rhetoric of the review wholesale, but the expressive language does its work, staying with him as he develops his own response to Jeremy’s project.

Later in the novel, Taylor introduces the hyper-trendy food magazine *Gud Tayste* and writer Kiwi Frederique, enhancing his portrayal of the restaurant review and reviewer as at once ridiculous and relatively powerful. Jeremy, sous-chef Jules, and waitress Zeena are equally amused and thrilled when (thanks to Dante’s business connections) *Gud Tayste* runs a small, error-ridden, but nevertheless catchy blurb about The Monkey’s Paw:

“New from the Rim,” it read. There were entries from Los Angeles and San Francisco.
“‘Vancouver!’” Zeena squealed, then read aloud, fending off Jeremy, who was reaching for the magazine. “‘And we’re not talking Vancouver, Washington. The one north of 49. The Monkey’s Paw Bistro. French Chef Jeremy Papier hacks his homeland cuisine with ingredients drawn from the rain forest around him. The scene: groovy, zippie, raver, addict, beemer. Good at: late. Good on: gin.’”

Jeremy finally got the magazine from Zeena. “‘French?’ he said. “‘Drawn from the rain forest’?”

“That would be the canned peaches they’re referring to,” Jules smirked.

(180-81)

The *Gud Tayste* blurb makes clear the role that the critical infrastructure plays in “re-viewing” (as Zukin puts it) the cultural landscape of a particular neighbourhood—although in this instance, the review collapses neighbourhood and city, written as it is for a primarily international audience.

Dante, intent on attracting this target audience of elite, cosmopolitan consumers to Gerriamo’s, considers it a coup when he arranges to bring in Kiwi Frederique for the restaurant’s opening night. In the interview that Kiwi then conducts with Jeremy (362-65), Taylor highlights the ways in which both chef and reviewer give food a language—in the case of *Gud Tayste*, a hip, persuasive idiom—translating a meal into an upscale cultural product, and placing it in the contexts of culinary tradition and innovation (by this point, however, Jeremy is only playing along, hiding the fact that the items on his menu will be made with raccoon, squirrel, and other ingredients from Stanley Park). Taylor’s portrayal of Kiwi foregrounds the problematic role of the reviewer, or at least this kind of reviewer. Though many of the diners at Gerriamo’s have some degree of
culinary knowledge, Kiwi is the professional cultural mediator—the expert assigned the
task of observing and “translating” Jeremy’s creations. However, her primary job is not
to act as an “honest broker” (to borrow a phrase favoured by Zukin [see Point of
Purchase]), but rather to speak to a consumer’s desire for pleasure and, especially, for a
particular aesthetic experience. Ultimately, Kiwi is the character with the expertise,
skills, and inquisitive drive to discover Jeremy’s opening night prank, but her response is
telling: she reacts with fascination, and excitedly begins translating the prank into an
idiom suitable for the _Gud Tayste_ target market: “[Jeremy] was apparently doing
something called meta-hacking. For reasons that were not clear to [Jeremy’s friend] Olli,
Kiwi was suddenly using a lot of _Wired_ ‘Jargon Watch’ words” (391). Taylor’s satire
of the restaurant reviewer in _Stanley Park_ seems largely fueled by an awareness of, and a
degree of anxiety about, the complicated positioning and allegiances of this cultural
mediator. Writing about localized urban experience in the context of a globalized
economy, Taylor highlights and interrogates the power of this figure, whose emergence
and prominence is intrinsically linked to the distance between consumers and the
products they consume.

But if such a strain of anxiety runs through _Stanley Park_, the novel also tries to
remind readers that, as reflexive consumers, they are themselves members of the critical
infrastructure, and can begin to participate in the work of cultural mediation in a more
engaged way. Indeed, the Professor attempts to teach his son this lesson over the course

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178 In an article on food reviewing for the literary arts magazine _Vancouver Review_, Taylor waxes nostalgic
about what he describes as an “era before food passed beyond objectivity and subjectivity and moved over
into the wholly mimetic realm, the fun-house mirrored hall of fashion” (25).
179 Olli’s response to Kiwi is also telling. He demonstrates an awareness of the rhetorical construction of
restaurant reviews, and seems not entirely persuaded by Kiwi’s description of Jeremy’s performance.
However, despite his apparent uncertainty, he tentatively accepts the description (revealing his reliance on
Kiwi as a professional mediator) rather than attempting to formulate his own.
of their meetings in the park. In developing his portrayal of the Professor, another professional cultural mediator, Taylor again draws on caricature, but his treatment, in this instance, is gentler. Generally suspicious of ideological fervor, Taylor endows the Professor with exaggerated earnestness, lightly poking fun at him without dismissing his approach or his project. The Professor perhaps receives this kinder treatment because he shares with Taylor, the novelist, an appreciation for story (Ricou, *Salal* 118), and perhaps also because his power as a cultural mediator is somewhat qualified. Though participatory fieldwork is common in anthropology, the Professor engages in what Taylor represents as an extreme (and very long-term) form of participatory practice, and takes a rather unorthodox approach to his work that seems to have made him a fringe figure in his profession. We learn early in the novel that he is having trouble persuading the “prestigious if aging” publishing house Sopwith Hill to accept his new book project about the park residents, apparently because the Professor is not interested in proposing and developing a project that fits within the typical paradigms of his academic field (14). Instead, he wants simply to immerse himself deeper and deeper in the social life of the park, carefully listening and observing. He articulates his project, to Jeremy, not through a set of clearly delineated objectives, but rather through the song of the famous fictional madman Tom O’Bedlam:

> With an hoste of furious fancies  
> Whereof I am commander,  
> With a burning speare, and a horse of air,  
> To the wildernesse I wander. (24)

180 Laurie Ricou describes Taylor’s treatment of the Professor’s project as a “burlesque of . . . an academic trend” (*Salal* 118).
“The stories,” the Professor remarks as he further elucidates his unconventional approach to Jeremy, “don’t come all at once, shrink-wrapped with a complimentary bookmark” (24).

Though he enjoys an upper-middle-class income and keeps a home in Vancouver’s affluent Point Grey neighbourhood, the Professor has physically and ideologically distanced himself from the centres of socioeconomic power in the novel. (This decision to remove himself takes symbolic form in the chess game that he plays with Dante: the successful businessman wins, but is left speculating as to whether the Professor has thrown the game [415].) As a cultural mediator, the Professor embodies, and tries to teach to his son, a critical stance toward dominant narratives and toward the socioeconomic games (such as the publishing game, or the restaurant game) that they help structure. In modeling an approach to story and place, he advocates an ethic of attentive listening that he sees as intrinsically connected to the enhancement of the social good. Importantly, the approach is an active rather than a passive one: it involves entering into, engaging with, and learning about the community in question, even as it also involves sitting back and listening to the community’s diverse (and, in most cases, marginalized) stories.

A teacher and father, the Professor attempts to impart the practice of active, attentive engagement—which has become, for him, a way of life—to his son. He assigns Jeremy a research task, directing him to the Central Branch of the Vancouver Public Library, and requesting that he seek out files concerning the 50-year-old, unsolved case of two children murdered in Stanley Park, which Taylor’s characters refer to in shorthand as “Babes in the Wood.” It turns out that the Professor has already seen the information
on file—in fact, he has added his own notes to the Babes in the Wood dossier. His goal seems to be not to have the research done for him, but rather to encourage his son to cultivate his own abilities as a cultural mediator, pushing him to engage in attentive research so as to develop a deeper and more complicated understanding of his home community, and of the roles he might play within it.

The Professor is, in a sense, another version of Meredith Quartermain’s dutiful community dweller, whose researches enable informed participation in city life (see Chapter Three). Interestingly, the Vancouver Public Library plays an important role in both Quartermain’s and Taylor’s work. As I noted in my discussion of “Backwards from Pender Lake,” a poem describing a walk home from the library, Quartermain links the library books packed in her knapsack to the burden of civic responsibility: her trips to the library (and other institutions such as the city museum and archives) and the research she performs there contribute to her sense of rootedness in a home community, and help orient her engagement therein. Taylor, through the character of the Professor and his relationship with Jeremy, promotes similar ideas about research and community engagement, connecting these to the cultivation of more ethical practices of consumption, production, and citizenship. Taylor advocates such work in response to what he seems to perceive as a failure to use and circulate what I will call the local archive—the information and, especially, the stories about Vancouver as home place. He also connects such work to the process of interrogating and redefining what actually constitutes the local archive (in other words, the process of questioning which stories matter), and the role such questioning might play in city life.
When Jeremy sets out to conduct the research requested of him, he finds himself standing outside the library, “considering both the task before him and the new building itself” (111):

Vancouver had replaced its old library, and Jeremy still missed it. Certainly it had been cramped and a bit dusty, but it had also been an architectural rarity from Vancouver’s early boom days. Crisp sheets of glass opened the inside to the outside. He remembered how, from the opposite street corner, you could make out people reading, taking books off the shelves. People from around here using their library as it was meant to be used. This late-modernist gem had now been converted into a Virgin record store and a Planet Hollywood.

The new library, meanwhile (in front of which Jeremy now stood), was built to resemble the Roman Coliseum, complete with arches and pillars in a ring around the central building. Overt unoriginality aside, Jeremy was offended more by the greasy pizza fumes. In their infinite commercial wisdom, the developers had opened the atrium outside the library to retail activity. Nothing wrong with street pizza, Chef Jeremy thought, just this particular street pizza, which . . . was striving for the exotic, the novelty niche. (111)

While Jeremy might be charged with nostalgia for an idealized past when public culture was mediated more transparently, the passage is nevertheless telling, especially if we keep in mind Ann Cvetkovich’s observation that the “history of any archive is a history of space, which becomes the material measure and foundation of the archive’s power and visibility as a form of public culture” (Archive 245). The new library, as portrayed in Stanley Park, can be read as a symbol for the obliqueness of cultural mediation in
Taylor’s Vancouver: significantly, library goers must pass through an increasingly pervasive urban landscape of cultural production and consumption—one targeting, and also helping construct, a particular cross-section of consumers—in order to enter the cultural landscape of the library itself.181 In other words, this commercial landscape mediates the public space of culture within, and must be mediated by anyone wishing to access that space.

Significantly, Taylor also foregrounds the ways in which the library materials themselves—and specifically the local archive—are produced and consumed. Jeremy makes two trips to the library to view the file of documents about the murdered children. The first time, he finds that the file contains “dusty newspaper clippings stacked in sequence,” and, tucked into the back, “a sheaf of pages with handwritten notes. A dozen messy pages. Almost indecipherable” (114). On this initial visit, Jeremy is inattentive and careless: he skims through the notes without really reading them, only properly processing the final sentence because he feels “honour-bound” (by his promise to help his father) to do so (114). The cryptic observations only mystify him, and he ends up dismissing them as the “latter-day addition of some random nutcase” (114). (Notably, the librarian who helps Jeremy locate the file takes a similar view [223].) Later in the novel, when The Monkey’s Paw has closed and, seeking guidance, Jeremy has started to contemplate reconnecting with his father, he returns to the library to complete the research task. This time, more invested in the project, he reads the documents in the

181 Noting the presence of the atrium mall and the library’s location “on the outskirts of the now-bourgeois settlement of Yaletown (Vancouver’s warehouse district that was gentrified with a vengeance in the years following Expo ’86),” cultural critic Clint Burnham has described Vancouver’s new library as “the Prima Porta of consumption” (36).
folder thoroughly, including the handwritten pages. In doing so, he recognizes the notes for what they are:

journal entries, a careful record, although the handwriting was exceedingly scattered. Letters slanted different directions within a single word, words themselves floating free of the lines or sinking into the line below. The pages looked old, although they were not dated with a year. Maybe the writer had been caught up in the precise limits of the moment being lived, and the future (in this case the future reader) had been an impossible abstraction. (217)

Since the Professor has always prided himself on his penmanship, it takes Jeremy a while to realize that the messy notes have been produced by his father over the course of his researches in and about the park community; a reference to Jeremy’s deceased mother, Hélène, finally helps him make the connection. Reading about the murders of the children; the relationship of one of the current park residents, Caruzo, to the children; his father’s observations and reflections; and the intersection of Hélène’s death with the research project (she died just as the Professor was discovering that Caruzo had been a friend to the children), Jeremy finds himself feeling “almost entirely numb. . . . Numb and oddly frightened. . . . It was as close as he had ever returned to those moments of blinding grief” that attended the death of his mother (220). Significantly, Jeremy’s thoughts then turn to his father: he contemplates the great sadness that his father also experienced with the loss of Hélène, as well as the Professor’s deep emotional commitment to the park community (222-23).

Through this research task, Jeremy begins to appreciate what it means to attend to another’s story—even to discover a story where there does not initially appear to be one.
The Professor has also learned this lesson. Tom O’Bedlam’s song, which guides the Professor’s project, is Caruzo’s song. Institutionalized at a young age and given electroshock treatments for (the Professor guesses) schizophrenia, Caruzo speaks in poetic riddles, making a kind of sense that is, as Ricou puts it, “more aural and oral than intellectual or semantic” (118): “I don’t think anyone in the city yet understands what [Caruzo] might be saying,” the Professor observes in his notes (220). Jeremy, for his part, eventually sees the handwritten notes differently, and pushes beyond his longstanding resistance to the Professor’s seemingly bizarre project. The research task moves him to become more deeply involved in his relationship with his father, and also in the park community. Through this narrative of teaching and research, Taylor thus suggests not only the need for greater attention to a community’s marginalized stories, but also the importance of establishing a personal, affective relation to the local archive.

I am using the term “archive” in a fairly expansive sense here, and in so doing I am indebted to Cvetkovich’s reconceptualization of the term in her book An Archive of Feelings, in which she explores the alternative form and content of lesbian and gay archives. Cvetkovich proposes that the gathering together of lesbian and gay archival materials has been informed by the need to rethink what “archive” means, and what an archive comprises, because in the context of lesbian and gay history it often refers to “marginal or ephemeral materials” that document “intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism—all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a

182 Through Caruzo, Taylor seems to offer implicit commentary on the general social failure to properly attend to those homeless residents of Vancouver suffering from mental illness. Many were left without adequate health and social services following closures at Riverview Hospital (a mental health facility located in the suburb of Coquitlam), which began in 1992. Caruzo has not been in an institution in 50 years so his situation is not a direct result of this situation; however, the Professor’s remark still speaks to our ongoing inability to give mentally ill residents the care and attention they need.
traditional archive” (243, 241). “[A]ssociated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma,” affect is a key criteria in evaluating the significance, the value, of a contribution to this particular archive, Cvetkovich argues (243). Archival contributions, she continues, might be either material or immaterial (Cvetkovich is especially interested in performance art and musical performance); the lesbian and gay archive thus exceeds the physical and spatial confines of a traditional archive. Indeed, Cvetkovich’s own book operates as what she describes as an archive of feelings, gathering together and exploring “cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception” (7). “Sometimes,” Cvetkovich remarks, “the archive contains tears and anger, and sometimes it includes”—as it does for Jeremy—“the dull silence of numbness” (286).

Though Taylor is addressing a different community and history than Cvetkovich, he seems to propose a similar conceptualization of the archive—in his case, a local urban archive. Significantly, for both Cvetkovich and Taylor, affect is intrinsically connected to ethical inquiry and to a politicized mode of everyday living (though we may choose to be critical of the stands and actions that various characters take against or in relation to structures of power in Taylor’s novel, characters do, nevertheless, act in ways we might certainly describe as political, aligning themselves with some residents and against others). Taylor also interrogates the “domiciliation,” the “house arrest,” that is, Jacques Derrida proposes in Archive Fever, a founding condition of the archive (2-3). 183 Taylor

183 In Archive Fever, Derrida traces the etymology of “archive” to the Greek word arkheion, noting that it referred to a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess...
suggests that all residents, but especially those whom Derrida might term contemporary
*archons*—those, in other words, with some form of power (e.g. with time, education,
economic means, mobility)—should commit themselves to the circulation of the local
archive, encouraging attentiveness to the diverse stories that have given shape to, and that
sustain, particular urban landscapes, and fostering a more dynamic relation between
public culture and private lives. Through his novel’s teaching and research narrative,
Taylor makes, in effect, a case for a particular kind of cultural mediator: one with
considerable emotional investment in the community he or she inhabits; one performing
the ongoing work of getting to know the community—in all its complexity—better; and
one who attempts to participate in the cultural life of the community in ways that enhance
the broader social good, with special attention to those most marginalized by current
structures of power. If Derrida associates the archive with a state of house arrest, Taylor
imagines it circulating between its official home at the library, private homes,\(^{184}\) and the
shelter of Stanley Park.

Importantly, too, Taylor figures this work of affected, critical cultural mediation
in relation to a particular event in the city’s history—the Babes in the Woods murder
case. When Jeremy first skims through the newspaper clippings about the case, he finds
that

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*the right to make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at
their home, in that *place* which is their house (private house, family house, or employee’s house),
that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents’ guardians. . . . They
are also accorded . . . the power to interpret the archives . . . The dwelling, this place where [the
documents] dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public.
(Derrida 2)*

\(^{184}\) The Professor himself is guilty of keeping many of his notes under “house arrest” in the study of his
home in Point Grey, though Jeremy eventually discovers the notes there and, by reading them and allowing
them to inform his actions, helps put them back into circulation (275-78).
most of [them] cast the murder as an at-once tragic and inaugural event in the city’s history. For Vancouver, the first of the self-inflicted wounds North Americans would come to associate with late-twentieth-century urban life. . . .

[T]hinking of it each year, or more accurately every ten years or so, the press in Vancouver would disinter the tale. The journalists would open their articles sounding as perplexed as they had been the first time. They would run over the tragic facts, grafting on the pale analysis of sociologists or psychologists or members of the still-stymied Vancouver City Police Unsolved Crime Unit. And they would finish as perplexed as they began. . . . Flipping from article to article, Jeremy was forced to consider a calendar of civic passage, guilt and confusion, tracing itself up through the decades. (115-16)

The newspapers, as Jeremy observes, engage in what Jeffrey C. Alexander has termed the “trauma process”: they construct from the event a cultural trauma that, they suggest, has unsettled the “patterned meanings” of the community, situating negative affects associated with the event at the heart of the community’s sense of identity (Alexander 10). Interrogating the tendency to naturalize cultural trauma, Alexander argues that it “is not the result of a group experiencing pain” (10); rather, cultural trauma is established through processes of representation: it is, in other words, “a socially mediated attribution” (8). Explains Alexander: “Collective actors ‘decide’ to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go” (10). The effective mediation of social trauma depends, as Alexander notes, on the “skills of reflexive social agents” (10): as Jeremy witnesses the trauma process unfolding in newsprint across the decades, he also notes the repeated inability of the
journalists (and other professional cultural mediators associated with the case) to help the community address the suffering, fear, and fracturing of group bonds that have been attributed to the event. The articles assume and repeatedly convey the idea that such an event requires resolution or closure of some sort, but they do not (indeed cannot) provide such catharsis. They thus perform the work of inserting “acute discomfort . . . into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity,” as Alexander would put it (10), but not of helping the community appropriately mediate that shared sense of discomfort, which becomes, as a result, simply the impetus for a growing sense of fracture and fear.

“Imagination,” Alexander reminds us, “is intrinsic to the very process of representation. It seizes upon an inchoate experience from life, and forms it, through association, condensation, and aesthetic creation, into some specific shape” (9). Never offering a clear solution to the Babes in the Wood case, Taylor instead attends to more expansively imaginative responses to the event than those (such as the newspaper articles) involving the desire for simple resolution and closure; he attends, in other words, to responses that might give the event a more meaningful “shape” for the community.

Caruzo—who spent time with the children and who found their bodies after they had been murdered (he did not report the crime) (291), is both driven and sustained by the need to bear witness—to guard “a memory, a site of memories that might be made holy through his steadfast watching, through his resolution to remember,” as Jeremy’s father observes in his notes (222). “Somehow,” the Professor continues, “[Caruzo] has remained [in the park] and become . . . [r]esident zero in the new community that has grown here,” the other park residents having been “drawn to his vigilance” (222). Caruzo’s special language (riddled, poetic) provides a means of maintaining a relationship to the
unresolvable event, and also of communicating a stance of reverence, respect, and reconciliation, without denying complexity. It was, importantly, Caruzo who initially inspired the Professor with Tom O’Bedlam’s song, and who moved him to greater attentiveness to the dynamics of the park community with his “strange words”: “... meant to be together. Just as the two were drawn from the same soil, so too must the same soil hold them, and through it must they be reconciled” (222). Directly impacted by the case, Caruzo also becomes one of its most productive mediators, taking an approach that draws people to him and nurtures an emergent public culture.185

As in my discussion of Quartermain’s writing in Chapter Three, I am reminded, by what is essentially Taylor’s dream of an alternative urban community, of the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s work on the city, especially, in this instance, Nancy’s interrogation of the foundational idea of the city as polis—as the space, first and foremost, of politics. Nancy’s thinking on the city emerges from his querying of Heideggerian Being: for Nancy, being-in-the-world is, fundamentally, an experience of sharing. “Being is being-with,” he argues, stressing that “the ‘with’ that constitutes Being... is not simply an addition...; instead, the ‘with’ is at the heart of Being” (Being 30). Nancy calls for a reversal of “the order of philosophical exposition, for which it has been a matter of course that the ‘with’—and the other that goes along with it—always comes second, even though this succession is contradicted by the underlying profonde logic in question” (30). Nancy argues that “[e]ven Heidegger preserves this order of succession in a remarkable way, in that he does not introduce the co-originarity of Mitsein [being-with]

185 My reading of the novel, here, is indebted to Cvetkovich, who describes her study of trauma and sexuality as “an inquiry into how affective experience that falls outside of institutionalized or stable forms of identity or politics can form the basis for public culture” (Archive 17). Notably, for Cvetkovich, public culture is always pluralized; in her project she explores “a range of public cultures that emerge in relation to trauma” (11).
until after having established the originary character of *Dasein*” (30-31). “[I]t might be,” remarks Nancy, “that we have understood nothing about the situation, and . . . that we have to start again to understand ourselves—our existence and that of the world” (28). In Nancy’s view, such a process includes rethinking the idea of the city as *polis*. The city, he proposes, “is not primarily a form of political institution”; rather, it “begins with and in ‘civil’ *concitoyenne* coexistence as such (which, in its very difference from the ‘imperial’ form, forces power to emerge as a problem)” (31). Taylor, in *Stanley Park*, imagines a similar shift in the conceptualization of urban community, from a space of fear, where bodies and property must be protected from the actions of others, to one that is understood fundamentally as a space of being-together—a “joined drama,” as the Professor puts it (194). The park community is not, of course, devoid of fear or the power struggles that fuel it, but enough of its members participate in a manner that respects the fundamental experience of being-together, so that interactions between members are frequently characterized by joy, learning, and watchful care.

Notably, in his work, Nancy repeatedly challenges the reduction of civil co-implication to a pure or singular communal identity. Instead, he locates what he describes as a “spacing,” a “dis-positioning,” at its origin, describing the city as “the place of a mêlée, a crossing and a stop, a knot and an exchange, a gathering, a disjunction, a circulation, a radiating” (145). He proposes that the project of rethinking the city involves “the bringing to light of being-in-common *as the dis-position* (dispersal and disparity) of the community represented as founded in interiority or transcendence” (23; emphasis in orig.). It is a project, he goes on to suggest, in which “the ‘ethical’ exposes what the ‘ontological’ disposes” (99). In *The Conscience of the Eye*, sociologist Richard Sennett
has explored what we might describe as the cultural work of ethical exposure to the “dis-position” of urban communities. Reflecting on foundational descriptions of urban relations by Charles Baudelaire, Georg Simmel, and the Chicago School, Sennett notes that for these early commentators “the culture of the city was a matter of experiencing differences—differences of class, age, race, and taste outside the familiar territory of oneself, in a street” (126). In other words, being in the city involved “exposure to the outside” (128), an experience characterized by surprise, provocation, and stimulation (126). Sennett also highlights the problem of urban community explored by these early urban commentators—that exposure to otherness “occurs in the very loosening of strong connections between people in a city” (126), and can result in feelings “of disengagement when immersed in difference” (129). He argues for the need to discover and nurture “the humane value of complexity,” and goes on to examine and champion cultural work that performs what he terms the “art of exposure”—that uses artful means to arouse empathy in relations between strangers sharing urban spaces (129).

In Taylor’s novel, Jeremy seems to move toward the empathetic understanding of urban complexity that Sennett advocates. Initially lost, Dante-like, in “the thick of his own woods” (194), Jeremy comes to know

what the Professor [has] long known: that there [are] different paths into the same wood. Different views of the same familiar story. Caruzo the first, the guardian, his sense of obligation buried in this place. . . . Chladek the wanderer, returned at last to his Place of Trees. Siwash the eternal seeker, wanting definition, wanting assurance, certainty on the matter of where he stood. (335)

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Sennett’s work informs Liam Kennedy’s conceptualization of urbanity (see Chapter Three).
Unfortunately, Jeremy seems to have trouble bringing this new understanding of urban community out of what we might describe as the dream-space of Taylor’s Stanley Park, and applying it to his work as a restaurateur (in other words, as a professional cultural producer) in the city proper. As I noted in my earlier discussion of Jeremy’s final restaurant venture, though The Food Caboose’s “Byzantine” reservation system is to some extent informed by Jeremy’s enhanced understanding of affected relationality, it seems destined to foster class-based cliquishness; worryingly, Jeremy does not seem overly attentive to the need to establish a productive, respectful relationship between The Food Caboose and the local neighbourhood and community. Ultimately, Jeremy is unable to integrate into his final restaurant project the complicated understanding of community that he has begun to develop through his research and park encounters.

The supposedly happy, though (for this reader, at any rate) decidedly disappointing ending of Stanley Park highlights the difficulty of incorporating alternative social ideals and objectives into the work of professional—and economically successful—cultural mediation and production. Indeed, as a whole, Taylor’s novel foregrounds the tension between the “economic” and “intrinsic” value of culture in the city (to return to the terminology of the City of Vancouver’s Culture Plan), suggesting that if part of the “intrinsic” value of culture is to mediate community crises, foster social justice, and contribute to more sustainable forms of human cohabitation, this aspect of the...

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187 It is difficult—and perhaps beside the point—to say for sure whether Taylor intended his “happy” ending to fail. Notably, though, he only devotes a few brief pages of tight description to The Food Caboose project at the end of what is, in effect, a rather sprawling novel. Whether purposeful or not, the relative lack of descriptive detail (especially of the surrounding neighbourhood and community) in this short final section is certainly surprising and contributes to the unsettling effect of the conclusion, since, up until this point, Taylor has made a concerted attempt to incorporate an expanding array of characters and spaces into his novel.
city’s cultural life remains in significant ways at odds with the economic dimension of cultural activity.  

Taylor is by no means alone among local authors in producing fiction that explores the tensions informing cultural work in the city. In now shifting my attention to others also engaged in this conversation, I have decided to focus on two authors whose work suggests a deep investment in cultivating empathetic, respectful modes of being-together in the city, but at the same time conveys considerable uncertainty about the ability of cultural practitioners to foster this kind of urban community. Both Nancy Lee, in her short story collection *Dead Girls*, and Lee Maracle, in her story “Goodbye, Snaaq,” attend carefully to profoundly unsettling events in Vancouver’s history, addressing, respectively, the missing women’s case and the city’s long and continuing legacy of colonial oppression. Both authors foreground the relationship between these cultural traumas and emerging landscapes of cultural consumption and production in the city. And, through stories featuring protagonists engaged in particular kinds of cultural

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188 While some contributors to the conversation about the cultural economy distinguish “social” from “intrinsic” dimensions of culture (see, for example, Throsby; Holden, *Cultural Value*; Holden, *Capturing*), the authors of Vancouver’s *Culture Plan* collapse these two difficult-to-disambiguate aspects of cultural activity. . . . Of course, the “social” often overlaps with the “economic” as well. Clearly, the categories—whether one makes use of two or three—are flexible, and I do not mean to suggest, in highlighting tension between what Vancouver’s *Culture Plan* calls the “economic” and the “intrinsic” aspects of culture, that there is an unambiguous separation between them.

In focusing on the cultivation of community and the mediation of public trauma, I am considering aspects of culture where the social and the intrinsic intertwine, and so I am, like the authors of the *Culture Plan*, simply assuming a social component to the “intrinsic” dimension of cultural activity. However, John Holden’s definition of culture’s “intrinsic values,” which he distinguishes from specifically social and economic values, is useful to keep in mind. “Intrinsic,” for Holden, refers to the set of values that relate to the subjective experience of culture intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. It is these values that people refer to when they say things such as “I hate this; it makes me feel angry,” or “If this was taken away from me I would lose part of my soul,” or “This tells me who I am.” These kinds of values can be captured in personal testimony, qualitative assessments, anecdotes, case studies and critical reviews. . . . [V]alue is located in the encounter or interaction between individuals (who will have all sorts of preexisting attitudes, beliefs and levels of knowledge) on the one hand, and an object or experience on the other. Intrinsic values are [best] thought of then as the capacity and potential of culture to affect us. (*Cultural Value* 14-15; emphasis in orig.)
work (a librarian, a teacher-in-training), both depict the cultural mediation of these instances of community crisis as deeply fraught, long-term projects.

The “Blocked Potentials” of Cultural Work: Nancy Lee’s *Dead Girls*

Nancy Lee’s *Dead Girls* collects eight stories set, primarily, in different parts of the metropolitan area of an unnamed—though recognizable—Vancouver; the case of the serial murder of female sex workers in the city links the stories.\(^{189}\) Lee wrote *Dead Girls* before William Pickton’s arrest in 2002, during the period when Vancouver police were finally starting to connect the many disappearances of women from the Downtown Eastside, and as the case was just beginning to emerge as a major news story.\(^{190}\) In *Dead Girls*, Lee imagines the arrest of a murderer named Thomas Coombs, who has buried his victims in the backyard of his suburban home. The story collection thus eerily foreshadows, to some extent, the arrest of Pickton and the discovery of murdered women buried at his suburban Coquitlam farm, though Lee’s Coombs is more refined and blandly middle class than Pickton. As Glenn Deer notes, one aim of Lee’s story collection is to interrogate the public tendency to associate the missing women’s case only with “the seedy reaches of East Hastings alleyways or the waterfront dockyards”: “Lee suggests that neither the mean streets of the Downtown Eastside, nor the grassy yards of suburban bungalows, nor the pristine chamber of a dentist’s office” are unconnected to the story (Deer, “Remapping Vancouver” 131).

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\(^{189}\) Discussing *Dead Girls* in an interview for *McClelland.com*, Lee has said: “I wanted to take an event, the murder of prostitutes in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, and ask the question: if this event is a symptom of the society we live in, what is it telling us about our society? I suppose for me the meaning of the book lies in the idea that every event that happens around us reflects us in some way.” Her hope, in writing the book, was to move toward “a more honest understanding of who we are and what we consider important.”

\(^{190}\) Lee notes in an interview with Nancy Wigston that she had to rely mostly on alternative media sources when doing research for her stories.
The full-scale investigation and widespread media coverage of the missing women’s case, which began in the late 1990s, were preceded by years of police inaction and mostly back-page press coverage (usually focusing on individual disappearances), despite insistence by family and friends that the missing women deserved greater attention (Cameron, *On the Farm* 204).¹⁹¹ The long-term failure to respond on the part of the police, the mainstream media, and the general public has been described by Denise Blake Oleksijczuk as “the most notorious case of social and civic neglect in the city’s history” (98). As numerous commentators have observed, the missing women’s erasure from the local consciousness was intrinsically connected to their social stigmatization: associated with sex work, drug abuse, and life on the streets of Vancouver’s poorest neighbourhood (their bonds with family members, friends, and the broader community typically ignored), the women were often judged, implicitly or explicitly, according to a moral code that denied their value as full human beings and members of the social collective. Moreover, many of the disappeared women were Aboriginal, and racist attitudes exacerbated their marginalization both before and after they went missing.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ There had been a sharp rise in disappearances beginning in 1995, and Pickton was charged with attempted murder and forcible confinement in 1997, but the charge was dropped after the victim in question did not show up in court (Cameron 204, 158). According to CBC News, the woman in the 1997 case—who still cannot be legally identified—alleged that she had been hired for sex by Pickton and was taken to his farm, where he tried to handcuff her and then stabbed her repeatedly, nearly killing her.

The woman suffered stab wounds to her abdomen, chest and arms, lost three litres of blood and remained unconscious in hospital for four days before recovering. (“Pickton Escaped”) “Ten years later,” CBC News goes on to note, “Pickton was convicted on six counts of second-degree murder. . . . All six women were killed after the 1997 case was dropped.” Pickton has been sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole for 25 years (the maximum); 20 other murder charges against him have been stayed.

¹⁹² Much has now been written about the problematic representations of Vancouver’s missing women, and about residents of the city’s Downtown Eastside neighbourhood more generally. See, for example, the essays collected in *Representations of Murdered and Missing Women* (a special issue of *West Coast LINE* edited by Amber Dean and Anne Stone) as well as *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver*, edited by Leslie A. Robertson and Dara Culhane.
Because of this stigmatization and marginalization, establishing consensus that a cultural trauma had occurred proved extremely difficult. Jeffrey Alexander notes that “at the beginning of the trauma process . . . most audience members . . . see little if any relation between themselves and the victimized group” (14). The tendency, he suggests, is for audience members to take a distanced stance that allows them to deny both “the reality of others’ suffering” and their own responsibility, however inadvertent (1), and this was certainly true of the missing women’s case.\textsuperscript{193} Alexander goes on to explain that making connections visible is paramount for the audience to “be able to symbolically participate in the experience of the originating trauma,” and often requires—because of resistance—a lengthy, difficult process of “meaning work” (14; 12). When successful, such meaning work encourages “members of wider publics to participate in the pain of others, . . . broaden[ing] the realm of social understanding and sympathy, and . . . provid[ing] powerful avenues for new forms of social incorporation” (24).\textsuperscript{194} For a long time, however, the case of Vancouver’s missing women was a tragic example of the failure to make a persuasive argument for cultural trauma—tragic especially because women continued to go missing as earlier disappearances were ignored. Even today, despite widespread coverage and discussion in various arenas, the case remains an example of a particularly difficult process of cultural mediation and production, subject (like many important instances of cultural trauma [Smelser 2004: 49-50]) to conflicting viewpoints and contested approaches to representation.

\textsuperscript{193} I am grateful to Terri Tomsky for encouraging me to think about the missing women’s case in relation to Alexander’s work on cultural trauma.

\textsuperscript{194} Though he does not cite him specifically, Alexander’s use of the term “publics” seems to share much in common with Michael Warner’s important reconceptualization of the term as a collectivity that comes into being through the circulation of texts (including “visual or audio texts”)—“public” as “a space of discourse” (Warner 51, 50).
Writing just as the case was beginning to receive increased attention, Lee demonstrates a clear investment in connecting the missing and murdered women of her fictional city to a broader public. In the interlocking stories of *Dead Girls*, she repeatedly foregrounds and explores various ways in which such a case touches different members of the community. The story “Sisters,” for example, focuses on a small-town adolescent girl’s search for her older sister, who has disappeared after following her boyfriend/pimp to the city. In “Rollie and Adele,” a homeless girl narrowly escapes an encounter with Coombs, who tries to lure her into his car, telling her “about his house, just outside the city, his grassy yard and spare bedroom” (Lee 194); the story is also about Adele’s budding relationship with Rollie, the owner of a tattoo shop on the street where she sleeps. The title story, for its part, explores the guilt and distress burdening a suburban mother uncertain (for much of the story) of the whereabouts of a drug-addicted daughter who has turned to sex work to help pay for drugs. In “Associated Press,” the protagonist is chosen to be a member of the jury at Coombs’s trial. And in a number of stories, characters encounter and react to the case as a news item, with Lee developing an extensive critique of the popular media over the course of the collection. Moving between a range of different geographic locations within or on the outskirts of the city, and featuring protagonists and supporting characters from various backgrounds, Lee articulates the rifts and fissures of a socioeconomically polarized urban community, while also emphasizing the many ways in which the city’s inhabitants are in fact connected to each other—and specifically to the missing women, as well as other women marginalized by sex work, drug addiction, and poverty. Lee focuses repeatedly on instances in which residents turn away, fail to see, or are otherwise complicit in the women’s continuing
victimization, but she also, in key instances, explores the emotional impact of the case on different members of the community.

Thus, Lee’s agenda is both to establish a sense of relationality, of being-together, between apparently disparate members of the community, and also to attend carefully to the ways in which those connections and bonds—sometimes only existing as potentialities—are frayed, broken, or have failed to establish themselves. Importantly, she works to extend a sense of (potential, fraught) relationality to her readers. As Deer observes, Lee “employs the second-person narrative voice throughout [several of her stories] . . . to construct a more urgent, imperative, and uncanny personal address” (132). Through this use of the second-person “you,” Lee transforms the reader’s relationship to the narrating characters: rather than mere objects of our gaze, she suggests that such characters are, partially, ourselves. “You are addicted to television news,” the story “Dead Girls” begins:

The speculation, the body bags, the hopeful high school photos; dead girls, everywhere. The police have arrested a man in a suburb of your city—a retired dentist, a small bungalow, a large backyard. . . . So far, the victims are all prostitutes, bodies for hire, disposable girls. Between four and midnight, you watch five hours of local coverage. You switch from channel to channel at peak times, five and six, ten and eleven. You keep the volume high. When your husband comes in to ask if you want dinner, you watch his lips move, demand that he speak up. (99-100)

Notably, such moments of connection involve a feeling of disjunction as well as identification. We recognize the media’s favoured tropes and images, as well as the
creeping sense of helplessness and emotional numbness that develops over multiple viewings of such coverage. We are but of course are not the “you” in this passage—a mother grieving for her missing daughter as she watches the news—and are left feeling unsettled, encouraged to probe our relation to the story and to think carefully about the ways in which it has been framed.195

Among the stories collected in *Dead Girls*, I am particularly interested in “Associated Press,” which opens the collection, because of its investigation of the difficult work of cultivating a meaningful sense of relationality within some of Vancouver’s defining spaces of cultural consumption and production. In this story, the unnamed protagonist is, as I noted, called to jury duty on the Coombs case; the trial, however, ends before really beginning, when the accused enters a guilty plea. The protagonist finds herself feeling confused, at a loss: it seems that she has hoped a trial featuring a string of witnesses and testimony might provide some kind of cathartic resolution to the case. She has, notably, prepared herself to play her particular role in what she has imagined will unfold as a TV-style court drama, dressing carefully in “the perfect outfit for court, a tailored black suit, a steel-grey blouse, serious, but impartial” (5). Lee makes it clear that the protagonist’s hoped-for resolution—justice as spectacle—is a rather empty (or at least limited) form of cultural mediation. Significantly, too, while the missing women’s case all but disappears from the storyline after the first pages, it continues to haunt the story, as Lee explores her protagonist’s attempts and failures to

195 Lee enhances this effect in a few other ways throughout the stories. Sometimes she provides only snippets of scenes, and moves chopply from one scene to the next; she also unsettles linear time, only gradually providing earlier details that help fill in the blanks. Thus, while Lee’s narration choices suggest that she wants the reader to feel a degree of connection to her characters, she clearly does not imagine or foster idealized forms of identification with them. Life in Lee’s urban community is often shaped by a troubling degree of disconnection, though she insists that by really paying attention to the lives of others we might begin to open up the latent possibility of connection.
establish meaningful relationships with others, registering the ways in which
ambivalence, emotional fatigue, and a degree of self-loathing sediment themselves in the
protagonist’s body, attitudes, and work.

Lee is interested, in other words, in foregrounding the emotional and social
impact of the missing women’s case on a member of the community only tangentially
connected to it. The protagonist’s desire for appropriate and meaningful cultural
mediation of the case seems to have preceded her call to jury duty, and certainly lingers,
mostly unacknowledged, after the sentencing of Coombs. In my thinking about Lee’s
exploration of such broader-based impacts of the missing women’s case, an important
guide is once again Ann Cvetkovich, who highlights, in her consideration of trauma and
public culture, the incommensurability of the experiences of someone directly affected by
an event, and the experiences of “someone whose relation to [the event] has been more
oblique” (279). Indeed, she notes that this irreducible difference is a characteristic “aspect
of life in the vicinity of trauma” (279). It is crucial to recognize this incommensurability
in the case of Vancouver’s missing and murdered women, given the long-standing failure
to respond to the case on the part of the broader public. Cvetkovich conceptualizes
relations to trauma in a manner that remains sensitive to incommensurability, yet works
to avoid hierarchization by extending, horizontally, “a wide embrace beyond the
immediate site of suffering to look at the experiences of those who are feeling its effects
even if they are removed from it (whether historically or spatially)” (280). “In looking at
emotional responses that are tangential to trauma yet that still touch on it,” Cvetkovich
explains, “I am arguing not that they are the equivalent of trauma but that they help
illuminate its emotional dynamics. The nuances of everyday emotional life contain the
residues that are left by traumatic histories, and they too belong in the archive of trauma” (280). Lee takes a similar approach in exploring the impact of the missing women’s case on characters such as the juror protagonist of “Associated Press.” Throughout Dead Girls, Lee is careful not to collapse differences, instead emphasizing the particular positioning of a character in relation to the crisis, exploring the specific combination of feelings and attitudes that attend the character’s experience, and considering how certain cultural tools and frames help or hinder mediation.

“Associated Press” centres on its protagonist’s relationships with two men, referred to throughout the story simply as “that boy” and “this boy.” “That boy” is a photojournalist who reports from warzones and other scenes of political unrest and injustice. Always travelling and caught up in the demands and issues of his work, “that boy” remains at an emotional, and often a physical, distance from the protagonist, whose neediness intensifies in response to his neglect. She excuses his behavior because he “risks his life to expose terror and oppression in the world,” while she “live[s] in a two-bedroom condominium with heated tile floors. Everything he does seems forgivable” (4). “This boy,” for his part, is an electronics salesman, and—though he stays close to home and engages in less socially conscious, and also less glamorous, work—is a “winner” in the local game of social distinction, with his “high-rise-view suite, black leather furniture and state-of-the-art home theatre system” (4). He seduces the protagonist “the old fashioned way. South African Chardonnay in hand-blown glasses, Nina Simone in quadraphonic sound” (4). “This boy” displays the interest that “that boy” withholds, and offers the protagonist—who works as a librarian and thus lives on a modest salary—the pleasures of “upscale” cultural consumption, and a more powerful and comfortable
position within the local landscape. His luxurious view apartment serves, at least initially, as “a refuge, a high glass tank that shields [her] from the world”: “While you work your days in the stacks, pulling books for inter-library loan, you dream of the view from his balcony, the dark water of the inlet, the city lights laid out like a jeweled carpet. You imagine your reflection in the sliding glass door, a version of yourself that is cool and smooth to the touch” (20). As the protagonist’s affair with “this boy” continues, however, their sexual encounters take a turn. “[T]he mainline to this boy’s desire” turns out to involve blindfolds, restraints, and asphyxiation, and the protagonist finds herself transformed into “a willing captive in [her] own bed” (17). “That boy,” meanwhile, breaks off his relationship with the protagonist when he learns of her affair with “this boy.” The protagonist begins to tire of “this boy” and the glass refuge of his stylish apartment, and starts re-establishing clearer boundaries in relation to both men, “monitor[ing] [her] autonomy” (23). When she finds out that she is pregnant with “this boy’s” baby, she seeks an abortion. As “Associated Press” ends, the protagonist has renewed phone contact with the photojournalist, but their connection, quite literally, is a “falter[ing] . . . digital stutter” (33).

Deer reads “Associated Press” as a “symbolic social allegory,” with the protagonist, as a librarian, representing “public memory,” and the photojournalist functioning as an “agent of social conscience” (Deer, “Remapping Vancouver” 131, 132, 133). The electronics salesman and his glass-tower condo offer “the promise of omniscient repose, smooth material comforts, and the modernist fetishes of scenic surveillance [and] technology. . . After the initial seduction, the transformation of the librarian’s consciousness is figured in her dreams of spatial power, an identification that
begins to displace thoughts of her work in the library” (Deer 132). However, as the story progresses and the librarian begins to reassert boundaries, she starts spending longer hours at the library, and develops a renewed interest in the materials there. Also significant, for Deer, is the moment when the librarian, sitting in the waiting room before her abortion, picks up a newspaper and takes note of a colour photograph of a bombed army helicopter that “reminds her of the social commitment of the journalist” (Deer 133); it is at this point that the librarian “decides to . . . end her relationship with the man who sleeps ‘with a clear mind, dreams in quadraphonic sound’” (133). By breaking off her affair with “this boy,” argues Deer, the “agent of the ‘library’ . . . avoid[s] both literal and symbolic strangulation by the electronics salesman” (133). In other words, she refuses a life of unreflexive slumber, even though this life offers a sense of power in and over her local environment. At the end of the story, the protagonist seems to be starting to reinvest herself in the more difficult and uncertain work of critically engaged cultural mediation.

That said, it is important to underscore the feelings of uncertainty and anxiety that the protagonist carries with her over the course of the story. Indeed, Lee’s librarian appears to lack a clear sense of what, in her case, more critically engaged cultural practice might entail. In shifting her focus away from the seductive but ethically and politically inert lifestyle offered by the electronics salesman, a desire to attend more carefully to the lives of others does manifest in her library work, but in rather peculiar ways. She starts bringing stacks of library books home with her, “their weight somehow comforting in [her] arms. The books pile up on [her] floor like clumsy pagodas, an obstacle course of precarious possibilities” (23). She begins a mental catalogue of various items and markings left in the books by other readers: “bus transfers, an unused teabag,
shopping lists, two fettuccine noodles, and once, a fifty-dollar bill folded between two diagrams of origami frogs” (23). Doodles and sketches in the margins become, for her, “[m]essages scratched into a dirt wall, the impenetrable hieroglyphs of those who came before [her] and searched for something in this place” (23). The librarian’s compulsion to collect books, with their comforting weight, shares similarities with the bag of books that Meredith Quartermain carries dutifully home from the library in “Backwards from Pender Lake.” But, whereas Quartermain puts books (and their contents) into circulation, allowing them to inform her poetic practice and engagement in civic life, the librarian hoards them (we might say, borrowing Derrida’s phrase, that though the books leave the library they remain under house arrest), fetishizing the traces that link her to previous readers.  

Still, the books’ comforting weight is worth emphasizing: the librarian’s collecting impulse, with its soothing aspect, seems a response to the melancholia that threatens to overwhelm her as she goes about the tasks of daily living and tries, faltering, to establish bonds with others in her life. As I suggested earlier, Lee implicitly links her protagonist’s melancholia to a general failure to mediate, meaningfully, the community crisis represented by the missing women’s case, though I would add that it also appears to be a response to a sense of crisis at the global scale, which is developed in “Associated Press” through the photojournalist’s reportage from war-torn and poverty-stricken countries. (Significantly, the literally stifling, and

196 The subject matter of the books (along with the items and markings found in them) also points back to specific, searching readers:
You stay late and roam the stacks, search for books that would interest you if you were the type to have interests. The history of carousel horses, small engine repair, winter gardening, the complete works of Dorothy Parker, Japanese paper art, the concise dictionary of Eastern mysticism, the songs of Bruce Springsteen, a century of fashion, a hundred and one metalwork ideas, the encyclopaedia of Victorian upholstery. (22)
potentially deadly, sexual play that the librarian engages in with the electronics salesman allows her to imagine herself connected, tentatively and very problematically, to a broad community of women victimized by violence: “You wonder in a moment of swoon if you will die here,” she finds herself thinking. “You wonder how many women in the world die this way, blind and tied” [17].) The protagonist’s collecting of books and cataloguing of their items can, I would argue, be read as a mourning practice. However, like her attempts to identify with other women through dangerous sexual behavior, her secret “project” is, ultimately, an abortive attempt to acknowledge and work through the problem of community crisis.

The librarian’s impulse to collect and catalogue is worth considering in relation to Cvetkovich’s discussion of gay and lesbian archives, where she observes that, unlike “institutionalized forms of cultural memory,” grassroots archival practices often have a very “intimate and personal” dimension; they tend to involve the gathering together of a wide range of items from everyday life, and through such efforts convey the message “that every life is worthy of preservation” (269). Reflecting on archival projects that emerged in response to the AIDS crisis, Cvetkovich reminds us that “encounters with mortality” tend to produce “the archiving impulse” (269). In the case of the AIDS crisis, grassroots archival projects served as a means of protecting against literal death (they helped foster a counterpublic197 invested in addressing the crisis) and also what Cvetkovich calls “social” death—in other words, disappearance from public memory (269). Moreover, in focusing on hybrid archival/art projects that recognize and reveal a complicated emotional dimension to the items they collect, Cvetkovich suggests that the

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197 Michael Warner defines a “counterpublic” as a public organized according to premises that “differ markedly in one way or another from the premises that allow the dominant culture to organize itself as a public” (81).
challenge of a trauma-related archive is to present material in a way that enables, in its reception, an acknowledgement and exploration of personal feelings associated with the traumatic event—that enables, in other words, the work of mourning.

As a librarian, Lee’s protagonist has access to the channels of institutionalized public memory, and her decision to step outside of these—indeed, to undermine them by hoarding books—seems to suggest that she has little faith in the ability of the institution to perform the mediation work necessary in this instance of community crisis. But she also evidently has little faith in her personal abilities. In reflecting on “that boy’s” commitment to social concerns, the protagonist at one point acknowledges what she describes as an “embarrassing truth” about herself: she admits (or at least claims—and the interest she exhibits over the course of the story puts the lie to this assertion) that she “never really [thinks] about the world”: “It wasn’t that you didn’t want to know what was going on, but that you couldn’t make sense of it. The world had become too tangled for you to unravel. . . . Complex systems to manage hunger and murder and exploitation, but nothing to end them. That is what bothered you most, that there was no conceivable end” (13). Throughout the story, the protagonist seems crippled by the feeling that she lacks agency, and this feeling comes across in her private archiving project, which reaches no audience other than herself, and seems only to foster a limited form of personal healing.

Importantly, though the photojournalist, as Deer suggests, plays the role of the “agent of social conscience” in “Associated Press,” Lee problematizes this role, linking him quite explicitly to the protagonist’s diminished sense of agency. If the electronics salesman woos the librarian with an offer of luxurious comfort and power that proves lulling and constrictive, the photojournalist has his own seductive quality, seeming to
promise—but never really offering—a feeling of intimate connection, both within the love affair and also in relation to a broader, more worldly and politicized community:

He sends you photos of human rights violations: the scarred backs of Chinese women, a severed hand at the side of the road, a secret mass grave. . . . That boy is more social conscience than you can bear. His love letters are diatribes, global history lessons. He woos you with the blood of political unrest, the testimonials of broken refugees. Devotion disguised as the pain of strangers, something coded and hidden in newspaper clippings, wire-service announcements. (3-4)

Like the newspaper articles in Taylor’s Stanley Park, the photojournalist’s “archive” plays what Alexander would describe as a mediating role in constructing, in this case, multiple instances of cultural trauma. Significantly, too, in this case vivid images and passionate diatribes draw the protagonist in, inviting her to respond emotionally, ethically, politically; however, they also, ultimately, keep her at arm’s length, the quantity of information and its relentlessly graphic quality serving to overwhelm and paralyze her, leaving her feeling ineffective, even worthless. Certainly, the photojournalist’s archive does not facilitate the reception that Cvetkovich describes in her study of grassroots archival projects: in anticipating complicated emotional reactions and aiming to help their audiences work through them, such projects, Cvetkovich suggests, not only mediate a crisis but also foster, and situate their audience in relation to, a focused and engaged community. The librarian’s alternative archiving project does part of this work, but certainly not all of it. As a reaction to the photojournalist’s news reportage, her impulse to create an alternative archive seems an attempt to address the problems of scale and paralysis this reportage produces (notably, her access to vast
quantities of information, as a librarian, enhances these problems). However, while we see her turning, through her secret project, toward a local community of library users, she does not seem to know how to reach out to and connect meaningfully with them.

I have employed the psychoanalytic term “melancholia” to describe the librarian’s emotional state; however, given that she seems to be experiencing a form of despair that manifests as inertia and (apparent) lack of care, perhaps it might be better understood as acedia, the term often used in early Christian writings to describe the sin of sloth. While we now understand sloth as mere laziness—and while, as Giorgio Agamben notes, “[m]odern psychology has . . . [largely] emptied the term acedia of its original meaning, making it a sin against the capitalist work ethic” (5)—Agamben has encouraged the recovery of the more expansive and nuanced understanding of this emotional and spiritual condition encouraged by early Christian theologians and spiritual leaders, who placed sloth not . . . under the rubric of laziness but under that of anguished sadness and desperation. According to Saint Thomas, who in the *Summa theologica* gathered the observations of the fathers in a rigorous and exhaustive synthesis, sloth was, in fact, a *species tristitiae* (kind of sorrow), and more exactly, sadness with regard to the essential spiritual good of man, that is, to the particular spiritual dignity that had been conferred on him by God. What afflicts the slothful is . . . the contemplation of the greatest of goods: acedia is precisely the vertiginous and frightened withdrawal (*recessus*) when faced with the task implied by the place of man before God. (5-6)
Agamben goes on to note that while a person afflicted with acedia “withdraw[s] from his or her divine destiny,” this “does not mean, in fact, that he or she manages to forget it or ceases . . . to desire it. If, in theological terms, what the slothful lacks is not salvation, but the way that leads to it, in psychological terms the recessus of the slothful . . . is the perversion of a will that wants the object, but not the way that leads to it” (6; emphasis in orig.). Acedia masquerades as an apparent ceasing to care; however, it is, as the editors of the essay collection Loss: The Politics of Mourning put it, the paradoxical figuration of “a certain space of delay as well as an anticipation of a place yet to come” (Eng and Kazanjian 13). It is not, in other words, “about the foreclosure of the world but rather [of] the potential engagement with the world and its objects” (13).

Reflecting on the fourth-century theologian John Cassian’s observation that acedia “insinuates . . . a horror of the place [in which the afflicted monk] finds himself, an impatience with his own cell, and a disdain for the brothers who live with him” (qtd. in Eng and Kazanjian 14), Eng and Kazanjian point to the way that the afflicted person spatializes and socializes his or her condition, obfuscating boundaries between the individual and the collective, the psychic and the social (14). Acedia, as these secular theorists understand it, is connected to the process of socialized becoming, manifesting when “unattained [social] ideals [are figured] as always already lost” and “political work . . . lose[s] track of possibilities” (14). Lee’s librarian, overwhelmed to the point of paralysis by the magnitude of her task as a cultural mediator, and apparently dissatisfied with the circumstances of mediation and the tools at her disposal, reacts by withdrawing and surrounding herself with stacks of books—“an obstacle course of precarious possibilities” that represents, spatially, what Eng and Kazanjian term “acedia’s blocked
potentials” (13). The librarian, though she tells herself otherwise, does not lose sight of the ethical and political dimensions of her role as a cultural mediator. Her alternative “archive,” while largely ineffective, can be viewed as a preliminary, very tentative step in her movement toward the important work of developing new approaches to mediation.

Lee’s Dead Girls (and “Associated Press” specifically) “re-views” the local landscape of cultural consumption and production in significant ways. Lee’s stories remind us, first and foremost, that in this landscape certain bodies have been constructed (or, in the terms of this chapter, produced and mediated) as consumable and expendable, and that this fact haunts any simple celebration of the value of culture, either economic or intrinsic, in the city. Indeed, Lee displays a particularly intense, deep-seated anxiety about the possibility of producing intrinsically valuable cultural work. Writing within the context of the struggle to construct the missing women’s case as a cultural trauma, her anxiety is more extreme than Taylor’s, and she does not allow it to resolve itself: unlike the author of Stanley Park, she refuses to offer a happy ending, either to “Associated Press” or to the story collection as a whole (the story that closes Dead Girls is “Sisters,” which, as I noted earlier, features an Aboriginal youth’s fruitless search for her missing sister). Instead of catharsis or happy endings, Lee offers a persistent examination of questionable cultural practices, failed relationships among differently positioned participants in the cultural system, and the seductions of power and prestige.

Vancouver’s Culture Plan conceptualizes the workings of culture in the city as “cultural ecology,” emphasizing the interconnectedness of “community, educational, recreational, arts, cultural and entertainment professionals, organizations, institutions, and businesses that . . . make up the creative fabric of the city” (14): all parts of the system,
the plan suggests, must be integrated into a “continuous cycle of renewal” and enhancement, or else the health of the system will begin to decline (6). Lee, in her story collection, depicts a cultural system in which different parts of the system do not connect in meaningful ways, and where cultural practitioners and consumers repeatedly engage in politically and ethically problematic or troubling practices. According to the terms of the *Culture Plan*, the cultural system in Lee’s city is in a condition of deteriorated health, and her stories remind us that the missing women’s case itself, and the struggle to construct the case as a cultural trauma, are indicative of the weaknesses and failings of Vancouver’s cultural system. And yet, both *Dead Girls* and the discursive struggle to which it contributes are, at the same time, evidence of the hope and potential of some kinds of cultural work. Both also draw attention to the particular conditions in which some cultural practitioners and mediators operate, and invite a re-thinking of how the work they produce should be understood and evaluated.

One of the most important issues that *Dead Girls* and the missing women’s case encourage us to address in the effort to recognize and foster valuable forms of cultural work is the problem of what Val Plumwood calls “remoteness.” An ecofeminist, Plumwood is dedicated to principles of ecological and social sustainability, and remoteness, as she understands it in these contexts, is plural. It is, of course, a spatial problem, involving the separation or disconnection of a person or group from a space and community that they impact or with which they share some form of (often unacknowledged or unrecognized) interdependency. But, Plumwood suggests, other types of remoteness frequently connect to or overlap with spatial remoteness, and sometimes manifest independently of it. In her reflections on this issue she lists other
types of remoteness, including “consequential remoteness (where . . . consequences fall systematically on some other person or group leaving the originator unaffected), communicative and epistemic remoteness (where there is poor or blocked communication . . . which weakens knowledge and motivation . . .), and temporal remoteness (from the effect of decisions on the future)” (615). Taking up Plumwood’s pluralized conceptualization of remoteness within the contexts of planning and storytelling, Barbara Eckstein observes that the defamiliarizing strategies of some stories encourage audiences to shift their typical interpretive frame or spatial perspective, and thus help reduce remoteness (“Making Space” 29). Lee engages in such work in Dead Girls, inviting readers to reconsider spatial positioning, relationality, the social construction of certain bodies and communities, and modes of communication. More generally, the struggle to mediate the missing women’s case as a cultural trauma involved addressing different forms of remoteness by drawing attention to particular relational, spatial, and temporal linkages. Participants in the struggle foregrounded bonds between the missing women and grieving families and friends, as well as the women’s connections to the broader community; they situated the women within a moral framework that recognized their fundamental human value; and, of course, they linked the different disappearances together, in space and across time.

The problem of time is often elided in discussions about the value (either economic or intrinsic) of cultural work, though it is a significant configuring factor in the relationship between cultural practice and social change. The missing women’s case is an important example of the at times painfully slow process by which social change is effected through forms of cultural production and mediation. In Vancouver, one of the
cultural landmarks that makes this point most movingly is a memorial boulder with the words “The heart has its own memory” framing the following inscription:

In honor of the spirit of the people
murdered in the Downtown Eastside.
Many were women and many were native
aboriginal women. Many of these cases
remain unsolved. All my relations.

As Adrienne Burk recounts in her thoughtful piece on the memorial, the boulder was installed by advocates of the missing women in 1997—a year before police began linking the disappearances together. Burk notes that the memorial’s form, siting, and inscription were tactically conceived so as “to communicate with both intentional and random audiences” (59):

The boulder sits in CRAB Park (for “create a real accessible beach”) in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside: land reclaimed through public advocacy from a part of the city, as one organizer claimed, “where everything’s not tidied up perfectly,” much to the distress of the city’s nearby commercial centre. The presence of the boulder and even of the park itself thus reinforces [sic] a community claim for those residents who do not share in the worlds of the development and business enterprises that tower over their modest homes, single-room occupancy hotel rooms, shelters, and night-sleeping spots. The CRAB Park boulder was also deliberately placed as a bold visual challenge in a direct line of sight to the Vancouver Police Station. (59)

Commenting on the inscription, Burk observes that it “was crafted to be highly specific in its accusations of inaction, but softer and inclusive otherwise in order to address the uncertainties of the numbers of cases, and the cultural inappropriateness of naming
people without the permission of their families” (59). It also seeks to foreground patterns of gender and racial specificity without becoming exclusive or omitting any particular case. The inscription has clearly been conceived with the attention to detail and relational meaning that characterize a good poem (hence, in citing it above, I have left the line breaks as they appear on the actual stone). It is, moreover, written very much in the spirit of being-together, of what Nancy calls civil co-existence or co-implication.

Indeed, the memorial as a whole encourages the creation of an engaged community while also helping those who visit it work through the difficult emotions to which the case often gives rise. As Burk notes, the memorial served as the first site where family members, friends, and other affected members of the community could visit and grieve. Other sites have since been created, but the boulder is still an important mourning and gathering place, especially since it is in a fairly quiet spot that neighbourhood residents can reach on foot (Burk 59). A memorial event is held at the site every February 14th, with “elders of several traditions, families, friends, and local people collect[ing] to remember those lost, and to pray, sing, and remind each other of company and support” (Burk 59). Mourning publicly, Burk notes, can complicate feelings of grief, but it also gives a public voice to the issue and makes visible the networks of people affected by it.

Returning to the problem of time, Burk comments that the boulder is “designed to prompt . . . silent, slow conversations” (59). It gestures to longstanding inaction and the snail’s pace of social change, while articulating the determination of the people attempting to construct the missing women’s case as a cultural trauma, and encouraging dialogue and community formation to continue over time. That cultural mediation of this kind takes time, that it unfolds through a long-drawn-out series of conversations, both
with others and with ourselves, complicates our sense of its value, especially given that policy-related discussions of the value of culture tend to privilege utility and efficiency in their assessments of work in this (or any) domain. In the case of the cultural mediation of the missing women’s case, it seemed, for far too long, tragically ineffective—until, finally, a critical mass of voices managed to push the case into the spotlight and persuade enough people that it constituted a cultural trauma. The case reminds us that to recognize and understand the nature and value of some cultural work we must expand our sense of temporality, and attend to processes of incremental persuasion through “slow conversations.”

“Built for Transformation”: Lee Maracle’s “Goodbye, Snaq”

I have used the phrase “slow conversations” to describe processes of cultural mediation more broadly, but Burk’s use—especially with her additional modifier, “silent”—also suggests a more specific definition: ongoing, internal, imagined exchanges with others undertaken by individuals. Her choice of the term “conversation” is significant, highlighting the informal quality of this particular discursive mode, which tends to be characterized by scattered and sporadic accrual. The Latin root of “conversation”—conversari—means to keep company with; we might further understand Burk’s notion of “silent, slow conversations” as the ongoing, internal process of keeping company with ideas and others. As a cultural practice, these “silent, slow conversations” are difficult to track and assess—though their effects are everywhere evident, as they inspire the small and large modifications of behaviour and action made by individuals over the course of everyday lives. One way of apprehending and exploring this mode of
engagement is through literature, which privileges extended investigations of interiority. In de-familiarizing the world and offering insight into the experiences and slow, silent conversations of others—the ongoing “activity of imaginative understanding,” of “bridg[ing] the structure of absence between ourselves and [other people],” as Daniel Coleman describes it in his study of reading (39)—literary texts both inform and encourage such engagement in readers.

In her short story “Goodbye, Snaug,” Lee Maracle takes up what could be described (using my first, broader definition of the term) as Vancouver’s slowest conversation—the local history and impact of colonial oppression and land appropriation. She explores this history and its lingering effects by depicting the ways that one individual “keeps company” with various stories and speakers who have helped shape the conversation since its beginnings. Maracle testifies, in her story, to the often glacial pace of social change, but she also seeks to imagine moments when a cultural mediator experiences shifts in understanding that enable her to find new, more socially and personally productive ways of engaging with her world. “Goodbye, Snaug,” in a sense, takes up where “Associated Press” leaves off, addressing its audience across “faltering, stuttering” static, carefully examining the lines of communication, and imagining the possibility of a better connection. That said, I should emphasize that it is important not to oversimplify this relationship and read “Associated Press” as a representation of a problem for which “Goodbye, Snaug” supplies the remedy: for all their similarities, the protagonists in each story face distinct sets of cultural issues that call for appropriately distinct responses.
“Goodbye, Snauq” appears in *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada’s Past*, a collection of short fictional pieces by Aboriginal authors, each one addressing a particular historical event. The aim of *Our Story*, Rudyard Griffiths explains in the book’s Preface, is to explore different ways in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada might, “after more than four hundred years of living together,” begin “to hear each others’ stories anew,” “creating common understandings and mutual respect” (2). The collection, in other words, emphasizes the foundational experience of being-together, and foregrounds meaningful and respectful forms of relations even as it exposes the hierarchical and marginalizing “dis-positioning” (to borrow Nancy’s term) that has long shaped Aboriginal experience in particular Canadian communities.

A key context for Maracle’s “Goodbye, Snauq” is the 2001 court settlement that saw the “return,” from the federal government to the Squamish Nation, of just under a dozen acres of land near Vancouver’s Vanier Park in False Creek. I put “return” in quotation marks because circumstances leading to the decision are complicated, as Maracle explains in her Contributor’s Note. She recounts how, prior to 1800, the Tsleil Watuth people shared the False Creek area with the Musqueam and the Squamish. Decimated by three epidemics, the Tsleil Watuth, who lived primarily on the north side of Burrard Inlet, counted just “41 souls” by 1812 (Maracle, “Contributor’s Note” 203), so they invited some of the Squamish down from their permanent homes to the north. One group of Squamish decided to occupy the area of False Creek known as Snauq. Maracle describes the subsequent history of land appropriation and legal disputes as follows:

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198 While I employ Maracle’s spelling here, a different spelling—Tsleil-Waututh—tends to be used in official documents of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation.
False Creek or Snaq (meaning sandbar), known to all the neighbouring fifty tribes as the “supermarket of the nation,” became a reserve some fifty years after white settlement began. It was sold between 1913 and 1916, and Khahtsahlano, the son of Khahtsahlano, and his remaining members were forced to move. This sale was declared illegal in a court case at the turn of the millennium. Although the Tsleil Watuth and the Musqueam originally shared the territory, the courts ruled that the Squamish, because they were the only ones to permanently occupy the village, “owned” it. (“Contributor’s Note” 203)

“Goodbye, Snaq,” then, addresses multiple community divides created by a colonial land grab. It is a story about the rift between the Canadian and Aboriginal nations, between the Aboriginal inhabitants of False Creek / Burrard Inlet and colonial (especially but not exclusively European) settlers, and also between the various Aboriginal groups that made up the community at False Creek / Burrard Inlet, who all had claims to the land and, originally friendly, ended up in legal wrangling over it. Maracle, “related to Khahtsahlano and the Tsleil Watuth people,” found herself pulled in multiple directions by this particular instance of colonial land appropriation and its long aftermath (“Contributor’s Note” 203-04).

Maracle’s protagonist in “Goodbye, Snaq” is positioned in a similarly complicated manner. She is a descendant of “Squamish chieftains,” and her ancestors lived in the mixed community at Snaq, but she is “really” Sto:lo because she married a Sto:lo. “Identity can be so confusing,” she remarks at one point in the story (“Goodbye, Snaq” 211).199 Officially, Maracle’s protagonist has “no real claim to the agreement”

199 Lee Maracle is also Sto:lo (Stó:lò), though she does not mention this affiliation in her Contributor’s Note.
between the federal government and the Squamish Nation; she is, however, deeply invested in it (212).

If “Goodbye, Snauq” is a story about community identity and relations, it is also about the history of land use, describing dramatic changes in the local landscape over the two centuries since the decimation of the Tsleil Watuth and the arrival of the Squamish. As Maracle’s protagonist observes, “When the Squamish moved [to Snauq] to be closer to the colonial centre, the water was deeper and stretched from the sea to what is now Clark Drive in the east; it covered the current streets from Second Avenue in the south to just below Dunsmuir in the north. There was a sandbar in the middle of it, hence the name Snauq” (206). She remarks that by the early twentieth century, “the trees had fallen, the villagers at Lumberman’s Arch [in Stanley Park] were dead, and the settlers had transformed the Snauq supermarket into a garbage dump” (213). She describes the arrival of sawmills and other industry in the area, the decimation of natural resources, the polluting and dredging of waterways, as well as the introduction of new concepts of property and ownership—“squatter” and “owner,” land pre-emption and granting, reserve creation. Now, she laments, Snauq and environs are “a series of bridge ramparts, an emptied False Creek, emptied of Squamish people and occupied by industry, apartment dwellings, the Granville Island tourist centre, and the Science centre” (214). Maracle’s story details the protagonist’s struggle, indeed her unwillingness, to come to terms with the loss of old land use patterns and lifeways—in other words, to “say goodbye to Snauq” (215). The arrival, in the mail, of news of the government settlement with the Squamish catalyzes the protagonist’s feeling that she must decide how she will relate to the context that she finds herself in: “Which way will my journey take me?” she asks herself. “Do I
dare remember Snaaq as a Squamish, Musqueam, Tsleil Watuth supermarket? Do I dare desire the restoration of the grand trees to the left and in the rear of Snaaq? Do I dare say goodbye?” (217).

In exploring the negotiation of these questions, Maracle chooses, for her protagonist, the job of teaching assistant at an unnamed university. Originally a weaver, the protagonist returned to school when her back gave out, enrolling in “a prestigious MA program in Indigenous government” (210):

I am not a star student, nor a profound teaching assistant. Not much about me seems memorable. I pursue course after course. I comply day after day with research requirements, course requirements, marking requirements, and the odd seminar requirement, but nothing that I do, say, or write seems relevant. I feel absurdly obedient. The result of all this study seems oddly mundane. Did Khahtsahlano ever feel mundane as he trudged about speaking to one family head, then another, talking up the Allied Tribes with Andy Paull? Not likely; at the time he consciously opposed colonial authority. He too studied this new world but with a singular purpose in mind: recreating freedom in the context that I was to inherit. (210)

The narrator repeats a version of this last line—“find freedom in the context you inherit”—multiple times over the course of the story, originally attributing the idea to the mythical figure Raven. “Raven shaped us,” she remarks; “we are built for transformation” (205). But in her current context, taking classes and teaching what she terms a “current events” course (which she also refers to as a “cultural class” [215]), the protagonist finds the struggle to transform, to create freedom in context, particularly
difficult: “I am not in a longhouse. I am not a speaker. I am a TA in a western institution. Suddenly the fluorescent lights offend, the dry perfect room temperature insults, and the very space mocks” (214). Like Stanley Park, “Goodbye, Snaq” is a teacher-student story, and it is also, especially, about the process of a student becoming a teacher, learning how to share the information she has gathered, and deciding how she will articulate her sense of personal and community identity within or in relation to institutional structures and codes of “professional” behaviour. And, as in “Associated Press,” cultural worker and cultural institution are in tension: indeed, in “Goodbye, Snaq,” the protagonist explicitly states that institutional norms and modes of communication restrict her sense of personal agency.

Also like the other texts discussed in this chapter, “Goodbye, Snaq” explores, through its TA protagonist’s struggles, the mediation of an archive. Over the course of her studies, the protagonist has “slogged through tons of insulting documents: Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Melville . . . alternatives to solve the Indian problem, assassination, enslavement . . . disease, integration, boarding school, removal . . .” (214, ellipses in orig.). And, she has listened carefully to the stories that her relatives—especially Khahtsahlano, who was still alive when she was a child—told about Snaq. Of Khahtsahlano and the stories he shared, she thinks, “Maybe, while he spoke to his little sweetheart, enumerating each significant non-existent landmark, vegetable patch, berry field, elk warren, duck pond, and fish habitat that had been destroyed by the newcomers, he felt this way. To what end did he tell an eight-year-old of a past bounty that can never again be regained?” (210). The protagonist’s descriptions of the textual and oral archive suggest that she is also, in Cvetkovich’s terms, negotiating an archive of feelings—a
complicated set of feelings that includes love, frustration, anger, sadness, and confusion. Like the protagonist in “Associated Press,” she is trying to figure out how to share them meaningfully and productively with others, while also achieving some form of personal healing.

However, unlike the protagonist in “Associated Press,” who feels overwhelmed by the problems of the world and cannot seem to focus on a particular issue, Maracle’s narrator can readily identify her central concern (notably, she also has a more clearly delineated audience—her group of students). This allows her to concentrate on a specific archive, a specific set of voices in dialogue and dispute. Still, she has not always felt this way; Maracle’s story is partly about the narrator coming into consciousness of, and developing, this focus. We learn in the opening pages of “Goodbye, Snaug” that the narrator has, in her studies, cast her net fairly broadly (at least within her field), but that she is increasingly preoccupied with the desire to understand—to work through some of the confusions of—her own, local community identity. “I am not sure who we really are collectively,” she thinks to herself, “and I wonder why I did not choose to study this territory, its history, and the identity changes that this history has wrought on us all” (211). The story describes the narrator’s increasing awareness of her desire to devote herself to this particular subject of study, but it also details the various ways in which she has already, for years, kept company with the contributors to this conversation. Indeed, she initially became a weaver because she wanted to replicate the clothing of her ancestors, which she treats as an articulation of cultural memory:

Coast Salish women bred a beautiful dog with long and curly hair for [the] purpose [of making jackets]. Every summer the mountain goats left their hillside
homes to shed their fur on the lowlands of what is now to be the Sea to Sky Highway. They rubbed their bodies against long thorns, and all the women had to do was collect it, spin the dog and goat together, and weave the clothes. The settlers shot dogs and goats until our dogs were extinct and the goats were an endangered species... but we carried on with our weaving, using sheep’s wool for a time; then when cash was scarce we shopped at local second-hand shops or we went without... I fell in love with the zigzag weft, the lightning strikes of those jackets, and for a time got lost in the process of weaving. (211-12)

Now that she has left her work as a weaver, the narrator has found other ways of keeping company with her ancestors. When she went away to university, she brought with her “an old archive photo” of Khahtsahlano, which she keeps in both her TA office and at home (212). The photo, rather like the CRAB Park memorial, though of course more private, encourages the process of slow, silent conversation: “Every now and then I speak to Khahtsahlano, promise him I will return,” the narrator says (212).

Notably, “Goodbye, Snauq” is characterized by repeated temporal shifts: descriptions of the narrator’s present-tense experience of the university repeatedly slip into remembrance, her retelling of Khahtsahlano’s stories opening up the past so that time and again we lose—then regain—a firm foothold in the present. Lying at home, drinking wine, memories “roll[] about” in the protagonist’s mind as the wine “slosh[es]” through her body (206). But, while the boundaries blur at home, under the influence of wine, the narrator struggles—and, in the end, fails—to maintain a strict divide in the classroom, ultimately losing her self-control in the telling of her stories to her class, and fainting. When she reawakens, however, she finds herself surrounded by a cluster of students, their
“apathetic stares . . . replaced by a deep concern” (215). She speculates that their “apathy must have been a mask, a mask of professionalism, a mask covering fear, a mask to hide whatever dangers lurk in learning about the horrors of colonialism” (214). In inadvertently losing her professional composure, the protagonist finds that she has been able to enhance her students’ conscious experience of the archive of feeling, to make them aware of the performance of professionalism and the complicated emotions this performance hides. At the same time, she comes to understand that her students, in their apathy, were already a part of that archive.

The narrator recognizes, in effect, that to engage her students she must involve them in the conscious creation of the archive. Telling them that “[w]e need to finish this story,” she takes them to Granville Island (originally the sandbar that gave Snaq its name), and together they perform a ceremonial goodbye, which the narrator marks with the following words:

In this goodbye we will remember Snaq before the draining of False Creek. We will honour the dead: the stanchions of fir, spruce, and cedar and the gardens of Snaq. We will dream of the new False Creek, the dry lands, the new parks, and the acres of grass and houses. We will accept what Granville Island has become and honour Patty Rivard, the First Nations woman who was the first to forge a successful business in the heart of it. We will struggle to appreciate the little ferries that cross the creek. We will salute Chief George—Chipkaym—and Khahtsahlanogh, who embraced the vision of this burgeoning new nation. I will pray for my personal inability to fully commit to that vision. (217)

The narrator and her students, in other words, turn to another kind of cultural
performance—that of ceremony—to mediate the history of change at the site, choosing and adapting a performance mode that allows them to affirm and articulate their own relation to, and complicated feelings for, the site. As Indigenous studies scholar Shawn Wilson notes in *Research Is Ceremony*, “The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge . . . distance,” a process that “allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world” (11).

In her treatment of Granville Island in “Goodbye, Snaaq,” Maracle provocatively “re-views” a landscape that has been much celebrated in local planning discourse as a successful example of planning for “livability.” As I have explained in previous chapters, livability planning was inspired by Jane Jacobs and other humanist urban theorists, and “livable” urban communities were promoted, in Vancouver and elsewhere, as an alternative to suburban living and commuting. Livability planning privileges walkability, mixed-use development, the availability of amenities in the inner city, increased residential zoning in central areas, and mixed housing types for a diverse socioeconomic demographic (Wheeler 16). As it was imagined by its early proponents, “the livable city” was

a city of human scale, where the population would find urban government more accessible through participatory programmes, where the ideology of the public household would guide transportation and housing policy, favouring public solutions (transit, social housing) over private ones (the private car, slum housing), and where design guidelines and generous park and landscaping policy would enhance the quality of the built environment. (Ley, *New Middle Class* 4)
However, the concept of “livability” has proven fairly malleable, and has at times migrated far from its non-elitist, socially and environmentally conscious roots. David Ley describes Granville Island, developed during the 1970s according to livability objectives, as “the epitome of niche marketing for an urbane middle-class population jaded by mass marketing, who seek in shopping and gazing the pleasures of symbolic exchange, the confidence of savoir-faire, the delights of consumer distinction” (New Middle Class 7). Granville Island, in this interpretation, is an example of how the cultural economy can function as a means of controlling particular urban spaces by scripting “who belongs” there (Zukin, Cultures 1), often eliding or ignoring more difficult conversations about land use and belonging.

In “Goodbye, Snauq,” Maracle’s protagonist resists buying into the dominant narrative of the Granville Island landscape, recognizing and foregrounding longer histories of displacement and land degradation that trouble the livability rhetoric—indeed, she recalls the ways in which this landscape was made devastatingly “unlivable.” Interestingly, however, her resistance is not complete: “Although today I must say goodbye,” she reflects, “tomorrow I may just buy one of the townhouses slated for completion in 2010 [at and around the Olympic Village, east of Granville Island]. Today I am entitled to dream. Khahtsahlano dreamed of being buried at Snauq. I dream of living there” (219). The protagonist’s relationship to the built landscape involves negotiation rather than rejection—she demonstrates a desire to come to terms with the landscape that

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200 Similarly, Caroline A. Mills finds in her study of the development of the broader Fairview Slopes neighbourhood (for which Granville Island serves as a commercial, cultural, and social hub) that while early Fairview projects maintained fidelity with the original principles of the livability movement, later projects tended to co-opt the livability ethos. They did so, she argues, by abandoning a commitment to inclusiveness, diversity, and sensitivity to local place and communities, and instead privileging as their primary objective the “significant enrichment of the life-styles of their new middle-class settlers” (“Life” 177).
has been built, to find a way to make truly livable the context that we have, for better or worse, inherited. Indeed, she re-inflects the livability narrative in a manner that, notably, is consistent with its original participatory principle, encouraging the continuance of a richly textured conversation about place. And, though she articulates a trenchant critique of the landscape of cultural consumption and production that has emerged at the site once known as Snaq, she also positions herself as a potential contributor to the economy that now shapes the site. “I am not eager,” she remarks, “to be a part of an environmentally offensive society that can preach ‘Thou Shalt not kill’ and then make war on people, plants, and animals to protect and advance financial gain,” and yet, reflecting on her ancestors’ history of enforced removal, she does not see removing herself as an appropriate response (219). While the “economic” and “intrinsic” value of culture—and of cultural workers—conflict in significant ways in the protagonist’s formulation, these categories are ultimately not, for her, mutually exclusive; rather, she insists on complicated intermingling.

Following her ceremonial goodbye, the protagonist offers further insight into this stance through a riff on the name of the wealthy developer who—as I explained in Chapter One—bought the Expo ’86 site and, subsequently, built the Concord Pacific condominium mega-project there (these condominium towers dominate the landscape across False Creek from Granville Island):

Li Ka Shing . . . is Chinese, and he didn’t live here when he bought [the Expo site]. I don’t know if he lives here now, but for whatever reason I love the sound of his name. “Everything begins with song,” Ta’ah says. His name is a song. It rolls off the tongue, sweetens the palate before the sound hits the air. It is such an
irony that the first “non-citizen immigrant residents” should now possess the power to determine the destiny of our beloved Snaúq. I know it shouldn’t, but somehow it makes me happy, like knowing that Black Indians now people the Long Island Reservation in New York State. (218)

In “re-viewing” False Creek and finding “sweet irony” (218), Maracle’s protagonist discovers a way to conceptualize oppositions between dominant and repressed narratives of a particular urban landscape in a manner that encourages a turn toward the space and community, rather than producing alienation or paralysis. Significantly, she also presents herself as a reflexive, deeply affected arbiter of taste. In highlighting the “sweet irony” of the landscape’s overlapping narratives, she suggests that we might find pleasure and hope in the carefully critical mediation of cultural products, processes, and spaces.

And yet, even careful, critical cultural mediators are bound by certain limitations of perspective. In the case of Maracle’s protagonist, I find myself troubled by her conflation of Vancouver’s first generation of Chinese immigrants—who, as she herself notes (218), endured the head tax, restrictions on immigration and employment, anti-Chinese riots, and general social oppression—with a wealthy Hong Kong developer operating in very different socioeconomic and cultural contexts, especially since she has taught us, over the course of the story, to attend to the complexities of Aboriginal experience in, and claims to, the local landscape. While “Goodbye, Snaúq” as a wholeforegrounds the transformatory potential of cultural mediation, the protagonist’s treatment of this particular issue reminds us that such work is never finished—that cultural mediation remains an ongoing and still often difficult process.

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201 Maracle’s protagonist describes Li Ka-shing as “one of them,” referring to early Chinese immigrants (218).
202 For a discussion of the history of Asian immigration to Vancouver, see Chapter One.
Taken together, Taylor’s, Lee’s, and Maracle’s texts depict an urban cultural landscape characterized by crisis and conflict, anxiety and despair, but also healing and connection, pleasure and hope. Like both the Creative City Task Force’s *Culture Plan* and Pier Luigi Sacco’s “An Approach to Cultural Policy in Vancouver,” these texts emphasize that widespread participation and ongoing learning (or what Sacco would describe as the enhancement of cultural competence) are key factors in fostering the cultural vitality of the city; however, they also foreground major challenges—an entrenched socioeconomic divide, long histories of marginalization and conflict, the commodification of urban life—to this project. They encourage us to think carefully, too, about the terms of participation and the kinds of “competence” we are attempting to hone, highlighting a prevailing tendency toward passive forms of consumption and encouraging greater reflexivity in cultural engagement. Finally, the texts question whether the compatibility between economic and intrinsic cultural imperatives that seems to be sought by Sacco and the makers of the *Culture Plan* is either possible or desirable; indeed, Taylor, Lee, and Maracle all indicate that the critical negotiation of these often conflicting imperatives is integral to making and mediating diverse, socially just, and sustainable forms of culture.
Conclusion

[N]ow it is evening. It is that strange, equivocal hour when the curtains of heaven are drawn and cities light up.

- Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life”

Reflecting on the urbanization of human society that began with industrialization, Raymond Williams observes, in _The Country and the City_, that “[t]he growth of towns and especially of cities and a metropolis; the increasing division and complexity of labour; the altered and critical relations between and within social classes: in changes like these any assumption of a knowable community—a whole community, wholly knowable—became harder and harder to sustain” (165). As Williams acknowledges, the notion of a “wholly knowable” community had, of course, always been an effect of idealization (165); however, the proliferation and diversification of interactions in the modern city foregrounded the problem—the reductive, idealizing fiction—of conceiving community through identity or sameness, and so prompted city dwellers to begin to understand and approach their relations with each other differently. The history of the modern city is, in one sense, the history of the tensions and struggles, but also the varied and vital new forms of implication, that have emerged—and that continue to emerge—in and through urban experience.

My study of Vancouver-based writing developed in large part out of an interest in the problems and possibilities of urban relations. During the initial stages of conceptualizing this project, literature and film scholar James Donald proved an important guide: in his book _Imagining the Modern City_, Donald takes up the work of a range of seminal urban writers, filmmakers, and social critics, exploring how descriptions
of urban experience by attentive observers have illuminated the dynamics of relationality for us, and how they have expanded our sense of what it could mean not simply to live but to live together, to build community, in the city (xi-xii, 169-70). For Donald, an urban ethics emerges at least in part through the production and circulation of urban ontologies: the possibilities of what we might be, in other words, emerge in relation to our understanding of what we are.

Michel Foucault’s late work on ethics, especially his essay “What Is Enlightenment?,” is foundational to Donald’s thinking about the practice of urban description. Foucault insists, in “What Is Enlightenment?,” that we understand modernity as an attitude rather than an epoch: “by ‘attitude,’” Foucault explains, “I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task” (309). This attitude, Foucault suggests, involves attending to and reflecting on the present moment—it is constituted in and through the active questioning of “today” (309). Foucault begins by locating this attitude in the work of Immanuel Kant, but it is in Charles Baudelaire (as Donald notes [21]) that he finds “an almost-indispensable example” of the attentive, interrogative “attitude of modernity” (310). Through Baudelaire’s discussion of nineteenth-century Parisian painter and illustrator Constantin Guys in “The Painter of Modern Life,” Foucault elaborates his conceptualization of the attitude, suggesting that it involves “a difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom”:

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203 See also my discussion of Donald’s study in Chapter Three.
For the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is. Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it. (311)

As Donald observes, the attitude of modernity, for Foucault, involves recognizing and nurturing the unstable boundary between reality and the imagination as part of the practice of attending to the present (Donald 22).

My own project developed from the premise that literary texts emerging from such an approach— from a combination of respectful attention and interrogative imagination— can make a difference in how we perceive, interact in, and build city spaces and communities. In the Vancouver-based work that I have examined, Lisa Robertson’s advocacy of the “mystical” practice of description, involving both “reflection” as mimesis and “reflection” as contemplation, consideration, deliberation (Robertson, Occasional Work 16; see Chapter Three of this study), is perhaps the most explicit articulation of the attentive yet transfiguring attitude described by Foucault; indeed, Robertson—who highlights Baudelaire’s influence in her essay-poem “The Value Village Lyric” [218]— was another early guide for my research. However, I have endeavoured to track permutations of the approach in each of the texts that I have selected for analysis, from Pauline Johnson’s unsettling uptake of the discourse of urban boosterism in her descriptions of early Vancouver, to Timothy Taylor’s, Nancy Lee’s, and Lee Maracle’s creative, critical, and affected mediations of Vancouver’s
contemporary cultural landscape. By turning our attention to aspects of urban experience that dominant discourses and conceptual frames fail to capture, and by considering and depicting how the city might be lived differently, the authors featured in my study expand our awareness and understanding of the contexts, complexities, difficulties, and possibilities of ethically engaged interactions and cultural practices in Vancouver.

While Donald served as a particularly important early guide, my project—and, specifically, my focus on Vancouver-based writing—also developed from my reflections on some of the elisions and limitations of Donald’s study. Donald set out to explore the “imaginary space” of the “Western” metropolis “created and animated . . . by the urban representations found in novels, films, and images” (x); however, while he did not plan to produce a site-specific urban imaginary (the geographical range of the texts and visual media he considers is broadly European and American), he nevertheless found that the “imaginary space” he ended up mapping emerged in significant ways from his experience of, and affiliations to, London, England—the city he had called home for much of his life.

Donald remarks in his Preface to *Imagining the Modern City* that “to leave the impression that my city is wholly abstract, that it has no implicit referent, would be disingenuous. ‘Every time I describe a city, I say something about Venice,’ admits Marco Polo to the Khan in Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*. In the same way, for me to write about the city is inevitably to invoke London” (x). Donald also makes what are, to my mind, some surprising choices in his engagement with literary texts. Despite advocating the practice of continually producing new descriptions of urban experience, Donald tends not to bring recent works of urban literature into his study, favouring instead Victorian and high

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204 Donald explains that he “began work on what was to become *Imagining the Modern City* just as [he] moved out of London, after living there all [his] life” (x).
modernist texts (e.g. Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*); when he does take up more recent creative representations of the city, they tend to be films rather than literature.

I knew, from the start, that for me to write about the city would be inevitably to invoke Vancouver, and as I developed the framework for my study I became particularly committed to foregrounding and exploring the situatedness of this specific urban imaginary—the way it emerges synekistically (as Edward Soja would put it) in and with a particular urban region—while also still attending to its often complicated connections with a broader urban imaginary. Recognizing that “the Western discourse on modernity is a shifting . . . configuration consisting of different, often conflicting, theories, norms, historical experiences, utopic fantasies, and ideological commitments,” as Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar describes it in “On Alternative Modernities,” I approached the literature and larger conversation about urban change in the Vancouver city-region as a particular manifestation of this discourse, attending to its specificities and internal complexities (Gaonkar 15). As I have noted, part of this project involved tracking multiple, site-specific versions of the interrogative attitude that, Foucault proposes, is the defining characteristic of cultural modernity; at the same time, I endeavoured to highlight how this attitude has been cultivated in relation to “the breathless rhetoric of the new” that tends to accompany and accelerate capitalist development and expansion (Gaonkar 22). In the case of Vancouver, this meant thinking about how an increasingly old story of newness (as I described it in Chapter One) has informed the city’s history of recurrent restructuring—from its inaugural boom era to the period of mega-project development at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. It also meant
investigating the various ways in which Vancouver-based literary texts have been responsive to, but have also necessarily been wrapped up in, this trajectory of repeated, rapid, and intensive socioeconomic and spatial change.

Donald’s lack of engagement with recent literary texts, meanwhile, proved to be one of a number of factors that encouraged me to think carefully about the continuing relevance of literary texts to the conversation about contemporary urban experience. Donald does not explicitly address his omission, but it is in keeping with the rise to dominance of visual forms in the mediation of urban experience, which earns extensive consideration in his study. Another factor that pushed me to reflect on the continuing relevance of literary texts was the lack of attention literature tends to receive in the scholarly and popular conversations about creativity and culture in the city. In the discourse on culture as an economic driver, for instance, more lucrative art and cultural forms related to advertising, design, film, and new technology tend to be privileged. As well, over the past 15 years, performative and participatory public art practices and activities—from large-scale, corporate-sponsored spectacle to small, often politically inflected site-based interventions—have become an increasingly prominent part of official and grassroots initiatives to foster the cultural health and vitality of cities.

In reflecting on the continuing relevance of literature in these contexts, I have found myself returning to Baudelaire’s description of Constantin Guys in “The Painter of Modern Life.” Guys, as Baudelaire describes him, spends his days walking in the city, “set[ting] up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement” (9); then, in the evening, at “that strange, equivocal hour when the curtains of heaven are drawn and cities light up,” Guys “bend[s] over his table, darting on to a sheet of paper the
same glance that a moment ago he was directing toward external things” (11, 12). In this moment, “the world is reborn upon his paper”: it becomes “natural and more than natural, beautiful and more than beautiful, strange and endowed with an impulsive life like the soul of its creator” (12). In other words, in this time and space of removal from the everyday interactions of urban life Baudelaire locates the act of interrogative transfiguration integral to the attitude of modernity (Foucault 311). Baudelaire focuses on art making in his essay, but reading, too—and especially the reading of literary texts—can involve a similarly productive experience of (partial) removal. Charles Altieri, as I explained in my Introduction, has urged us to remember that through their formal structure literary texts retain a connection to the world of sensuous experience while also “calling forth . . . the free play of imagination” (73): in reading literary texts, we are not removed entirely from the world, but rather are situated in dynamic relation to it. “[T]he urge to read is paradoxical in that the reader withdraws from others not to be shut up in his or her own mind but to connect, intimately, with others,” Daniel Coleman has observed in his reflections on reading as a cultural—and potentially countercultural—practice (17). “The withdrawal,” Coleman continues, “underlines the importance of privacy, intimacy, and self-awareness if we wish to attend meaningfully and imaginatively to the world beyond our own immediate skins” (17).

The kind of withdrawal Coleman describes here is, I would argue, especially important in a city where spectacular events such as the Winter Olympics and Expo ’86 have been employed to promote an uncritical, largely celebratory view of the city. But I would suggest that reflective withdrawal is also an important supplement to participation in the various smaller-scale, grassroots initiatives that are playing an increasingly
prominent role in urban public life—from guerrilla gardening and Jane Jacobs-inspired walking tours to site-specific performances by innovative local theatre companies. Many such initiatives claim to (and often do) foster alternative, critical forms of public interaction and space making, but individual participants still need to maintain a critical relationship to the events themselves, to do their own thinking about what their presence and activities in particular spaces actually mean, and to consider how the events in which they choose to participate impact local communities. In suggesting that an interrogative attitude be cultivated in relation to site-specific performance and interactive events in Vancouver, my aim is certainly not to quash the growing enthusiasm for participating in the public life of the city. However, I would suggest that forms of withdrawal allowing for reflection on, and questioning of, public engagement are as integral to ethical urban relations as enthusiastic participation. Meredith Quartermain’s *Vancouver Walking* perhaps best articulates the approach that I am describing: hers is, as I observed in Chapter Three, poetry that attests to the speaker’s enactment of publicness through daily, rooted forms of interaction, while also gesturing toward an inaccessibly private dimension of her relationship to the city.

**“Retro-Speculation”**

As I was gathering my thoughts toward a conclusion to this study, I returned to Wayde Compton’s *Performance Bond* (2004), a book that had long occupied a prominent position on the shelf next to my desk, since I had very much hoped to discuss Compton’s poem sequence “Rune” in my project. The central site in “Rune” is a lost one—Hogan’s Alley—a section of Vancouver’s Strathcona neighbourhood that was home, for much of
the previous century, to the majority of the city’s black population. As I noted in Chapter One, Hogan’s Alley was demolished in 1970 to make way for the Georgia Viaduct; Compton further explains that “the City of Vancouver had already made it hard to live in Hogan’s Alley through a series of anti-residential bylaws designed to shift the population into a set of housing projects in central Strathcona, so by the late 1960s, when the viaduct was actually being built, Hogan’s Alley’s black community was already evanescing” (“Retro-Speculative Verse” 111). Compton never lived in the community himself, but he heard stories about it from his parents (111); in 2002, he co-founded the Hogan’s Alley Memorial Project, becoming a key figure in the struggle to bring the community into the collective memory of the city.

In “Rune,” Compton explores the difficulties and possibilities inherent in his efforts to recover the memory of, and to reimagine, Hogan’s Alley. For example, in a section called “Blight,” Compton employs erasure poetics to suggest how the lost community exists primarily as a structure of absence in the contemporary landscape and archival record:

. . . fameless, half-named, enghosted: False Creek to
   _______?

Compton also observes that the “successes of global anti-racism during this period . . . made it easier for black Vancouverites to live wherever they wished, and, it seems, they wished to live outside Strathcona, and have not since collected residentially anywhere in Greater Vancouver. Though there are over 18,000 blacks living in Vancouver and its suburbs, we are today scattered throughout an intra-urban diaspora” (“Retro-Speculative Verse” 111).

In his introduction to Bluesprint, an anthology of black literature and orature from BC, Compton notes that “there seems to exist no written account by a black person composed during the Hogan’s Alley period” (25). He praises Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter’s Opening Doors: Vancouver’s East End—which collects transcriptions of oral memoirs by Strathcona inhabitants (including black residents) recorded by Marlatt and Itter in the 1970s—for “preserv[ing] orature that would have otherwise gone unrecorded” (25). First published in 1979, Opening Doors returned to print in 2011 as part of the Vancouver 125 Legacy Books Collection; the five interviews with black residents Nora Hendrix, Rosa Pryor, Leona Risby, Austin Phillips, and Dorothy Nealy are also included in Bluesprint.
The occlusion blues
down in the bottom
when City Hall
puts ______ under study.

There are whole languages built out of how ______ aren’t.
Whole forts. Absences chopped down, hewn into beams, and raised. (113)

“Rune,” Compton goes on to explain, also “deals with the ambivalences of looking back at [the Hogan’s Alley] community, and the odd reality that younger black people today, who never had to live in conditions of segregation or pseudo-segregation, have an enduring curiosity about those times and conditions” (“Retro-Speculative Verse” 111). A section called “Lost-Found Landmarks of Black Vancouver” features photographs of buildings to which Compton had appended signage for black community institutions that never existed (“Strathcona Coloured People’s Benevolent Society of Vancouver,” “False Creek Moslem Temple,” “The Far Cry Weekly: Voice of the Negro Northwest (Since 1957),” “Pacific Negro Working Men’s Association”); the aim behind this exercise in “retro-speculation,” as Compton terms it, was to explore “the twin senses of displacement and self-enculturation that worry blacks in Western Canada” (“Retro-Speculative Verse” 115). If the discourse and act of property speculation configures space in ways that fail to recognize the historical and communal dimensions of particular sites, Compton’s retro-speculation is an act of attentive transfiguration, one that does not restore what has been erased but that makes visible the complicated, imaginative manner in which the history and memory of a site and community is being brought forward by a later generation.

Compton’s work gives me a useful language and context for thinking about some of the omissions of my own project. In Chapter Two, I proposed that we conceptualize
the city-region as an assemblage, as a relational complex of physical, social, and discursive structures. An assemblage, I noted, is by definition heterogeneous and open, but processes that assert the power of particular component parts can limit the inherent dynamism and complexity of such a structure, causing it to take on more monolithic qualities. Though my project is only one contribution to the broader discourse about what the Vancouver city-region is, has been, and might be, I nevertheless worry that in failing to address certain texts and conversations it is complicit in the strengthening of some histories and stories of place, and the erasure of others.

With this in mind, I wish to engage, briefly, in some retro-speculation of my own. Perhaps most importantly, I see Chapter Two of my study—with its focus on representations of displaced or otherwise marginalized populations—as a contribution to a larger and increasingly longstanding literary and scholarly conversation about the spatial experience and intra-community dynamics of marginalized groups in Vancouver. While I concentrated primarily on colonial and class-based displacements in this chapter, Vancouver has produced an especially rich tradition of literary texts (and associated scholarship) that remember and reimagine the history of racial, cultural, and gendered forms of spatial segregation and marginalization, and the survival and growth of communities within these contexts. A short list of such texts would include Joy Kogawa’s _Obasan_, Daphne Marlatt’s _Ana Historic_, SKY Lee’s _Disappearing Moon Café_, Lee Maracle’s _Sojourner’s Truth and Other Stories_, Shani Mootoo’s _Out on Main Street and Other Stories_, Wayson Choy’s _The Jade Peony_, Larissa Lai’s _When Fox Is a Thousand_, and Madeleine Thien’s _Simple Recipes_. Compton’s _Performance Bond_ and _49th Parallel Psalm_ are also a part of this tradition, as are Marlatt’s _Vancouver Poems_ and _Steveston_.

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and Sachiko Murakami’s *The Invisibility Exhibit* and *Rebuild*, but given that each of these texts emerges from and reconceptualizes the position and practices of the street-level poet, they might also have found a place in my exploration of urban poetic practice in Chapter Three. Finally, as part of Chapter Four’s examination of Vancouver’s emergent landscape of cultural consumption and production, I might well have discussed Douglas Coupland’s portrait of video game programmers in *JPod*, or have considered the locative art that William Gibson imagines for Vancouver in *Spook Country*.

Each of these texts, and many more, are squeezed into my bookshelves devoted to Vancouver-based writing, and still others are stacked in piles—“an obstacle course of precarious possibilities,” Nancy Lee’s librarian might say (23)—around my desk. Like Meredith Quartermain’s speaker in “Backwards from Pender Lake,” I have lugged backpacks full of them as I have gone about my daily routine. Different texts have jostled for attention in my thinking about certain areas of Vancouver, mixing with personal experience and informing my understanding of the city in complicated ways. And yet, for other parts of the city-region I have found relatively few literary points of reference. For example, Vancouver’s largest suburb, Surrey, did not receive much attention in my study, largely because, though it is the second-most-populated municipality in British Columbia, it is not yet fostering a vibrant tradition of city-focused writing.

Like Vancouver, Surrey is redeveloping rapidly, and as I conclude this study I find myself paying particularly close attention to the efforts of government officials and developers to establish this sprawling suburb as a major centre in the city-region. Each time I take the SkyTrain to Surrey Central Station I note new signs of the municipality’s transformation into what one commentator has described as “a vibrant, walkable
Yale town south of the Fraser” (Sinoski), and I usually leave wondering whether novelists and poets will play a role in articulating, responding to, and shaping this trajectory of change. Notably, officials are following the creative city script in their redevelopment plans, incorporating a performing arts centre, a library, and additional space for Simon Fraser University207 into the emerging downtown centre. However, the large-scale, developer-driven projects that are planned for the city have not, historically, proven particularly hospitable or attractive to writers. My trips to Surrey remind me that while many of the omissions in this study are the result of choices I have made and the necessary limitations of my perspective, others are suggestive of gaps and silences in the local literary landscape,208 and also point to the need for further reflection on the kinds of environments that encourage literary communities to thrive. In the end, my hope is that my project inspires readers to turn their attention to un-storied spaces, and to make diverse and unexpected connections to overlooked texts and contexts, sparking acts of thinking, reading, research, and writing that help bring the city-region to light.

207 Simon Fraser University already has a campus adjacent to Surrey Central Station.
208 In Fall 2011, the Vancouver 125 Legacy Books project will bring attention to one long-overlooked contribution to Surrey’s literary history, Truman Green’s novel A Credit to Your Race, which was initially self-published in 1973 (the novel will be republished by Anvil Press). Set in Surrey in the early 1960s, the semi-autobiographical work explores Canadian racism through the experiences of a teenaged black protagonist, Billy Robinson, who has a relationship with and impregnates a white neighbour. Wayde Compton has cited Truman as a personal influence: “If isolation is a key theme of black BC writing,” Compton has remarked, “Billy Robinson is perhaps its most fully-drawn expression” (“Introduction” 27).
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