

**EMPTY HOUSE: REAL ESTATE AND THEATRICALITY  
IN VANCOUVER'S DOWNTOWN**

by

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## Abstract

Vancouver's spaces of performance are implicated in its real estate drama in ways that are unique to the city. Like characters in a play, these spaces embody and reveal dramatic urban tensions. This thesis looks at the material forces influencing Vancouver's theatrical culture and uses a historically descriptive lens to understand that culture's mechanisms of change. The three case studies at its core all hold space in Vancouver's downtown neighborhood, and each one involves a distinct building, era, and socio-economic context. The first case study is focused on the dual venue of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre and the Vancouver Playhouse, which opened between 1959 and 1963. Run by civic authorities, the complex maintained a dysfunctional relationship with the resident local regional theatre the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company, which collapsed in 2012 just shy of its 50th Anniversary. The second study centres on the 1800 seat venue launched in 1995 by Garth Drabinsky's Livent under the name The Ford Centre for the Performing Arts. Closing after three years due to Livent's financial scandals, it was purchased in 2001 by Four Brothers Entertainment who established a Pacific Rim identity by programming a blend of European and Asian performance forms. After years of losses, the venue was sold again in 2012 to Westside Church, a local Evangelical Christian organization, and functions now as a church. The third case study is less concerned with a theatre venue's real estate history than with a real estate development's link to theatre history. It explores developer Ian Gillespie's 2013 mobilization of the German modernist art concept of "gesamtkunstwerk," literally "total work of art," in relation to his building projects. The apotheosis of this work is Vancouver House, a condominium tower with a design inspired by a stage curtain, which uses theatrical means and metaphors to make sense of its place in the city. Looking at the

accumulated impact of the three case studies, the thesis concludes that there is a kind of geopathological malady that infuses spaces of large-scale theatricality in Vancouver's downtown that contributes to their failure to thrive and to their transformation into hybrid forms.

## **Lay Summary**

Vancouver's spaces of large performance are implicated in its real estate drama in ways that are unique to the city. Large-scale theatrical activity in the neighbourhood of downtown has proved especially unstable, revealing much about the city's relationship to its culture and built environment. This study looks at three sites downtown: the Queen Elizabeth complex (housing the Queen Elizabeth Theatre and the Vancouver Playhouse), the former Ford Centre for the Performing Arts (after The Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts and currently Westside Church), and Westbank's condominium development Vancouver House. The study brings a geographical perspective to theatre space and a theatrical perspective to residential space in order to consider how buildings perform and embody themes of the city's spatial drama. It concludes that Vancouver's downtown is unique in its inability to sustain large-scale locally-produced theatre, and that this gap has perhaps been filled by real estate development.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Katrina Dunn.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of actor, director, artistic director, and writer Joy Coghill (1926 – 2017), a leading player in one of the stories presented within and a major force in Canadian theatre. Her fight for the place of theatre in downtown Vancouver has left an indelible mark on the cultural landscape that will linger through many ages.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In November of 2019 a 7,500-pound chandelier suspended below the Granville Street bridge spun illuminated in a dazzlingly theatrical display to celebrate the transformation of urban dilapidation into a world-class condominium development. Ten years earlier, in March of 2009, the Canadian impresario behind the only privately built theatre ever constructed in Western Canada, The Ford Centre for the Performing Arts in downtown Vancouver, was led into a jail cell having been convicted of forgery, and of defrauding investors of an estimated \$500 million. Over five decades earlier, in August of 1963, *The Vancouver Sun* ran a photograph of an unnamed actress running away from makeshift banners hastily attached to the city's new regional theatre building; the image engaging the era's spirit of protest to claim the civically-owned and managed space for the local theatre community. As these and countless other examples suggest, Vancouver real estate is dramatic. Conversely, Vancouver's spaces of performance are implicated in its real estate drama in ways that are unique to the city. Like leading characters in a play, these spaces embody and reveal dramatic urban tensions. They engage in actions that both drive and react to the major plot points in Vancouver's spatial story, with all its attendant euphoria and struggle.

The city's geographical drama has attracted international attention, and it is fair to say that the local real estate discussion has evolved into an obsession. The basic narrative goes like this. Since the city hosted Expo 86, rampant residential development, fueled in a large part by foreign buyers, has made Vancouver one of the most expensive (and lucrative) housing markets in the world, escalating the divide between rich and poor, and instigating a city-wide affordability crisis. As leading urban geographer David Ley says: "The top end of the market is not being supported by local conditions .... We've got a housing market that is totally out of

whack with the labour market” (qtd. in Sutherland). While discussion and opinion about the causes and effects of this narrative are abundant, much of the conversation focuses on the search for blame, the binary of winners and losers, and the suspended state of disbelief that residents and onlookers display. In 2018, *The New York Times* described the situation as a “housing frenzy” and suggested that it was damaging civic mental health: “Vancouver’s transformation to an international gateway has given the city something of an identity crisis” (Dougherty). There is, however, a parallel narrative in the city’s spaces of large-scale theatricality that brings to the surface some of the underlying forces driving Vancouver’s complex and compelling situation. What if we could use the lens of our own cultural life, through analysis of these spaces, to understand salient qualities of Vancouver’s urban landscape?

This study takes its inspiration from Michael McKinnie’s *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City*, with its desire to “broaden the critical interests of Canadian theatre studies . . . exploring the intersection of theatrical and geographical inquiry” (15). Drawn to the precision of McKinnie’s work, I was intrigued to see what kind of results would be produced by a similar exploration of Vancouver’s theatres in their urban context. As with McKinnie, I look to the material forces influencing Vancouver’s theatrical culture and use a historically descriptive lens to understand that culture’s mechanisms of change. Though both my borrowing and inspiration are clear, I believe my work also confirms McKinnie’s warning about the ecological fallacy of transposing his particular findings beyond Toronto’s limits and using them to make national arguments (McKinnie, *City* 135). Vancouver is a distinct and special site for this type of study and has yielded results specific to its own urban matrix. Further, I have centered my study on a particular section of Vancouver: the city’s downtown, an area that has



been home to three major sites of performance, each of which is remarkable for a history redolent with large-scale theatricality.

While all of my investigations hold space in what Vancouver's city planners have designated as the neighborhood of "downtown," the three case studies at the centre of this thesis each involve a distinct building, era, and socio-economic context. The first case study (Chapter 4) is focused on the dual venue of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre (2,765 seats) and the Vancouver Playhouse (668 seats), a performance complex designed by Canadian architect Fred Lebensold that opened between 1959 and 1963. Run by civic authorities, the Queen Elizabeth complex maintained what I will demonstrate was a dysfunctional relationship with the local regional theatre the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company, which was resident in the complex throughout its existence. In a dire financial state and locked in an adversarial relationship with its civic landlord, the company collapsed in 2012 just shy of its 50th Anniversary. The second case study (Chapter 5) centres on the 1800 seat venue launched in 1995 by Garth Drabinsky's Livent under the name The Ford Centre for the Performing Arts. Designed by renowned modernist architect Moshe Safdie, The Ford closed after three years due to Livent's financial scandals and was purchased in 2001 by Four Brothers Entertainment who sought to forge a Pacific Rim identity for the venue by programming both European and Asian performance forms. After years of losses, the venue was sold again in 2012 to Westside Church, a local Evangelical Christian organization, and functions now as a church. The third case study (Chapter 6) is less concerned with a formal theatre venue's real estate history than with a real estate venue's connections to theatre history. The context for this third case is Vancouver's remarkable twenty-first century real estate boom which saw developer Ian Gillespie in 2013 mobilize the German modernist art concept of "gesamtkunstwerk," literally "total work of art," in relation to his building projects.

The apotheosis of this work is Vancouver House, the tower and podium condominium development designed by Finnish architect Bjarke Ingels whose shape suggests "the gestural metaphor of the curtain" (Boddy *Gesamtkunstwerk* 9). I explore the ways in which this real estate development uses theatrical means and metaphors to make sense of its place in the city.

The shape of this thesis has a further connection to Ingels's design for Vancouver House. To fit the challenging footprint of land he was given, tucked between the ramps of Vancouver's Granville Street Bridge, his building has a triangular base. It twists as it rises until, about two thirds of the way up, it executes a beguiling transformation into a standard rectangular skyscraper. The cumulative visual effect is that the lower building suggests the curtain of a proscenium stage pulled back to reveal some transfixing performance in progress beyond the building. My study also twists and transforms. My research approach in the first two case studies braids together performance analyses and cultural materialist urban theatre analyses, akin to those of McKinnie, Jen Harvie and Ric Knowles. This braided approach aims to make sense of significant events in Vancouver theatre history and the built environment legacies these events have engendered. However, at the moment in this thesis when The Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts was sold to Westside Church and became primarily a site of religious worship rather than a home for secular performing arts (about two thirds of the way through), the study shifts its approach to demonstrate how the language and practices of theatricality influenced cultural production and real estate. This lens continues through the Vancouver House chapter (Chapter 6), where I consider how buildings perform and how the downtown peninsula itself is configured like a proscenium stage through the material intervention of architecture. Unlike the tower, however, my study becomes less standard as it transforms and my desire with this unconventional form is to test the limits of the theatre and performance studies structures I

employ, to see if they might stretch further in their applications, and to endeavor to affect a similarly beguiling transformation in print.

I have titled this study “Empty House,” partially as an allusion to the well-known Vancouver phenomenon of empty homes functioning as investment properties, thus generating a rift in the city’s materialist unconscious between the vacant built environment and the embodied, and sometimes homeless, life on the street. In the theatre, an empty house refers to a poorly attended performance, which is a recurring event in some of my case studies. My title also gestures to the long stretches of time in the life of The Ford Theatre/Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts when the building sat empty, unable to be animated by theatrical production because of financial, legal, and artistic limitations and choices. Lastly, it remembers the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company and the theatre building where it struggled, and failed, to become a permanent presence.

Unfolding from this empty house metaphor, my study has led me to conclude that there is a kind of geopathological malady that infuses spaces of large-scale theatricality in Vancouver’s downtown that makes it difficult for them to thrive. Scholar of theatre and space Una Chaudhuri has coined the term “geopathology” (*Staging* 55) to describe the fundamental dislocation between humankind and nature in modern realist texts, and theatre scholar Joanne Tompkins has used it to describe the “spatially unstable nation” of Australia as seen through its theatre works (5). Although Canada’s processes for violently unseating Indigenous peoples are similar to the ones Tompkins points to in Australia, I also use geopathology in a somewhat broader sense using Kim Solga’s definition of the term as “*a disease of place and space*” (italics in original, *Theory* 65), identifying the spatial sickness or spatial anxiety that infects places as the result of material forces with more recent economic, social, or governmental drivers. Solga and Tompkins

together, in “The Environment of Theatre,” have noted that geopathology is undertheorized outside of fourth-wall realism and encourage migrations of the concept into other theatrical forms (80-94). My uptake of their challenge is more material, applying it to venues and their emplacement in the city. The body of this study seeks to define and detail downtown Vancouver’s geopathological malady as it manifests in three downtown theatre-connected sites.

## **1.1 Methodology**

### **1.1.1 Purpose, Research Questions, Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to provide a theatre studies-based understanding of key cultural and spatial forces that have been at play from 1945 to 2019 in Vancouver’s downtown spaces of large performance. Using performance analyses, archival research, site histories, and scholarly insights from theatre, performance, and urban geography studies, I hope to shed new light on some of the events associated with the complicated and sometimes controversial spaces I explore. I interrogate the three case studies using a set of research questions designed to draw together the various methodological approaches to the project. My investigation builds on evidence gathered in relation to these questions and is supported by the various streams of theory and knowledge they engage. The five main research questions I ask in relation to each case study are:

- 1) Given that each urban structure is part of an economic and social matrix unique to its period of genesis, how have large-scale theatrical sites in Vancouver’s downtown core reflected the economic flows of capital and property in the city since 1945?
- 2) Each case study houses a narrative of controversy or failure. These controversies and/or failures have been variously formed in relation to the space’s conceptual, financial, legal,

administrative, ethical, and artistic dimensions. Given that none of these controversies or failures are divorced from the urban matrix, how have they impacted the urban and cultural landscape in which they are situated?

- 3) What are the recurring themes in the dramas of these buildings' histories and the performances they have showcased? How are these themes connected to the urban civic culture of Vancouver?
- 4) What is revealed when we read these buildings as performing theatrically within their specific urban context?
- 5) How have the performances generated by these buildings helped to reveal elements of the previous four questions?

My objectives in pursuit of these research questions are threefold. First, I wish to deepen both the scholarly and general understanding of the sites I explore: their histories, their cultural resonances, and their material and economic features. Second, I want to contribute to the body of work positioning cultural sites as prime and fertile ground for understanding the unfolding of urban processes. Third and lastly, I hope to add some fresh strains to the large chorus of voices struggling to understand and articulate how Vancouver's urban context and development over time have impacted its artists and citizens.

### **1.1.2 Scope and Delimitations**

This study has both temporal and geographical scopes that limit its investigations and are vital to the selection of its case studies. Temporally, the study focusses on the period of 1945 to the present (2020). I have selected 1945 (the end of World War II) as a beginning point because it is the date when movement towards the establishment of a civic theatre space in Vancouver

(what was to become the Queen Elizabeth complex) began to gain serious traction. I will sketch out some of the relevant earlier history of Vancouver in Chapter 3: A Short History of Vancouver's Downtown, and note some earlier tries at a civic venue to provide context for my analysis of this first case study. The primary work, however, will focus on events after 1945. As the third case study, Vancouver House, is in the final stages of being constructed as this thesis is being finished, my study will also push forward into the future and theorize the final, animated form of the building and its attendant performative life as part of the city. Though the study has a significant historical component, it will not attempt comprehensive histories of the performing lives of the buildings. The Queen Elizabeth complex itself, with over fifty years of events, would overburden the document before the other sites had even been considered. Instead, I will focus on the genesis of each building, mapping significant eras in the lives of the buildings, and analyzing select performances that evoke a sense of the larger production histories and serve as testaments to how the respective buildings work.

My geographical scope is limited to Vancouver's downtown. Vancouver has a rich and varied geography of theatrical production with a number of unique sites worthy of in-depth investigation. For instance, the performance culture of Granville Island, with its diverse confluence of economic, cultural, ownership, and stewardship models would surely be a fascinating site for the kind of analysis I pursue in this study. However, I have chosen to focus on downtown as it has been a focal point for much of the extreme socio-economic change that has shaped Vancouver since 1945. The following map (Figure 1) shows the borders of what the City of Vancouver (COV) considers to be the downtown neighborhood ("Downtown") and the placement of the three sites I explore within it. To clarify the use of the word "city" throughout this work, I use the acronym COV to refer to the City of Vancouver as a governmental entity.

Otherwise, when referring to Vancouver in a more general sense, I simply call it the “city.”

Some considerations of downtown include the neighbourhood of Coal Harbour, but for the purposes of this study I have kept it out and focused only on downtown east of Burrard.



**Figure 1 (Chapter 1.1) Map of Vancouver's Downtown Showing Geographical Scope and Three Sites by Eric Leinberger, Used with the Permission of Eric Leinberger**

Of the possible buildings and companies that fit my scope, I have chosen to pursue those that are large in scale and have strong theatrical associations. Scale has been important to me, as I want to be able to explore my case studies as significant players in Vancouver's built environment. While all the sites I have chosen have associations with other disciplinary endeavours (music and dance primarily, though in the case of Vancouver House its associations are residential), theatre has played a strong role in defining the cultural identities of each. I have chosen to leave out of my study the 2672 seat international music and other performance hall The Orpheum, for instance, although it has been in the downtown peninsula since 1927. My reasons for this are because its genesis is outside my temporal scope (post-1945) and, while theatre is a part of its history (specifically vaudeville), its current primary identity is as a music venue. Theatrical association is also why, in the discussion of the Queen Elizabeth complex, I have chosen to focus most of my attention on its smaller, theatre-focused venue, the Vancouver Playhouse.

A study of large-scale theatricality in Vancouver that leaves out the city's largest not-for-profit theatre, the Arts Club Theatre Company, must be explained. Though the Arts Club's first venue was on Seymour Street downtown (opening in 1964 and closing in 1991), since its shift to Granville Island in 1976 it has focused its attention away from downtown and currently all of its three venues animate other parts of the city. Though it fits nicely in the temporal scope of the study, its evolution is deeply idiosyncratic, at times defining and at times countering the dominant modes of theatrical production. Its growth, impact and contributions to the built



environment are worthy of their own study,<sup>1</sup> but inclusion in this one would draw attention away from the more specific concerns of downtown. That said, the company makes cameo appearances in a couple of the narratives I present, a testament to its considerable civic influence.

### 1.1.3 Theoretical Lens of Analysis

This study proceeds from a cultural materialist basis, seeking to detail what Jen Harvie has called, “the material conditions of performative practices and the performative effects of the material theatre” (*Theatre* 72). The theory of cultural materialism has evolved from its roots in Marxist theory, through its incorporation into anthropology by Marvin Harris, later expanding into cultural studies through the work of Raymond Williams. Kim Solga defines it as “an interdisciplinary methodology that explores the ways in which different cultural phenomena are enmeshed with one another at the level of lived, material experience, and it attempts to account for the tangible effects of that enmeshment on the circulation of goods, money, labour and ideas” (*Theory* 28). Broadly, this theoretical approach is interested in how manifestations of culture interact with larger social systems. Harvie clarifies the aim of the approach: “to explore culture as a site of ideological contest, and to consider the ways that culture participates in the dissemination of ideologies” (*Fair* 6).

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<sup>1</sup> An exploration of the Arts Club Theatre Company and its legacy could begin with Malcolm Page’s article “The Growth of Professional Theatre in Vancouver, 1963-1999” in *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol. 101, supplemented by Peter Guildford’s 1981 thesis “The Development of Professional Theatre in Vancouver.” Later periods could be considered with Rachel Ditor’s commemorative *The Arts Club Anthology: 50 Years of Canadian Theatre in Vancouver*, with support from Peter Dickinson’s “Vancouverism and its Cultural Amenities: The View from here.” in *Canadian Theatre Review* vol. 167.

The most salient explication of the cultural materialist lens in relation to this particular study is Ric Knowles's *Reading the Material Theatre*. In this book Knowles "attempts to develop a mode of performance analysis that takes into account the immediate conditions, both cultural and theatrical, in and through which theatrical performances are produced, on one hand, and received, on the other" (3). He details how space and place are ideologically coded, and how that code can be read not only in theatre architecture, but also in the spaces of creation, production and sales (62-88). Knowles builds from Henri Lefebvre's argument that formations of space are unique to their cultures. In this framing, space is neither inert nor given but always produced by complex social forces. For example, glossing Lefebvre's argument that "space is a means of control and hence domination, of power," Knowles emphasizes the complex and powerful social forces at play in who gets to have access to space and provides many instructive examples to demonstrate how material factors can advance, alter, or undermine a theatre creation, company, building, or project (68). Further, he shows how these aspects similarly affect the process by which audiences make meaning.

In *City Stages*, Michael McKinnie also reads theatre spaces through a cultural materialist lens but he explicitly links his approach to materialist geography, a field which Allen Scott defines as exploring "the spatial and locational foundations of economic life" (484), and which has done much to articulate the logic and dynamics of urban space under capitalism. Exploring the role of economic policies, procedures, market forces, and space in Toronto, McKinnie seeks to understand theatre as a civic enterprise shaped by capitalism in downtown Toronto. He emphasizes links between "political economy and programming, real estate and performance ideology . . . urban development and theatrical legitimacy" (16). As I detail further in my three case studies, McKinnie asked many questions about Toronto's downtown theatre spaces,

economics, and culture that have also informed my investigation into Vancouver's downtown theatre spaces. The broadest and most direct of these are: "Did the particular urban geography of Toronto itself play a part in the theatrical production in the city? And, inversely, did theatre play a part in the urban development of Toronto?" (*City* 4).

In Vancouver, a rich vein of materialist geographical research concerning its urban space has been particularly concerned with Vancouverism, the shorthand term for Vancouver's developmental model which some credit to John Punter who may have used it for the first time in his book *The Vancouver Achievement* (Beasley 38). Further materialist geographical approaches have explored how urban change in the city might be read as symptomatic of globalization (Olds, Mitchell, Peck et al.). While this research has helped provide me with foundational understanding of the city's unique growth pattern, none of it pays attention to the theatrical spaces of the city. Focusing on this aspect, I hope to accomplish research akin to that McKinnie undertook in relation to Toronto.

The "spatial turn" in theatre and performance studies brought greater attention to how theatre spaces themselves perform. Kim Solga dates the migration of a focus on space into theatre to the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, from its mid-twentieth century origins in philosophy and cultural studies as instigated by Michel Foucault (Solga, *Theory* 72-75) (see also Chapter 2: Literature Review p. 43-44). The spatial turn developed frameworks for thinking about how theatre spaces perform, adding meaning and resonance to any performance they house and to the city that houses them. This work rose to prominence initially through a semiotic approach, such as is developed through Marvin Carlson's *Places of Performance* and David Wiles's *A Short History of Western Performance Space*. A similar turn in performance studies broadened this work from a singular focus on the

performance venue to a multi-faceted consideration of the many performative elements influencing its built environment, broadly defined. For example, Richard Schechner's work helped to define as performative those quotidian structures and events through which a culture's values are announced or revised so that they may be learned and perpetuated ("Forward" x). While in the first two case studies (Chapters 4 and 5) my research centres on two different performance venues, in an effort to engage with this more multi-faceted approach, in Chapter 6 I explore the many performative elements at play in Westbank's Vancouver House.

This study also draws from architectural discourse to theorize how buildings perform. Juliet Rufford, in *Theatre & Architecture*, positions this discourse at a key crossroad where many of my interests with this study intersect. She argues that, "since architecture has long existed at the nexus of real estate and urban development, it may provide insights into the forces linking theatre to urban planning, civic ideology and political economy" (9). These are the kinds of insights I seek to uncover through this dissertation research. Although I cannot claim full disciplinary expertise in architecture and economic geography, for the purpose of undertaking this thesis research, I have sought university-based opportunities to become better versed in these fields, particularly as they pertain to Vancouver theatre. For example, I studied with UBC economic geographer Dr. Jamie Peck exploring *Globalization, Cities, and Regions*, and cultural geographer Dr. Geraldine Pratt in her *Film and the City* course. This study has helped me to understand and articulate the practical experiences and knowledges I gained through my several decades of experience as an artistic director of a Vancouver theatre. In many ways my approach here feels akin to the struggle to connect disciplinary divides that Dipesh Chakrabarty articulates in his influential 2008 essay *The Climate of History: Four Theses*. As a historian writing about climate change without formal scientific training, he has relied on material that "informed writers

have written for the education of the general public” (198). He therefore discusses his topic from a historian’s point of view, not a scientist’s. Likewise, I do not profess advanced capacity in some of the knowledge fields that I draw on that are outside the performing arts, but rather believe that connecting scholarly architecture and geography precepts to those of theatre and performance studies may contribute intriguing new insights, perspectives, and hybrids.

Finally, while grounded in spatial thinking, this is also a work of theatre history. An example of David Wiles’s assertion that “writing history is a creative act, based in an attempt to analyze the present” (“Why” 17), I work backwards from the spatial conundrum of current downtown Vancouver for its important theatrical narratives. Like Wiles, I maintain that historical narrative and analysis are vital tools for the forging of future change. Without them, generations of culture makers are “disempowered by their lack of appropriate maps of the past” (“Why” 3). I add to this assertion that understanding the history of buildings is also vital to our understanding of the present and our ability to change the future. Susan Bennett asserts the importance of civic infrastructure to the construction of an identity of place (“Calgary’s” 43), and to the inscription of important shared memories (50-51). Buildings solidify and embody cultural forces and are as rich with the imprint of the past as the stories we tell.

#### **1.1.4 Research Methods**

Through my research for this thesis, I found that interrogating the complexity of performance and space in downtown Vancouver theatres requires more than one methodological perspective to yield layered and meaningful arguments. I therefore explore each of my case studies with a multi-method approach. I draw evidence from research conducted at the COV Archives, at performance site visits, through study of Vancouver’s development since 1945

through the lenses of economic geography and urban planning, from performance analysis, as well as from semiotic analysis of architectural and design features. In each of these efforts, I have sought to immerse myself in the discourses of space in several disciplines to help me understand the range of ways space has functioned in these case study sites. This blend of approaches allowed me to view layers of time and space both underneath and above each site, and to comprehend the forces that have brought a particular space into being.

Archival material informs much of the work on offer here, and in this I have been inspired by media theorist Cornelia Vismann and her observation that archival files and other primary sources “are located on the meridian between spoken and written language,” much like play scripts (8). Unlike secondary sources, they are “able to turn communicative acts into writing without loss” (8), thus perhaps getting closer to an actual transfer of a live event. My research has benefitted from this energizing, theatrical perspective. While the controlling and excluding nature of the archive must be recognized (D. Taylor 17-19), individual files themselves have the potential to “store an unadjusted history of becoming” (Vismann 8). The archive offered me civic policy documents, society board minutes, brochures, press releases, reviews, letters, and programs. I also examined more generally available material such as sales brochures and catalogues, e-marketing pieces and promotional websites. Carefully cross-referencing these materials has helped me to fill in the details of events. I complimented this approach by engaging with secondary sources in the several theoretical lenses of analysis I have identified. Through the various sources I encountered, the stories of these sites and their attendant controversies have slowly emerged like raw, rough, and somewhat shocking new plays, once performed but still rich with contemporary significance.

Many of the methods described above are elements of McKinnie's methods in *City Stages*. Where I divert substantially from the path he forged is in my pairing of the material exploration of the built environment with performance analysis. Harvie articulates well what I perceive to be the benefits of this particular approach:

On the one hand, a performative analysis tends to be optimistic, reading cultural practices as wonderfully socially liberating of subjects who are free agents. On the other hand, a materialist analysis tends to be skeptical, portending likely social compromise for a world of unfortunate dupes. I want to argue here for a reading that deliberately combines performative and materialist strategies to create a materialist performative analysis .... My reading has two central aims: first to redress a tendency in theatre and performance studies to practice analytical strategies that focus either on performative practices or material conditions, producing two parallel analyses rarely given the chance to intersect and influence each other; and second, to argue that the more complex reading permitted by this combined strategy gives a more accurate understanding of the complexity of our contemporary lived social experience. ("Agency" 205)

Engaging Harvie's blended materialist performative analysis, I look at performance to understand how the sites I am exploring expressively manifest their material aspects, and interface communicatively with the city and its citizens. Each case study has three performance analyses associated with it, each drawn from different stages of the buildings' presence in the city. In this practice I am particularly influenced by Raymond Williams's *Drama in Performance* and Gay McAuley's *Performance Analysis: Theory and Practice*, both of which emphasize the coterminous consideration of performance text and its embodied realization within a single

framework. Thus, if the performance I am analyzing is based on a published text, I explore that in the same frame as its realization in performance.

I have elected not to do interviews with participants in the events researched as part of this study for the same two reasons that McKinnie identifies in the Introduction to *City Stages*:

First, in a materialist vein, the individual practitioner is only one agent in a much larger historical formation, and that individual is not always (or even predominantly) the best index by which to understand and critique the historical events I examine. Second, while there is nothing inherently problematic historiographically with using the testimony of individual participants, I have strong reservations about retrospectively gathering and employing it as evidence of past intention, aspiration or explication when data related to these things already exist from the time of the events themselves .... While such retrospective testimony may be interesting, it is more reliable evidence of participants' views now, and less reliable evidence of their intentions or aspirations then. (14)

Furthermore, a number of significant controversies associated with the sites I explore in this study make the gathering of testimony difficult, as participants resist disclosing their views in this public way. Eight years after the dissolution of the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company, bits of litigation are still wending their way through the courts and some of the parties involved are not speaking freely about events surrounding the company's collapse or its financial ramifications. The corporate entity associated with the genesis of The Ford Centre, Livent, has been sold along with its assets. Moreover, the criminal proceedings that accompanied its demise as a musical theatre producer left a fulsome trail of details in the media. The leadership of both Westside Church and the development company Westbank would also undoubtedly have an



interesting perspective on the analysis presented here, but my focus is on their public-facing performances and shared perspectives.

## **1.2 Significance**

### **1.2.1 Social and Cultural Significance**

Citing Demographia's affordability comparisons across global cities Douglas Todd reported in May of 2019 in *The Vancouver Sun* that, "only Hong Kong ... has a more egregious housing situation than Vancouver" (Todd). The local discussion of this remarkable and civically challenging conundrum is widespread, and Vancouver citizens and authorities continue to debate such issues as access to housing, the widening economic divide, and large-scale demographic shifts. It is my hope that by looking at some of the same issues through the combined lenses I describe in my methodological description above, I can offer new tools for looking at old problems as well as offer ideas and arguments for participants in this civic conversation.

Vancouver theatre organizations have been priced out of the built environment for decades. The city does not have an abundant stock of old factories and under-utilized warehouses good for re-purposing as artistic space. Where they exist, they have either become "prime locations for high-end residential conversions," or their expensive seismic upgrading requirements have made low-end adaptations unfeasible (Artscape 53). Vancouver's well-known lack of corporate head offices in contrast with comparably-sized cities has meant there is a dearth of hefty local sponsorships necessary for capital projects, and "limited philanthropic community engagement" (Artscape 67). Reading histories of cities like Toronto and Montreal, it is clear that Vancouver's identity has not rested on the sentimental sway or broad support for cultural facilities in the same way that it has on such other public amenities as parks and recreation

facilities. A notoriously difficult place for performing spaces to survive, especially large-scale ones, Vancouver boasts some spectacular failures (two of them chronicled in this study) with important lessons to share.

My study aims in part to give practitioners and venue managers more tools and language with which to address the significant challenge of finding ground for artistic creation in the city. Vancouver's theatre community has doubled in size since 2000.<sup>2</sup> While there are some creators in its unique ecology of companies that have attempted to stand outside dominant market ideologies and forces, in a city where municipal officials battle or collaborate with real estate barons for lucrative pockets of air hovering over the cityscape, "there is no such outside to occupy" (Harvie, *Theatre* 42). Vancouver Theatre would benefit from a strong foothold in its built environment and engaged support from business and government. Without this support, and the autonomy and power that stable space provides, Vancouver theatres will remain in situ exiles in the world's most "livable" urban centre; landless and clamouring at the gates to their own city.

### **1.2.2 Cultural Policy Significance**

The COV's formal cultural policies transformed in their focus several times during the period under study (1945 to the present), attempting to align the city's cultural development with its growth. In *The City as an Entertainment Machine* (2011), T.N. Clarke argues that consumption and entertainment drive urban development, not vice versa, and that "using cultural facilities in downtown revitalization has become a prevailing planning tool in post-industrial

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<sup>2</sup> The number of member theatre companies in the Greater Vancouver Professional Theatre Alliance, as reported by Executive Director Kenji Maeda, was thirty-seven in 2000, up from seventeen in 1987. Between 2000 and 2019 membership grew from thirty-seven to eighty member companies (Maeda).

cities” (18). The cities of Western countries moved from resource-based to service-based economies through the last half of the twentieth century and sought to revitalize downtown cores which had become “unloved, unlivable and frightening” (Punter xvii). Urban planning had historically worked to generate higher values and more productive uses of land. By the late 1960’s, however, that ideology had shifted to accentuate the concerns of a residency-driven urban environment: preservation, neighborhood planning, and “the livable city,” and Vancouver’s cultural policy fell in line with this movement. Cultural facilities are, of necessity, a part of this picture.

In 2008, COV Cultural Affairs staff commissioned Toronto-based Artscape to help provide direction for future facility development, which resulted in the Cultural Facilities Priority Plan (CFPP) that announced a shift in the role of the COV from “planner-provider-deliverer” to “enabler-convener-catalyst-broker” (Artscape 79). Buckling under the pressure to provide space to an expanding arts community in an economically impossible milieu, the COV was clearly bowing out of cultural facility development. Also, in 2008, The Centre for Expertise on Culture and Communities, a three-year research and networking project led by SFU, produced a report titled *Under Construction: The State of Cultural Infrastructure in Canada*. This report concurs with the CFPP in identifying the “devolution of policy responsibility for cultural spaces” (Duxbury vi), and calling for “cultural-creative enterprises that blur the line between for-profit and not-for-profit . . . and a reformed private-public framework” (Duxbury 81-82). My study provides a parallel narrative to the chronicle of evolving cultural policy unfolding in these documents and helps to articulate the material forces at play in them. Anticipating the future growth of the city, it may prove useful in future versions of policy attempting to supervise the interface of cultural space and real estate downtown.

### **1.2.3 Academic Significance**

The *Under Construction* report also identifies that “academic attention to the area of cultural infrastructure is in a largely absent or nascent state” (28). While noting McKinnie’s *City Stages* as the single exception to this situation, the report goes on to observe, “the lack of ongoing engagement between practitioners and academics is a related problem” (29). Perhaps academics can act as a bridge between the labyrinthine policy sphere of government and the practical pay-the-rent aspects of theatre production. Perhaps further academic analysis of the economies of performative space can aid in finding an alternative calculus of cultural value to use as a basis of discussion. I expect this research not only to contribute to the growing academic conversation on “Theatre and the City” and “Theatre and Real Estate,” but also to position Vancouver as a rich site of interest and study for these fields. Moving beyond theatre and performance studies, this interdisciplinary perspective may also be of interest to economic, urban, and cultural geographers. Further, anyone attempting to shine a light on the urban landscape of Vancouver and the unique details of its built environment, including historians of the city and archivists, will gain from the detailed case studies and new perspectives on the roles theatres have played in Vancouver’s urban context.

### **1.3 Research Project Overview**

This investigation surveys and blends relevant theories to provide a scholarly foundation from which to approach the three case studies at its core. I explore the distinct buildings, economic factors, and engagements with theatre, performance, and theatricality at each site. I then move to synthesize the discoveries and arguments emerging from these cases. Structurally, I

follow this introductory chapter with a Literature Review (Chapter 2) that explains in more detail the relevant publications I drew upon for this study. The structure of the Review begins with the most expansive lens, spatial studies in general, and then gradually closes the aperture as I focus on specialized fields of knowledge and smaller geographical scopes. This chapter articulates in detail the interdisciplinary aspects of my analytical lenses and the related rationales for my research methodology. In Chapter 3 I offer “A Short History of Vancouver’s Downtown”. This chapter helps to embed my three case studies in the long and short arcs of change that have impacted the area defined in my geographical scope. It is by no means exhaustive, but instead a very brief overview of the human history of land in this study. It also surveys and highlights the powerful social and economic forces at play in downtown Vancouver through my period of study and acts as a reference to help understand some of the events that animate the case studies.

The first study, the subject of Chapter 4, is the dual venue of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre (2,765 seats) and the Vancouver Playhouse (668 seats), both housed in an attached complex. The Queen Elizabeth complex materialized after a decades-long grassroots movement to support the burgeoning professional arts scene in the city with infrastructure. I look at the social climate of post-World War II Vancouver and the tension between the rise of the Keynesian welfare state and the staunch, fiscally conservative civic ruling class of Vancouver. The building was designed by Canadian architect Fred Lebensold and the first part of it opened in 1959, just ahead of a nation-wide, publicly funded movement to create cultural infrastructure in the form of civic venues and regional theatres. As Canada’s primary mid-century theatre architect, Lebensold’s footprint on Canadian cultural life was enormous. He also designed the National Arts Centre (NAC) in Ottawa, Place des Arts in Montreal, and the Confederation Centre for the Arts in Charlottetown, and I hope that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of his legacy.

It was the specter of inner-city decay and the quest of local politicians to attain world city status for Vancouver that finally drove the complex to be built. Run by civic authorities, the complex maintained a troubled relationship with the local regional theatre the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company (VPTC), which was resident in its smaller venue, the Vancouver Playhouse, throughout its existence. My primary thesis in this chapter is that embedded in the organizational structures of the VPTC and in its founding drama is an alienation of producing theatre artist from theatre building that was never rectified in its forty-nine-year history. I explore the challenges the company faced as it navigated the complexity of being both in, and not in, the larger complex in which it was cited as “resident.” The paradox of this nominal “residency” made it difficult for the company to thrive. The demise of this important regional producer in 2012 rocked the Canadian theatre scene and engendered heartfelt protests from local artists.

The three performance analyses I have chosen for this case study show the arc of the company’s struggle with its civic landlord. The first is VPTC’s inaugural production *The Hostage* by Brendan Behan. A controversial offering and critical failure, the production set the company’s artistic aspirations at odds with the prevailing taste of the city right from the very beginning of its existence. The second is 1997’s full-length telling in mime of Nikolai Gogol’s famous short story *The Overcoat*, created and directed by Morris Panych and Wendy Gorling. Developed and premiered by the VPTC, the show became a huge hit, but the VPTC’s lack of resources to support international touring saw the production move to Toronto’s Canadian Stage which ultimately used it to tour and build a significant international reputation. The third is the company’s final show, Yasmina Reza’s *God of Carnage*, presented by civic authorities a month after the VPTC dissolved. Though it was successful in the other city of its co-production

(Winnipeg), in the traumatized theatre scene of Vancouver it existed strangely in the cultural ecology as a show without a producer and was a huge box office failure.

In Chapter 5, my second case study, I look at the 1800 seat venue just blocks away from the Vancouver Playhouse which was launched in 1995 by Garth Drabinsky's Livent under the name The Ford Centre for the Performing Arts. The Ford was the kingpin in what was seen as a major movement to build a commercial theatre scene in Vancouver in the nineties based on the economy of the Broadway-style musical. In the 1980's and 90's Vancouver had grown by 100,000 people in only 13 years (Planning Dept. 4) and Expo 86 had promoted the growing city with a new Pacific Rim identity. Drabinsky's theatre was designed by renowned modernist architect Moshe Safdie, and though it presented itself as a commercial enterprise it was built partially with public funds. It closed after only three years of production due to Livent's financial scandals and Drabinsky and his Livent co-founder were later convicted of fraud and forgery, with Drabinsky serving prison time for his role. The site was purchased in 2001 by Colorado-based Four Brothers Entertainment and run by impresario Dennis Law under the name The Centre in Vancouver for Performing Arts. His programming featured some homegrown production, mainly in the hybrid performance form of "action musical" which he pioneered. It also, however, endeavored to be "a performance-arts gateway to the Pacific," trying to program a transnational blending of Asian and European performance forms. In 2012, after years of staggering losses, the venue was sold to Westside Church, a local Evangelical Christian organization, and functions now as a place of worship for that organization's large congregation. As an offshoot of the remarkable growth and success of the American evangelical movement, Westside Church's repurposing of The Centre is a prime example of how this particular religious

denomination has radically reimagined church space by adapting secular performance forms to the worship experience and by revising the semiotics of sacred space.

My performance analyses for this case study begin with the production that launched the Ford Theatre, the musical *Show Boat*, with music by Jerome Kern and book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, based on Edna Ferber's best-selling novel of the same name. The show was famously controversial in its Toronto premiere, with influential Canadian poet, novelist, lawyer and activist M. NourbeSe Philip calling it “an example writ large of cultural appropriation and theft,” and “part of the overwhelming need of white Americans and white Canadians to convince themselves of our inferiority” (59). Despite such substantial and prolonged critique, however, the show became a huge financial and critical success for Livent and went on to open without protest in Vancouver. Next, I look at *Terracotta Warriors*, the action musical that most illustrates the aesthetic that Dennis Law pursued, and that became a focus for some of the controversies that surrounded his leadership of the venue. Revolving around the life of China’s unifier and first emperor Qin Shi Huang (259-210 BCE) and the seven thousand terracotta warriors with which he was buried, the work combined western dance and Chinese classical dance and martial arts. Proposing his Centre as the nexus of a new transnational spectacular body, Law struggled publicly with the negative critical press reviews that followed *Terracotta Warriors*’ premiere performance. Lastly, I analyze the primary production of the building’s third manifestation as Westside Church, a Sunday worship gathering on July 1, 2018. Using Jill Stevenson’s concept of evangelical dramaturgy, I look at the importance of music in the worship activities as well as the church’s hypermedial mise en scène which infused the auditorium with large scale audio-visuals. Finally, I discuss the highly exegetical sermon Pastor Matt Menzel delivered on Matthew 22:22-



23 on 1 July 2018, which narrates the fallout of one of western culture's most influential narratives of space: Jesus's clearing of the Temple.

The third case study, in Chapter 6, follows this unusual progression right into the heart of Vancouver real estate and brushes my prior methodology in the opposite direction. Instead of using materialist geography to think about theatre, I use theatre to talk about new vanguards in real estate development. In 2013, billionaire real estate developer and founder of Vancouver's Westbank Projects Corporation, Ian Gillespie, became intrigued by the concept of "gesamtkunstwerk," the hugely influential and provocative theory of "total work of art" made famous by composer Richard Wagner, and began applying it to his development projects. The apotheosis of this new focus is Vancouver House, the tower and podium development both next to, and sandwiched in between, the north Granville Bridge and its ramps, planned for completion in 2020. The design solution for the tricky site that Finnish architect Bjarke Ingels of Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) created is a twisting form morphing into a square tower above the bridge. Ingels has written: "Think of our building as a giant curtain, at the moment of being pulled back to reveal the world to Vancouver and Vancouver to the world" (qtd. in Boddy, *Gesamtkunstwerk* 32). I show how Vancouver House correctly identifies the development of Vancouver's downtown as a theatrical spectacle that performatively impacts the citizens and is invested in framing, generating affect, and maintaining a particular vision of city. The building effectively shifts the site of performance from the interior of performing arts venues to the city as a whole, the roles of author and director are usurped by developer and architect, and both performers and spectators are played by a tacit citizenry cast in a participatory happening not of their own explicit choosing.

My performance analyses for this case study chronicle Gillespie's increasingly bold forays into public performance. The first is the interactive exhibition *Gesamtkunstwerk* (2014) that announced the Vancouver House development and unveiled its designs. Housed in a mini storage building on the site of the future tower, the exhibition explored and glorified the idea of a "total work of art" and proposed Ingels's tower as its apogee. Next is Gillespie's 2017/18 exhibition *Fight for Beauty*, a largely autobiographical account, narrated by Gillespie himself, of the projects that display his past, in-progress, and future transformation of the face of Vancouver and the other cities in which he has worked. Proposing civic aesthetics as a battle to be fought with the enemies of art, *Fight for Beauty* revealed that Vancouver House was already a partially lost fight: it was originally to be two towers framing the bridge ramps, both sides of the proscenium, one of which was rejected by Vancouver urban planners. Now stage left hangs unbalanced on the horizon – ironically a mere half of a "total work of art." The last analysis is of Vancouver artist Rodney Graham's recent and already notorious "Spinning Chandelier," a kinetic sculpture commissioned by Gillespie that electrifies and animates the space under the north end of the Granville Bridge that is part of the Vancouver House development. Imagined as an urban icon with the civic cachet of other performative structures like Gastown's Steam Clock and Stanley Park's Nine O'Clock Gun, the sculpture will mark time by animating twice daily. This final performance analysis details the unveiling of Graham's artwork on 27 November 2019.

I conclude by returning to my research questions and, building from the case studies, elaborate on my thesis statement. I reflect on the analyses presented in Chapters 4 to 6 and summarize the ways in which the three case studies construct a narrative that brings to the surface some of the underlying forces driving Vancouver's particular context. I discuss the

geopathology of Vancouver's downtown in more depth and suggest directions linked to my analysis that might fill some of the city's now empty houses. This concluding chapter also gestures to future areas of research that might expand the scope of this study and build on the way performative spaces in Vancouver and other cities are experienced and discussed.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

To provide an overview of the scholarly work that has been most influential in my research, in this chapter I outline the interdisciplinary aspects of my analytical lenses and provide the rationale for my research methodology. I begin with the most expansive theoretical concept at play in my work – space itself – and then explain my more limited geographical focus and the ways that my three case studies help to make sense of this area. I organize the relevant scholarly literatures into five categories that follow the direction of this increasingly focused theoretical aperture: Space and Place, Theatre and The City, Vancouver and its Discontents, Backstories of Case Study Buildings, and Performance Analysis Supports. Apart from academic works, a scan of my Works Cited will demonstrate that, beyond the scholarly sources cited here, I also engaged with journalistic articles about Vancouver, real estate, architecture and arts and culture. It is important to note that while these and the many local theatre reviews I consulted are left out of this overview, I have gained from the many material details they have provided about the sites and performances I explore in my case studies and I cite them often throughout the thesis.

### 2.1 Space and Place

Many thinkers have helped me grapple with the rich spatial and platial puzzle that my case studies provide. As Gay McAuley notes, “theatre is perhaps the only art form in which the name given to the place where the artistic event occurs . . . is the same as that of the art form itself” (*Space* 1). Physical space is primary in theatre and performance, and theatre and performance studies theorists have borrowed concepts and methodologies from a wide range of thinkers and disciplines to explain and expand on this truth. In 1967 French philosopher Michel Foucault, ushering in the “spatial turn” as an intellectual movement, mused prophetically that

"The present epoch will perhaps above all be the epoch of space" (*Other* 22). In *Questions on Geography* (1980) Foucault asked for a critique of "this devaluation of space that has prevailed for decades" and answers to why space was seen as "dead, fixed, the undialectical, the immobile," while time was "richness, fecundity, life, dialectic" (70). His *Of Other Spaces* (1986) contains thoughts towards a new schematic of space, and introduces the notion of heterotopias, or counter-sites, that comment on other spaces and societal myths. He classifies theatre as a heterotopia with a subversive role to play in creating interactions in non-heterotopic sites. This was a beginning. As he suggested in *The Eye of Power* (1980): "A whole history remains to be written of spaces" (149).

Most spatial thinkers, including those contributing to theatre and performance studies, acknowledge a foundational debt to Henri Lefebvre and the ideas he laid out in *The Production of Space* (1991). Lefebvre argued that space is both physical and mental and is never a given but a social product. Each society creates its own unique version of this social product based on complex social practices and constructions: "Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism" (94). Answering Foucault's challenge, Lefebvre's insight provides the groundwork for analyses of space in many disciplines. Theatre scholar David Wiles captures how these ideas were taken up in performance studies: "Since space, as Lefebvre insists, is always socially produced, aesthetic practices are at every point bound up with socio-political and philosophical assumptions" (*Short* 19).

In an analysis that would not be out of place in the stream of human geography, Wiles's *A Short History of Western Performance Space* (2003) contends that performance is first and foremost a relationship in space. Building on Lefebvre, he consistently returns to the role of performance in spatially constituting social subjects and in spatially producing the symbolic

elements that allow those subjects to make sense of their worlds. Taking his cue from Richard Southern's *Seven Ages of the Theatre*, Wiles divides his analysis into seven main chapters: Sacred Space, Processional Space, Public Space, Sympotic Space, The Cosmic Circle, The Cave, and The Empty Space. Wiles's definition of what constitutes a performance space is broad, and he sees these headings as recurring spatial preoccupations of Western performance, using them to establish connections between case studies that range from antiquity to current day. His broad remit has helped me to think beyond the venues themselves to the larger spatial preoccupation from which those venues derive.

Throughout this thesis, I seek to emphasize the critical importance of the social matrix shaping the theatrical event. My appreciation of this dynamic derives in large part from performance studies scholarship, particularly Richard Schechner's arguments in *Performance Theory* (1988) and *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2013). Schechner urges "explorations of horizontal relationships among related forms rather than searching vertically," such that a "unified set of approaches will be developed that can handle all performance phenomena" in the social matrix, ending historical rifts between disciplines (*Performance Theory* 28). One of the most significant components of this matrix is the theatre building: possibly the most important material condition affecting a play's social impact. Susan Bennett finds that performance studies provides the means to dissect "theatricality as much inscribed on a building as it would be on a stage," and that through this "we can better interrogate the benefits, challenges and risks of urban life" ("Calgary's" 62). Ric Knowles's *Reading the Material Theatre* also works in this realm, using semiotic and cultural materialist theory to develop and demonstrate a method of theatrical performance analysis involving the entire theatre experience, from production to reception. He shows how specific aspects of theatre production, and specific contexts of reception, shape the

audience's understanding of what they experience in the theatre. He looks specifically at the notions of space and place and the ways in which they are ideologically coded, focusing not only on theatre architecture, but also spaces of creation, production, and sales: on the material impact of rehearsal halls, lobbies, box offices etc. Citing Lefebvre, he is especially concerned with the control of access to space as a significant element in determining what appears onstage and how an audience interfaces with theatrical events. He forwards a materialist mode of production analysis which has influenced my thinking on the productions I look at in this study.

In her insightful book, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (1998), Gay McAuley also provides a valuable model for looking at the spatial manifestations of theatrical activity. Her theoretical and methodological framework is both semiotic and phenomenological, based in part on the seminal work of Anne Ubersfeld. She argues that theatre, as distinct from other dramatic media, is essentially a relationship between performer, spectator, and the space in which both come together. She examines the ways in which theatre buildings function to frame the performance event. As well, she looks at the delineation of audience spaces and practitioner spaces within buildings, the nature of particular stage configurations and the modes of representation they facilitate, and the relationship between the real space of the theatre and the fictional places that are evoked. Insisting that performance practice must be socially and culturally located, she creates a taxonomy of theatrical spaces to illuminate and distinguish her considerations of physical space, performance structures, bodies in space, written texts, and spectators.

In my analyses of theatre architecture, I have gained immeasurably from Marvin Carlson's influential monograph *Places of Performance* (1989). This work maintains that an architectural object may be considered a sign, tied by cultural codes to its function. Beyond this

functional meaning, a piece of architecture will also take on “semantic overtones” based on its unique history and its relationship to objects around it (*Places* 7). All of this signification will contribute to the cultural processing of any artwork housed within the object. Carlson argues for a close connection between the character of a place and the perceived social and aesthetic value of the theatre performed there. His emphasis on location opens theatre semiotics to the semiotics of the urban plan, and he also explores spaces where the legitimacy of social practices and theatrical forms is contested. Further, in *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (2001), Carlson argues that theatre spaces are especially susceptible to semiotization, making theatre “the art most closely related to memory and the theatre building itself a kind of memory machine” (Carlson, *Haunted* 142). He describes how the previous identity of a space can be seen “bleeding through the process of reception” and demonstrates how this dynamic creates “extratheatrical associations” (*Haunted* 133-4). Throughout this thesis, I have tried to determine and note this dynamic, particularly as it has played out in my chosen sites.

A volume in the *Theatre &* series, Julia Rufford’s *Theatre & Architecture* (2015) has been seminal in helping me to link architectural ideas to theatre theory and practice. She observes that “the fact that these two disciplines share important overlaps of concern – including a focus on the human body, time and duration, spatiality and sociality, truth and fiction, structure and expression, and much else besides – is what enables us to compare them” (11-12). However, she asserts that “understandings of theatre and architecture and the relationship between them are historically and culturally contingent” and have not always found fruitful interchange (7). My study attempts to contribute to a stronger uptake of the consideration of architecture in theatre and performance studies.



Cathy Turner's fascinating *Dramaturgy and Architecture* (2015) speaks to a current interest in expanded conceptions of dramaturgy and has helped me broaden my thinking about architecture to its influence beyond the built environment. She includes analyses of some of the most productive overlaps between drama, performance, and architecture of the modern period, and theorizes the ways in which theatre and performance have intervened in everyday spaces, staged anxieties about architecture, and imagined possible futures. She extends the possibilities for both socially and spatially engaged theatre dramaturgy by viewing it "through the lens of architecture" (2). At the same time, she connects the dramaturgy of plays and performances to a real-world dramaturgy of urban space, in order to consider the contribution made by drama and performance to how we think about, design, and dwell in, the built environment.

This relational approach to space is furthered by geographer Doreen Massey's *For Space* (2005), an influential work of human geography with important implications for theatrical space that draws heavily from post-structural and feminist philosophical traditions. She develops three propositions about space: 1) that it is created through interactions; 2) that it is "the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity"; and 3) that it is "always in the process of being made" (9). Massey proposes that twentieth-century European philosophy has tended to separate time from space, positing time as the masculine or active arena of change and politics, and space as the feminine passive arena of stasis and representations. She also argues that this denigration of space reinforces market ideologies, which then manifests as urban entrepreneurialism and the creative cities script. She insists that space is not being annihilated by time as other theorists have suggested, and that the political possibilities inherent in space still persist.

Where Massey has helped me to situate my spatial interests within larger social and economic and feminist fields, Michael McKinnie's work in *Space and the Geographies of*

*Theatre* (2007) helped me to migrate those ideas into a theatre context. Introducing this work, McKinnie observes that “the purchase of geographical research within theatre has never been greater” (viii). He describes the flowering of the geographical discipline from an original focus on the physical forms of the earth, into a wide-ranging field encompassing critical practice and characterized by “its diversity and its potential utility across academic disciplines” (viii).

Symptomatic of this diversity is Mike Pearson’s spatial analysis in *Site-Specific Performance* (2010) in which he asserts that performance recontextualizes place: “it is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations – their architectures, material traces and histories – are still apparent and cognitively active. Conversely, site relocates the dramatic material” (*Site* 35). Though there are different ways that performance and place relate in site specific work - the event may complement, confront, or ignore the site (*Site* 36) - Pearson believes that truly powerful work in this genre engages the narratives of the site in some way. In his book *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape* (2006) Pearson maintains that a landscape is a “matrix of related stories as much as topographic details” (*In* 17). Historical narrative is actually embedded in landscape and can be activated by performance process. This notion of historical narrative manifesting through space and performance occupies my Chapter 3, *A Short History of Vancouver’s Downtown*, and then wends its way through each of the case studies.

Canadian performance theorist Andrew Houston has studied with Pearson and marshals some of his ideas to broaden the spatial imagination in theatre from a Canadian perspective. In his introduction to *Environmental and Site-Specific Theatre: Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English* (2007) he gives definitions of the terminology discussed in the volume: “environmental theatre concerns the placement of a text in site, and site-specific theatre concerns

the generation of a performance from a site” (xv). Glossing geographer Edward Soja, Houston asserts that “studying the historicity of a particular site, event, person or social group is not intrinsically any more insightful than studying its sociality or spatiality” (ix). He takes up this shift in perception in his analysis of Forced Entertainment’s *Nights in This City*, both in Sheffield, England (“Forced”), and his own Lloydminster production, in both cases using mapping narratives to produce “a performative relationship to the world it represents” (“*Nights*” 39). These intensely theatrical explorations of cities have given me permission to think theatrically about my own civic subjects.

Scholar of theatre and space Una Chaudhuri shifts the focus from historical narrative to the relationship of humans to their natural environment. In *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (1995), she focuses her semiotic analysis on the fictional space of realist drama. She asserts that “dramatic structure reflects deeply ingrained convictions about the mutually constructive relations between people and place” (Staging xii). Noting that “the varieties of platial experience allowed by the medium of theatre – and recorded in dramatic texts – far surpass that of any other artform” (Staging 21), her analysis of the platial mapping of modern realist texts reveals a fundamental dislocation between humankind and nature that she labels “geopathology” (Staging 55). I have used this idea to describe the malady affecting spaces of large performance in Vancouver’s downtown (see Introduction and Conclusion).

In theatre scholar Joanne Tompkins’s *Unsettling Space* (2007), she takes up Chaudhuri’s geopathology and Carlson’s haunting, using contemporary theatre examples to contest history and culture in the “spatially unstable nation” of Australia (5). She uses the term “unsettling” to acknowledge the violently disruptive process of unseating Australia’s Indigenous peoples, and to name the resulting spatial anxiety that still lurks beneath the surface of Australian culture. She

argues that place has a heightened presence in Australian theatre, a presence pregnant with collective memory that is unleashed by theatrical meaning making. This idea of an “unsettled” place has been important to my understanding of Vancouver both in its Indigenous history and present, but also with regard to the other displacements that have characterized it as a place.

Finally, while Kim Solga’s *Theory for Theatre Studies: Space* (2019) was published late in relationship to this study, its valuable explanations and syntheses of ideas have helped me navigate the field’s complexities and articulate my research context and purpose. Aimed at undergraduate and graduate students, Solga’s book looks comprehensively at how theatre scholars understand space and place in performance and itemizes the tools used to theorize the type of work that space does. She provides an introduction to the “spatial turn” in theatre and performance studies and a special focus on the field of urban performance studies. She also points to a critical discussion on spatial tactics that may contribute to decolonizing the Western, settler-colonial stage.

## **2.2 Theatre and the City**

Numerous scholars (Carlson, *Places*, Wiles, *Short*, Harvie, *Theatre*) have identified how, in the West, theatre has most often been tied to the city. Carlson notes that the theatre building is one of the most persistent architectural objects in Western culture. Many kinds of structures have come and gone as ideologies and technologies have changed but, with some notable exceptions, theatre buildings persist as an amenity in the Western city from antiquity to the present day. Carlson insists that this is not a sign of theatre’s stability, but rather its ability to adjust alongside city transformations. The evolution of performing spaces through various eras can be read as a map of the theatre’s accommodation to the political, social, philosophical, and economic form of

cities (*Places* 14-36). For geographer David Harvey, such cities are best described as “urban processes” because they are so complex and ever-changing that it is foolhardy to describe them as fixed (10). For performance scholar Jen Harvie, theatre does more than just reflect this, it actually helps to produce the city, in a feedback loop that is both parasitic and generative (*Theatre*).

Much of my research for this study involved immersing myself in the work of scholars who consider theatre and performance by linking them to civic and urban processes. As I have noted in my Introduction, primary among those, for me, is Canadian scholar Michael McKinnie’s *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City* (2007). McKinnie roots his analysis in Marx’s statement, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it . . . under circumstances chosen by themselves (Marx 595, McKinnie, *City* 12).” Highlighting the political economy of several Toronto theatre spaces, McKinnie shows how these spaces and their histories are constantly being made and remade by human subjects in an untidy process heavily influenced by social forces and shaped by unanticipated results (*City* 12). Joining the ranks of theatre scholars welcoming the influence of materialist geography into their critical practice, his melding of approaches has allowed him to articulate and detail the complexity of exchange between theatres and urban space. I have continued this melding of approaches in my study and have added a performative lens to McKinnie’s materialist analysis.

In her short overview *Theatre & the City* (2009), Jen Harvie asserts that only by theoretically combining a cultural materialist approach with what she calls “performative analysis” will we be able fully to appreciate and understand how theatre is able to reflect, join, and influence urban processes. She asserts that theatre is “symptomatic of urban process, demonstrating the structures, social power dynamics, politics, and economies also at work more

broadly through the city. Theatre actually does more than *demonstrate* urban process, therefore: theatre is *a part of* urban process, producing urban experience and thereby producing the city itself” (7). This important link between theatricality and civic life undergirds this entire thesis. Harvie attempts to understand the complex economies and ecologies of theatre and performance in an increasingly urbanized world. She identifies three ways in which theatre produces meaning within these processes: through dramatic texts, through material conditions (location, architecture), and through performative practices. She gives examples of how theatre and performance practices are able to create communities that reflect both stark economic realities and the desire for change. Harvie’s precise articulation of power dynamics and ideologies at play in urban performance have helped me situate, and reflect on, the many power struggles and activist events I encountered in my case studies.

A very important articulation of how diverse the exploration of theatre in urban contexts could be, can be found in D.J. Hopkins, Shelley Orr and Kim Solga’s edited collection *Performance and the City* (2011). Hopkins, Orr and Solga argue that for too long urban experience has been interpreted as a literary text rather than as a lived experience. The collected essays demonstrate the ways that theories of the city can be developed in theatre and performance. They respond to two questions posed by the editors: “1) what roles do theatre and performance play in the development, negotiation and renewal of urban space?, and 2) how does our interaction with a performance event shape our individual and collective interactions with the city at large?” (2). Delimited to “the urban Anglosphere” (7), different sections explore the relationship between memory and urban pedestrianism, between urban performance and civic institutions of global capitalism, between cities and the bodies that inhabit them, between performance and architecture, and between imagined cities and material spaces. Each author

contributes in some way to the main thesis that the city is not read, it is performed. Jen Harvie's chapter, "Agency and Complicity in 'A Special Civic Room': London's Tate Modern Turbine Hall," inspired me with its validation of "materialist performative analysis" to pursue performance analysis as part of my case studies (205). Both Michael McKinnie's "Performing the Civic Transnational: Cultural Production, Governance and Citizenship in Contemporary London" and Laura Levin's "Can the City Speak? Site Specific Art After Poststructuralism" encouraged me to expand how I thought about the field by helping me to see the city as a subject, both active and verbal in its interface with the citizenry. D. J. Hopkins and Kim Solga's follow up collection, *Performance and the Global City* (2013) moves beyond the urban Anglosphere and explores urban performance in the world cities created by globalization and transnational flows of capital. The expanded perspective of this second collection helped me especially with Chapters 5 and 6, the periods in my study when Vancouver might be best understood as a global city.

Though centred in film studies and cultural geography, Geraldine Pratt and Rose M. San Juan's *Film and Urban Space: Critical Possibilities* (2014) has brought productive lenses to my considerations of theatre and urban space. Pratt and San Juan argue that the political impact of a film is necessarily connected to the film's relationship to urban space. Moreover, they propose that considering the specificities of such a relationship will reveal a richness and complexity currently absent from film theory. Recognizing film as a rich archive of urban space, they also argue for the continued relevance of public cinemas for urban experience, drawing on examples of the loss or ruin of neighbourhood cinemas, and of temporary screenings embedded in the urban landscape.

Pratt and San Juan's work answers Henri Lefebvre's call in *The Urban Revolution* (1970) for new interpretive and perceptual approaches to the urban environment. Widely considered a foundational book in contemporary thinking about the city, Lefebvre begins with the premise that the total urbanization of society is an inevitable process that demands strategies to address the accompanying passivity of the urban dweller as well as the lack of imagination and humanity demonstrated by architects and urban planners. In contrast to ideologies of urbanism that rely on commodification and bureaucracy, Lefebvre's somewhat utopian discourse imagines an urban environment with a greater degree of citizen self-determination, individual creativity, and authentic social relationships encoded in socially produced spaces and structures.

I followed Lefebvre's largely theoretical work into a consideration of the city through the lens of economic geography. This field introduced me to a number of works that impacted my thinking. David Harvey's *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (2001) grounds spatial theory in social justice, detailing the capitalist production of space as well as the relationship between geography and political power. Dallas Rogers's *The Geopolitics of Real Estate: Reconfiguring Property, Capital, and Rights* (2017) gives a history of foreign real estate investment and demonstrates how foreign land purchasers and global real estate professionals have upended civic dynamics by subverting governmental structures to facilitate new types of capital circulation and accumulation. T.N. Clarke's *The City as an Entertainment Machine* (2002) takes a cultural policy approach to the growth of cities, suggesting that urban amenities and entertainment facilities drive urban development, as well as being driven by it, and are integral to the future vitality of cities.

Lastly, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift's somewhat whimsical *Seeing Like a City* (2017) considers cities to be living organisms whose relational constructions power the urban network



in the shaping of social and cultural life, the dividing of resources, and the creation of order. "Seeing like a city," for them, means transcending disciplinary boundaries in order to more intimately map the dense complexities of urban life. They blame disciplinary limitations for current inadequacies in the understanding of cities and suggest, "developing situated forensic skills" by incorporating diverse scientific and artistic approaches into urban studies (25). I have taken their book as my invitation to join the conversation and I offer the situated research skills I possess as a theatre scholar to their interesting attempt to embody and perform the character of cities.

### **2.3 Vancouver and its Discontents**

Trying to understand Vancouver as a multi-faceted organism and to "see like it" was a significant part of the work that I undertook in this study. In considering how to imagine and discuss the land pre-contact, Dallas Hunt's "Nikîkîwân: Contesting Settler Colonial Archives through Indigenous Oral History" (2016) was especially useful in helping me think beyond chronologies where Indigenous peoples are often either absent or misrepresented as disappearing. Hunt suggests unearthing an archive of memories, including the memory embedded in the land itself. This led me to Wayne Suttles *Musqueam Reference Grammar*, which highlights hənq̓əminəm place names for settlements, resource sites and cultural landmarks throughout their traditional territory. A strong counter to the notion of an empty land free for the taking, Suttles's map and glossary dismantles settler colonial mechanisms of possession and reasserts Indigenous presence throughout Vancouver. My understanding of local Indigenous history was also developed and greatly enriched through the many resources at <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/>.

Nicholas Blomley's monograph *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (2003) chronicles how Vancouver's history is riddled with dispossessions that have advanced the claims of new social groups and interests over those of longstanding communities and residents. He asserts that "the very creation of the city, and its continued remaking, seems all too often to be associated with acts of dispossession and eviction" (xvii). This cycle of displacements started with colonial rule imposed on the pre-existent landscape and communal property of First Nations. Further dislocations have included the removal and internment of Japanese-Canadian residents, the pervasive gentrifications of various neighbourhoods in the past three decades, and the more far-reaching redevelopment of Vancouver's central area since the early 1990s. Blomley's view that, "property is deeply social and political, structuring immediate relations between people as well as larger liberal architectures, such as the division between public and private spheres" (xvii), especially influenced the exploration of the notion of property in Chapter 3.

A number of sources helped me to understand some of the important events in Vancouver's early history that shaped its later identity. Norbert MacDonald's "The Canadian Pacific Railway and Vancouver's Development to 1900" (1977) helped to build my sense of the railway company's complex land grant and pivotal role in the city's early formation. Donald Gutstein's *Vancouver Ltd.* (1975) builds on the idea of Vancouver as a company town and expands that idea to unmask the corporations that dominated the city the first half of the twentieth century. Kay Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (1991) argues that Chinatowns generally, and Vancouver's in particular, are European constructions that serve to reinforce cultural domination. Her detailing of more than a century of Chinese people's presence in Vancouver and their resilience in the face of subsequent waves of

discrimination, made me see clearly how primary Canadians with Chinese heritage have been to every important phase in the city's history.

A string of articles from the field of economic geography greatly enriched my understanding of some of downtown Vancouver's most significant transformations. Robert N. North and Walter G. Hardwick's chapter "Vancouver since the Second World War: An economic geography" (1992) helped me grasp the economic changes post-World War II that threatened downtown and drove a number of mid-century civic decisions that had long ranging impacts. Jamie Peck, Elliot Siemiatycki, and Elvin Wyly's "Vancouver's Suburban Involution" (2005) provides a compelling argument for considering Vancouver's downtown as a neo-suburban outpost that has not so much transcended suburbanization as it has ingested its cultural and political-economic logic. Björn Surborg, Rob VanWynsberghe, and Elvin Wyly's "Mapping the Olympic Growth Machine: Transnational Urbanism and the Growth Machine Diaspora" (2008) suggests that Vancouver has become a hotbed in which local elites can acquire specialized knowledge on new urban entrepreneurial strategies. It explores the transnational dimensions of urban growth machine theory as it manifests in entrepreneurial cities and in the migration of policies to different locales. Finally, Elliot Siemiatycki, Thomas Hutton, and Trevor Barnes's "Trouble in Paradise: Resilience and Vancouver's Second Life in the 'New Economy'" (2016) documents the abrupt decline of the city's resource-based economy in the 1980s and the creation of a "new economy" by the 1990s. They then chronicle the decline in those new "creative" industries (video game development and film production) and question the means by which cities display resilience.

Two books were seminal in developing my understanding of the change that Expo 86 brought to Vancouver. Kris Olds's *Globalization and Urban Change: Capital, Culture, and*

*Pacific Rim Mega-projects* (2001) gives specific attention to the globalization of the north shore of False Creek as Pacific Place, and the greatly increased international profile for Vancouver generated by the Expo 86 world's fair. He stresses the contingent role of individuals or “actors,” through profiles of Li Ka-shing, Hong Kong's wealthiest and most prominent tycoon who became the site's developer, and Vancouver mayor Michael Harcourt, a social democrat who articulated a future for the city as a society within the Asia Pacific urban system. Katharyne Mitchell's *Crossing the Neoliberal Line: Pacific Rim Migration and the Metropolis* (2004) draws out the myriad ways in which liberalism is profoundly spatial and varies greatly depending on the geographical context. As wealthy immigrants from Hong Kong began to settle in Vancouver their presence challenged a longstanding liberal consensus that defined politics and spatial inequality in the City and became the centre of public controversies around planning, home building, multiculturalism, and the future of Vancouver.

A later work in the same field, David Ley's *Millionaire Migrants: Trans-Pacific Life Lines* (2010), makes the argument that neoliberalism created the region of the “Pacific Rim” specifically to serve the interests of business immigrants. With Olds and Mitchell, Ley's work was useful to my understanding of the transnational factors that shaped Vancouver's property market. He documents the ways in which the Canadian state represented itself as open and welcoming to entrepreneurial classes from East Asia at a time when insecurities, especially in Hong Kong, were high. The resulting Business Immigration Program works on the assumption of the “substitutability of locations” (124): that entrepreneurs in East Asia will be entrepreneurs in Canada. Ley offers evidence to suggest that locations are not in fact substitutable and that business immigrants in Canada struggled with geographic difference and did not fuel the economy in the ways that were expected.

Growing out of these last three sources and joining with my previous forays into thinking about architecture in the urban environment, I engaged with a slew of writing about Vancouver's namesake urban planning and architectural phenomenon, Vancouverism. This began with John Punter's *The Vancouver Achievement: Urban planning and design* (2003), a detailed account of the development of Vancouver's unique approach to zoning, planning, and urban design from the 1970s to the beginning of the twenty-first century. This led me to Lance Berelowitz's *Dream City: Vancouver and the Global Imagination* (2005), an explication of the ties between Vancouver's natural setting, its history of speculative development and its influential culture of planning and design. Robert M. Walsh's 2013 University of Michigan dissertation "The Origins of Vancouverism: A Historical Inquiry into the Architecture and Urban Form of Vancouver, British Columbia" provided me with the most useful definition I could find of the style.

The writings of one of Vancouverism's most fervent champions, architecture critic Trevor Boddy, have been important for my understanding of the term's currency and popular uptake. His articles "Downtown's Last Resort" (2006), "New Urbanism: 'The Vancouver Model'" (2004) and "Vancouverism" (2009), have been particularly helpful in these regards, especially in their articulations of key stylistic details. Late in my research process, a central player in Vancouverism's drama, former City Planner Larry Beasley, published his own account, simply titled *Vancouverism* (2019). His insider perspective, while not particularly critical, has shown me many new details of some of the term's associated artifacts, and the historical prologue that Frances Bula wrote for the book filled in some gaps in my understanding of Vancouverism's historical narrative.

## 2.4 Backstories of Buildings

Piecing together the diverse social, economic, and artistic threads that led to the creation of the three buildings I profile, as well as the documents that detail their colourful and sometimes chaotic engagement with civic policy and culture, was a very different task for each of the three case studies (Chapters 4, 5 and 6). Of necessity, the sources I consulted for each were very distinct and idiosyncratic. Below I explain the types of sources that were available to me and how I used them in my consideration of each site.

As I discuss in Chapter 4: Playhouse Property, a series of scrapbooks kept for years by what is now Vancouver Civic Theatres, and currently housed in the archives of the City of Vancouver (COV) under the name “Civic Theatres Department newsclipping scrapbooks” was of primary importance to unfolding the narrative of the emergence of the Queen Elizabeth complex. Much of the source material for this chapter came from the Archives of the COV and their extensive holdings on Vancouver Civic Theatres, the Community Arts Council of Vancouver, and the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company. These archives contained many windows into other eras, a noteworthy gem of which is *Tyrone Guthrie’s Report* to the Community Arts Council of Vancouver (1955), who brought him to Vancouver to generate ideas about kickstarting professional theatre in the area. Peter Guildford’s UBC MA thesis “The Development of Professional Theatre in Vancouver” (1981) offers a detailed narrative of the emergence of theatre infrastructure in the city, and while useful to me it often lacked the citational detail of more contemporary scholarship and therefore required cross checking with other sources. I referenced Malcolm Page’s article “Change in Vancouver Theatre, 1963-80” to understand the flourishing of new theatre companies in the period he designates, and the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company Blog, set up as a kind of memorial archive after the

company's dissolution, to place details in the correct order. Two sources helped me understand the national forces that influenced the building of cultural infrastructure in Canada and the emergence of the regional theatre network. The first is Don Rubin's *Creeping Toward a Culture: The Theatre in English Canada since 1945* (1974) which is rich with detail I have not found in other places. The other is Ryan Edwardson's excellent *Canadian Content: Culture and the Quest for Nationhood* (2008), a source I return to time and time again.

As the site discussed in Chapter 5 has three distinct eras, they each required me to engage with their own different sources. For the Livent era I mainly relied on Alan Filewod's chapter on Livent's rise and fall and uncertain national allegiances in *Performing Canada: The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre* (2002). Further, Anthony Vickery's "Accounting Fraud at Live Entertainment Canada, Incorporated, 1993-98" (2005) is a critical resource for understanding the fraud and forgery revealed in Drabinsky's long criminal proceedings. Barry Avrich's film *Show Stopper: The Theatrical Life of Garth Drabinsky* (2012) was useful, and I also spent time with Drabinsky's 1995 autobiography *Closer to the Sun* (written with Marq De Villiers before the theatre he created in Vancouver was built) which, while clearly subjective, helped me analyze the impresario's publicly stated values and intentions. For the era when the building was animated by Dennis Law, Haiping Yan's "Other Transnationals: An Introductory Essay," from a special issue of *Modern Drama* exploring Asian diaspora in performance, helped me think about transnational subjects and their unique ability to instigate exchange and change. In order to consider Westside Church's era at this site I needed to understand the Evangelical Christian movement better. Randall Balmer's *The Making of Evangelicalism* (2010) provides a valuable historical overview, and Anne Loveland and Otis B. Wheeler's *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material and Cultural History* (2003), with its goal of showing how "evangelical

Protestants adapted their architectural forms as well as their beliefs and practices to shifting religious and social currents” (2), provides a historical context for thinking about the theatre to church transition I analyze here. Jill Stevenson’s *Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First Century America* (2013) also provides models for investigating the performance of evangelical space and highlights the characteristics of the movement’s adapted performance forms.

Ian Gillespie and Westbank have made things easy for researchers by self-publishing two massive tomes that document every development project and public artwork they have ever undertaken. Both *Building Artistry: Thoughts and Reflections on Creating and Building A Body of Work From 1992 to 2012* (2012) and *Fight for Beauty* (2017) are over five hundred pages each. They are understandably heavy on photographs, but also contain essays, manifestos, poems, and additions by some of their collaborators. While sometimes repetitive, both books have helped me to see clearly the image the company is projecting and have given me ample support for analyzing their undertakings. The architect of Vancouver House also has a publication that gives context and background to some of the design decisions at play in the site. Bjarke Ingels’s *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution* (2010) is a graphic architectural manifesto that also thoroughly documents the evolution of his work through a multitude of projects.

Susan Bennett’s 2017 article “Calgary’s Cultural Topography: The Performance of a City,” provides an influential example of civically meaningful building performances over time. Though focused outside of Vancouver, its similar goals and interest in the notion of the performance of buildings and cities both inspired and validated some of my research methods.



Moreover, the article's continuous exploration of the attainment of "real city" status for Calgary provided an interesting parallel to some of the Vancouver impulses and narratives explored here.

## 2.5 Performance Analysis Supports

As I discuss in Chapter 1.1 Methodology, each case study has three performance analyses associated with it, each drawn from different stages of the buildings' performative lives. In a manner that builds from Raymond Williams's *Drama in Performance* (1969) and Gay McAuley's "Performance Analysis: Theory and Practice" (1998), I analyze performance events in conjunction with any texts that may script, inspire, or document it. This means that I researched the play texts and production histories of the theatre events I looked at, and the most influential sources that I consulted are detailed below. An important element of this process is that I personally viewed all of the performances that I analyze, with the exception of the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company's production of *The Hostage* in 1963, for which I pieced together a performance analysis by reading and researching the play script and consulting its related materials from the critical press and other media. These nine sections are "materialist performative analyses" (Harvie, "Agency" 205) (see Chapter 1.1 Methodology), meaning that I engage cultural materialist and performance studies lenses to build my arguments.

To enrich my understanding of Brendan Behan's oeuvre, I consulted John Brannigan's *Brendan Behan: Cultural Nationalism and the Revisionist Writer* (2002) and then Nadine Holdsworth's *Joan Littlewood* (2006) to understand the director who greatly influenced *The Hostage*, as well as their unique playwright/director relationship. Reid Gilbert's "Panych and Gorling: 'Sheer' Texts 'Written' in(to) Perception" (2002) and "Speaking from the Pre-Symbolic: Morris Panych and Wendy Gorling's 'The Overcoat'" (2001), are both full of rich

theorizing of the distinct movement theatre style of *The Overcoat* as well as information about the work's genesis and creation phase. When analyzing Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage* I drew on the substantial literature that charts her development as a playwright and the reception of her barbed comic style in different countries and languages. These included Amanda Giguere's *The Plays of Yasmina Reza on the English and American Stage* (2010), Michael Karwowski's "Yasmina Reza: From *Art* to the *God of Carnage*" (2009), and Helene Jaccomard's "The Business of Violence in Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage*" (2016).

The performance analysis work for the Ford Centre for the Performing Arts required that I improve my understanding of the history of musical theatre and the place of *Show Boat* in that history. Geoffrey H. Block's *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim* (1997) was particularly useful in this regard. However, it was Todd R. Decker's excellent *Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical* (2012) that most shaped my understanding of the work in its social, racial, and artistic context and gave me the tools to discuss the messaging of the Livent production. M. NourbeSe Philip's bold and important *Showing Grit: Showboating North of the 44th Parallel [and] the Redemption of Al Bumen (A Morality Play)*, so powerful and influential in its challenge to theatre producers to take responsibility for what they are representing, was my constant touchstone while thinking through the Canadian *Show Boat* controversy. In trying to define and specify the particular intercultural fusion of performance styles in Dennis Law's action musical, I gained significantly from Kevin J. Wetmore's insightful review of "Terracotta Warriors" in *Asian Theatre Journal* (2008). In assessing the impact of evangelical performance form for my analysis of worship at Westside Church, I drew again on Jill Stevenson's *Sensational Devotion*, but also on John Fletcher's *Preaching to Convert: Evangelical Outreach and Performance Activism in a Secular Age*

(2013), whose comparison of conversion tactics with contemporary activism is highly illuminating.

Analyzing Westbank's performances required that I deepen my understanding of an important term from theatre theory, "*gesamtkunstwerk*" or total work of art. I began with Richard Wagner's two essays "The Art-Work of the Future" and "Art and Revolution" (1849), where the phrase and philosophy are first invoked. I followed this with David Roberts's *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (2011) and then with Erika Fischer-Lichte's "The Transformative Aesthetics of the Gesamtkunstwerk/Total Work of Art as the Specter Haunting Modernism" (2013). Fischer-Lichte's long summary review of three works that focus on the total work of art asks whether this important notion possesses the characteristic of being transformative. Trevor Boddy's "Curatorial Essay" in *Gesamtkunstwerk: Life as a Total Work of Art* (2014) shares a deep understanding of the idea while serving to boost Westbank's endeavours. He would answer Fischer-Lichte that gesamtkunstwerk is transformative, and he attempts to situate the term and its transformative potential in the Vancouver context. In considering *Fight for Beauty*, Melody Ma's blog *The Real Fight for Beauty* was extremely important, and Peter Dickinson's "Vancouverism and its Cultural Amenities: The View from here" (2016) greatly stimulated my early thought processes about *Spinning Chandelier*.

### Chapter 3: A Short History of Vancouver's Downtown

Much of downtown Vancouver's social and economic history can be linked to its geography. Part of the downtown peninsula, the larger area is bounded to the north by Burrard Inlet and to the south by False Creek. Prior to the infill of the eastern basin of False Creek, downtown was bordered by swampy marsh to much of its east. Musqueam leader Larry Grant has explained that the area's pre-contact form resembled "not a peninsula but a series of islands" (qtd. in *čəsnaʔəm*). When considered in conjunction with the West End neighborhood and Stanley Park, which opens to English Bay on the west, the entire peninsula floated almost free of connection to the larger footprint of what is now Vancouver, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. This swampy temperate rain forest featured conifers typical to the coast such as Douglas fir, Western red cedar, and Western hemlock, with pockets of maple and alder ("Pacific"). The soil of the area is finely textured silty clay loam with poor drainage features (hence the swampy quality of the original land) with strong evidence of marine sediments throughout ("Vancouver Soil").

Jim Lichtowich pegs the arrival of salmon in the Fraser between 4,500 and 5,000 years ago, an occurrence that took place symbiotically with the emergence of the conifer ecosystems (19-20). Of critical importance to the culture, spirituality, and subsistence of local First Nations, massive fish bone and shell middens on the Vancouver townsite attest to a teeming biotic synergy between Indigenous peoples and marine life. Whereas Native American scholar Mishuana R. Goeman acknowledges this watery link in working to "unmoor 'truth' maps from knowledge based on imperial projects" (184), Canadian-Indigenous scholar Dallas Hunt describes the process of reasserting Indigenous histories of place as one of "unburying" and "unearthing":

In the archives of settler nation-states like Canada, Indigenous peoples are often either absent, depicted as ciphers of the real individuals they are meant to represent, or presented as always already disappearing from the landscape. Yet the archives themselves also provide a means to trace how colonial "space is produced and productive," and thereby enable us potentially to "unbury the generative roots of spatial colonization and lay bare its concealed systems" (Goeman 171). This unearthing is one way that Indigenous peoples can enact "resurgent histories" (A. Simpson 107) to contest our erasure, assert our presence, and call upon an Indigenous archive of memories, including those held by elders and by the land itself, beyond what settler histories allow. (Hunt 26)

Increasingly, elements of this "archive of memories" are finding new Indigenous-controlled forms that account for deep layers of Indigenous knowledge and counter colonial erasure with evidence of a "network of ancient native villages, resource sites, and symbolic landscapes" (Blomley 110). The Musqueam (x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm) people have a landmark called "p̓q̓aḷs," meaning "white rock," at the foot of Granville Street where Waterfront Station currently stands downtown (Suttles 571). Though p̓q̓aḷs is a Musqueam site, three groups of the Salishan language aggregation of the Pacific Northwest have overlapping claims to the downtown area as a traditional territory and shared resource for fishing, hunting, trapping, and gathering. Relationships between these three groups were maintained through intermarriage, the redistribution of wealth through potlatching, and occasionally war. The Squamish (Skwxwú7mesh) territory opened from Howe Sound to include False Creek and Burrard Inlet, with major settlements at Whoi Whoi (Xwáyxway) in Stanley Park, Snaug (Señákw) near the Burrard Bridge on False Creek, and Xwemelch'stn at the mouth of the Capilano River. The other

two groups which shared the Halkomelem (hənqəminəm) language were the Tsleil-waututh and the Musqueam (xʷməθkʷəyəm) (“Vancouver Before”).

White settlers did not arrive in the Vancouver region until almost three centuries after the first eastern cities of what is now recognized as Canada were built (Halifax, Quebec City, Ottawa), eventually propelled to the area by forestry, the railway, and land speculation. From the late sixteenth century on, Spanish and English imperial emissaries sailed by the area, and in 1808 a trader of the North West Company, Simon Fraser, came overland from Eastern Canada. By 1867 Captain Edward Stamp had established a sawmill on the south shore of Burrard Inlet downtown near p̓q̓aʼs. A settlement originally named Gastown grew up around the central focus of the mill and was renamed Granville in 1870 when the colonial government surveyed and laid out a townsite to support it. In 1884 the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) selected Granville as the terminus for the Canada’s transcontinental railway, reneging on earlier plans to terminate in Port Moody where speculators had eagerly purchased land in anticipation of a steep increase in value once terminal city status was achieved. Instead, the CPR privately negotiated a massive land grant with the colonial government that included 480 acres downtown (this comprises all the land in the area now designated as downtown) and 5,795 acres across False Creek. The downtown acreage was bordered to the west by Burrard Street, which still constitutes the western edge of Vancouver’s downtown neighbourhood. As well, every third lot from the West End and every sixth from the area just east of downtown were granted, all for extending the line just twelve miles past Port Moody (N. MacDonald 3-35). Once the terminus was announced, the primary beneficiaries of the huge profits from the resulting real estate boom of the 1880s were the CPR and its officials. The latter were then well-placed to control many facets of the early development of the new city incorporated on 6 April 1886, and renamed Vancouver to be more

appealing to newcomers familiar with the older settlements on Vancouver Island (Gutstein 11-12). Superimposed on unceded Indigenous land,<sup>3</sup> the CPR grant and the city that it created dismissed and erased the time immemorial Indigenous occupation of downtown in one fell swoop and functioned as weapon in the push to drive the survivors of this assault into the undesirable margins of the region.

The rapid development of downtown from the city's founding to WWII was, in the eyes Larry Grant, not undertaken with "the attitude of sustainability" (qtd. in *časnaʔəm*). Instead it was fueled by an extractive approach to natural resources, leaving an imprint on the area left by the industries themselves and by the business infrastructure that grew up in support of them. The Hudson's Bay Company began exporting salmon from BC waters almost immediately. The first cannery opened in the early 1870s, and Georgeson and Hallenbeck report that "Salmon canning quickly became the biggest industry in British Columbia and was essential to the early industrialization" (28). By 1900, "a million cases of sockeye salmon ... were coming out of the Fraser River every year" (10-11, Newell 50). As the city grew, the sawmill industry shifted from Burrard Inlet to the northern shores of False Creek. Built to facilitate the deforestation of Vancouver and its surrounding areas, at the industry's height there were seventeen operating

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<sup>3</sup> In most of British Columbia, treaties were not negotiated. The legacy of this has been that the province has been a hotbed of land issues, with Aboriginal leaders and organizations arguing for decades that their land title has not been officially extinguished in the province. A BC Treaty Process (BCTP) was inaugurated by the BC Government in the 1990s, when uncertainty around title was dampening resource development in contested areas. The BCTP has been controversial and many Nations have refused to participate. Various court decisions have sought to navigate the distance between the Indigenous concept of Original Title and the Canadian legal notion of Aboriginal Title. Two excellent chronologies document this complex process. See: Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. *Stolen Lands Broken Promises*, [https://www.ubcic.bc.ca/stolenlands\\_brokenpromises](https://www.ubcic.bc.ca/stolenlands_brokenpromises), and "Land & Rights" page [indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca website](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/land_rights/) (author Jeanette Armstrong) [https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/land\\_rights/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/land_rights/).

sawmills in False Creek employing over 10,000 workers (“Kiosk”) devouring the indigenous soft woods of British Columbia floated there by booms, and then excreting waste into the water and air.



**Figure 2 (Chapter 3) Map of Downtown Vancouver by Weller Cartographic Services, Used with the Permission of Angus Weller**

Downtown’s Yaletown neighborhood grew up to provide housing and amenities to many of the sawmills’ workers. The vacated downtown edge of Burrard Inlet was repurposed as the site of a thriving port industry and a major shipping destination. The Klondike Gold Rush



brought an influx of outfitters in the late 1890s that helped to build downtown's business infrastructure and drive a thriving import/export economy, moving goods through the seaport. Street names downtown bore the family names of CPR and colonial officials shaping the emerging metropolis, sometimes using the detritus of prior Indigenous occupation and land use to do the work: "the shell remains [of middens] were so numerous that white settlers used them as paving material in early roads" (Simons 146). The massive eastern basin of False Creek was infilled in 1917 to create a nexus for travel and exchange: the Railway's Pacific Central Station and rail yard. Economic dominance by the large corporations driving these activities led to significant labour tensions through the first three decades of the twentieth century, dissipated only by the onset of World War II.

Accompanying this rapid expansion was a sinister colonial program of discriminatory practices aimed at keeping the control of land and resources firmly in the hands of white settlers. Nicolas Blomley has suggested that if "colonial possession was dependent on dispossession, the survey serves as a form of organized forgetting" (112). Settler maps erased *p̓q̓als* and other Indigenous sites, though not from the collective memories of the people that still lay claim to the downtown area. Indigenous inhabitants were shunted onto reserves outside of downtown<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup> The closest reserves to downtown are the Squamish reserve on the north shore of Burrard Inlet near the Lions Gate Bridge, the Tsleil-Waututh reserve farther east on the north shore of Burrard Inlet, and the Musqueam reserve on the western tip of Vancouver near UBC. The Kitsilano reserve, the site of an ancient Squamish village (*Señákw*), formerly occupied what is now Vanier Park on the south shore of False Creek. In 1913 the Provincial Government induced the residents to relocate, placing families on a barge and towing them to other communities in the Burrard Inlet, an action which was later found to be illegal. In 2001 the courts awarded the Squamish Nation the return of 11.7 acres of land, coming from land possessed by the CPR, located near Vanier Park and underneath Burrard Street Bridge (Sterritt, "Little-known"). On 10 December 2019 the Squamish Nation voted to construct a \$3-billion housing development called *Señákw* on the site with partner with Westbank Development Corporation. The development will feature eleven towers and 6,000 rental housing units (Sterritt, "We").

subjected to the devastating impacts of residential schools, colonial laws banning their ceremonies, and other attempts to assimilate them. Both traditional lifestyles and economic opportunities in settler culture were unavailable to most of the displaced, and thus Indigenous female labour became the backbone of the canning industry, mobilized by “alienating Indigenous women from the traditional food fishery” (Georgeson and Hallenbeck 10).

Chinese immigrants first came to Vancouver attracted by the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush of 1858 and then the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s. After the railroad was completed, the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 levied a head tax of \$50 per person (raised to \$500 by 1903) solely on Chinese immigrants to discourage further settlement. On 7 September 1907, a thousands-strong anti-immigration rally held by the Asiatic Exclusion League at City Hall (then on Main Street near Georgia Street) erupted into riots when League members headed east vandalizing Chinatown and then Japantown, causing significant damage (K. Anderson 73-105). The discriminatory sentiments encouraged in the riots flourished, eventually leading to the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, which abolished Chinese immigration to Canada entirely, except in limited circumstances. Nearby Japantown ceased to be a distinct ethnic neighborhood during World War II when the properties of interned Japanese Canadians were forcibly and permanently forfeited by the Canadian government.

A national post-World War II economic and development boom also gripped the City of Vancouver’s extractive economy, but its geographic implications were unanticipated. The building of bridges facilitated a migration of mills and wholesale warehouses from the waterfronts of Burrard Inlet and False Creek to sites farther along the Georgia Strait and the Fraser River (North and Hardwick 206). Farming communities became commuter suburbs as the central city’s share of the population fell from 79% in 1941 to 48% in 1961 (Kloppenborg et al.

133). The emptying out of downtown forced a desperate attempt by downtown property owners and their friends in City Council to revitalize the city centre. The early 1950s saw a series of “Downtown Day” shopping promotions to try to win back the area’s retail advantage, but these were largely unsuccessful (Kloppenborg et al. 139). Disturbed by the blight marring the fringes of the inner city and “haunted by the specter of American-style urban decay which it feared might imperil the regional centrality of the downtown area” (North and Hardwick 208), Vancouver City Council hired American planners and business experts to consult on the matter. They recommended publicly financed commercial revitalization (ultimately prompting the creation of the enduring Pacific Centre mall which opened in 1971), and, significantly for my study here, new cultural facilities (North and Hardwick 208).

The prospect of urban renewal, and a planned freeway that would have cut through downtown, began a citizen’s revolt that saw an “anti-development fever” grip the city in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Bula 27). The proposed freeway was intended to propel commuters from North Vancouver and the eastern suburbs quickly into the downtown’s central business district by cutting through East Vancouver neighborhoods and running along the waterfront of Burrard Inlet. The “slums” of Strathcona, Chinatown, and Gastown would be raised, eradicating their “dangerous and troublesome” elements (Bula 28). Outcry initiated by the Chinese Benevolent Association and Chinese Property Owners Association built into a city-wide rebellion led by the pro-resident, anti-developer TEAM (The Electors’ Action Movement) which eventually defeated the freeway in 1972, as well as other large-scale developer-driven initiatives. Bula describes this defeat as a turning point for the future built environment of downtown as, “the realization that the city would never be bisected by a freeway galvanized politicians and planners to think about

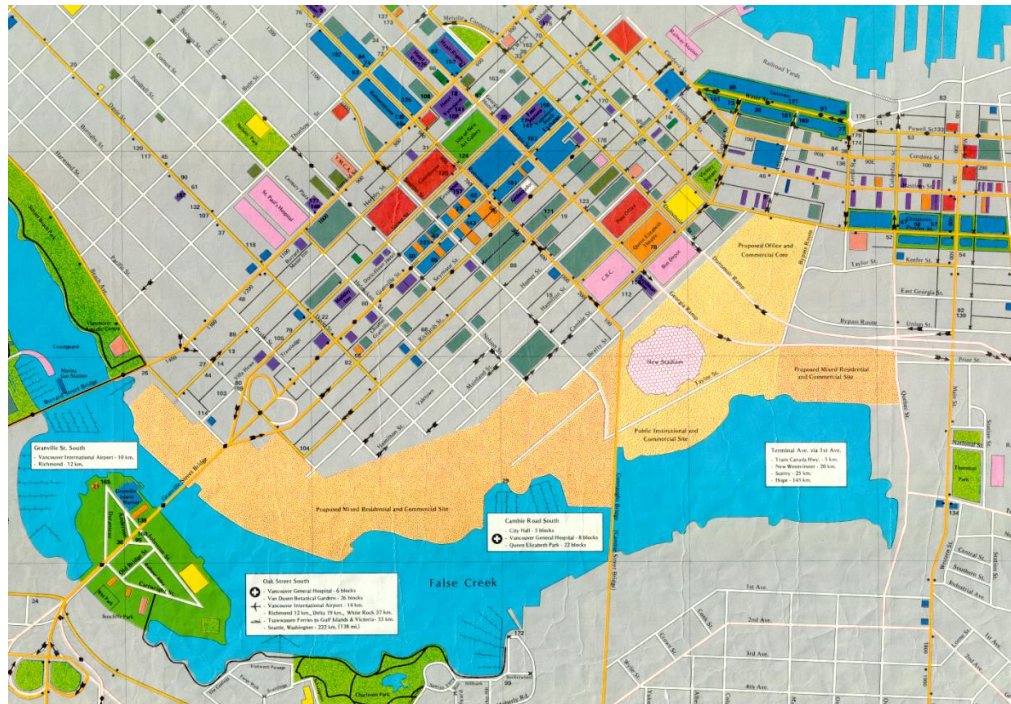
how to adapt .... if downtown office and shop workers couldn't have an easy commute from the suburbs, they would need to be provided with housing in the central city" (28).

This drive to adapt is reflective of a trend towards urban entrepreneurialism that grew out of the degeneration of Vancouver's fiscal base from the 1960s through to the 1980s. The "staples crash" of the 1980s put an end to what was left of industries resident on downtown lands and left a deep crack in the economic foundation of the city (Siemiatycki, Hutton & Barnes 184). The construction of new office towers in downtown ground to a halt as businesses found cheaper accommodation in the suburbs and on the outskirts of Vancouver. Pressed with finding new financial drivers, city leaders promoted tourism and real estate as the new sources of Vancouver's prosperity and looked to the international community for investment. Former industrial and corporate space downtown would be re-imagined as residential neighborhoods. Dubbed by urban geographers as "Vancouver's Suburban Involution" (Peck et al. 386-415), residents would live downtown, enjoying the many amenities offered there, and often commute to the suburbs to work. The City succeeded with this strategy by "switching on the mega-event machinery" (Surborg, VanWynsberghe and Wyly 343) and knitting those events to massive development schemes (this is true of both Expo 86 and the 2010 Winter Olympics). Within twenty years this strategy changed Vancouver's trajectory, creating a wealth-generating machine with sophisticated urban design elements and a dynamic, diverse city that regularly lands on top ten lists for "livability" (Abadi & Warren).

Prior to Expo 86 the former industrial north False Creek lands of downtown were underused and dilapidated and existed "on the outskirts of consciousness" for most Vancouverites (Simons 150), even the large faction of activists dedicated to protecting the city from urban renewal. As neoliberal ideas began to take hold among decision makers, businesses

in cooperation with the civic and provincial governments used Expo 86 to lure investment to the city, and to gage the new financial potential of north False Creek that was unleashed by the recent deregulation of property investments (Olds 99-113). Using the “rhetoric of globalism as both desirable and unavoidable” (Mitchell 42), the city cultivated a “Pacific Rim” identity at Expo 86 (Olds 91-96) in order to help solidify its economic future. Soon after the event, the newly elected Social Credit government under Bill Vander Zalm initiated a sweeping land privatization campaign that necessitated the sale of huge tracts of undeveloped land in BC (Mitchell 47). As part of this campaign, the Expo lands were sold swiftly, to the highest bidder, with virtually no public consultation, and amidst local outcry reminiscent of the anti-development fever of the freeway episode. Hong Kong-based developer Li Ka-shing, using his Vancouver-based company Concord Pacific, purchased the land and enlisted the support of local planners to execute its transformation. The resulting Pacific Place, a massive sprawl of condo towers that covers one sixth of the downtown core, generated billions of dollars of profits for the developer and his investors and delivered amenities in the form of parks, a school, and an arts and recreation centre (Mitchell 48-52). The post-modern architecture on display in most of the towers left local architects out of the spotlight and ignored early efforts in sustainable building practice (Ingram). By 1986 the Government of Canada had finally put an end to racially discriminatory immigration legislation and welcomed Asian entrepreneurs to the country through the Business Immigration Program (Olds 83-85, Mitchell 57-62, Ley, *Millionaire*). In the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests in China and concerned about the reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese control in 1997, wealthy overseas elites looked to Vancouver as a harbour for both their wealth and their lifestyles as enshrined in Li Ka-shing’s Pacific Place, though many brought only a portion of their wealth to the region. Instead, a high ratio of absentee ownership

and willingness to pay high prices for tiny condos helped to drive the city into a housing affordability crisis (Ley, *Millionaire*). It also introduced a new urban style to the world.



**Figure 3 (Chapter 3) Map Showing Expo Lands in Yellow by Weller Cartographic Services, Used with the Permission of Angus Weller**

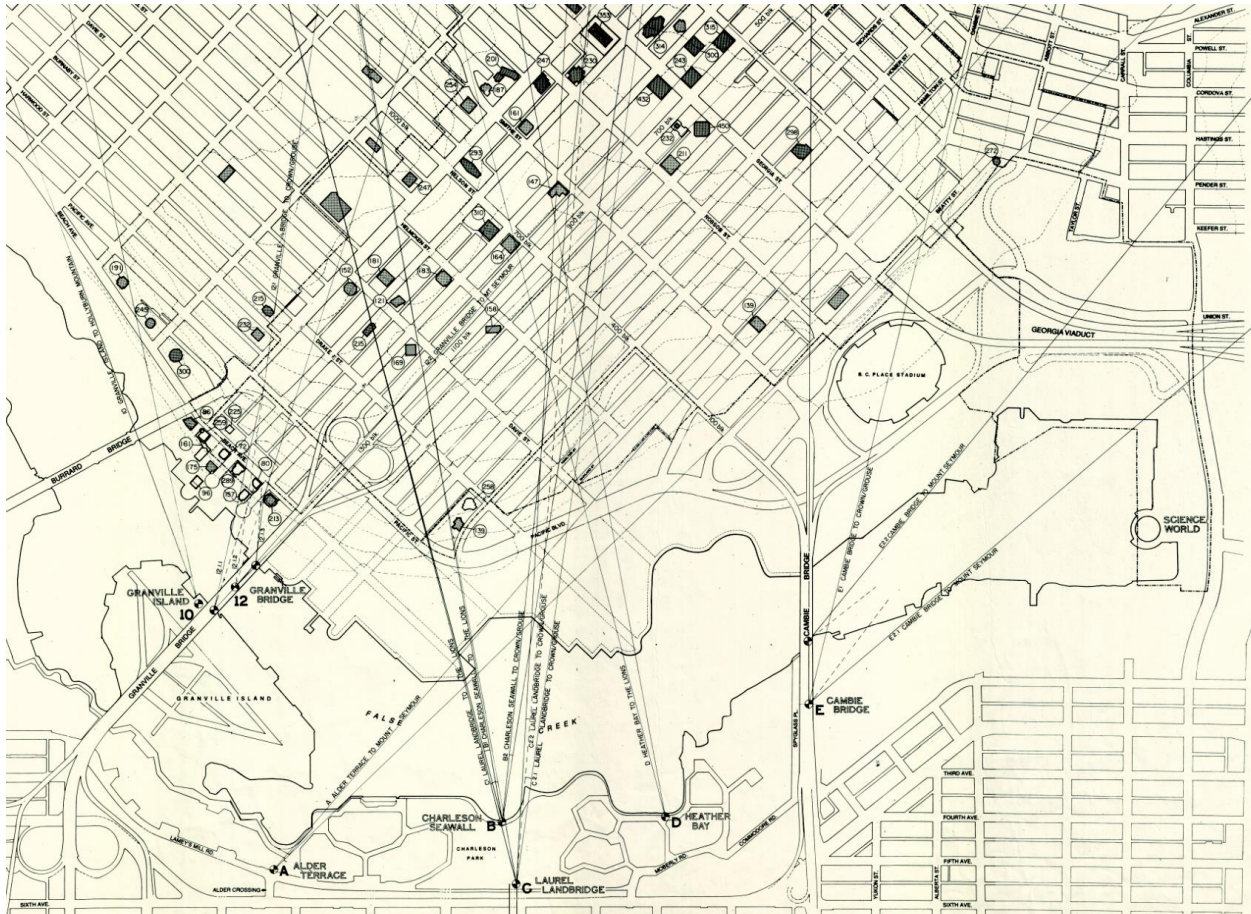
While downtown Vancouver, especially its waterfront developments, has become synonymous with the design brand of Vancouverism, defining the brand has proved a slippery task. Local architecture critic Trevor Boddy has been one of the movement's strongest advocates, adding to his definitions with each succeeding article ("New", "Downtown's", "Vancouverism"). Julie Bogdanowicz has offered up a 48-point system herded under subheadings that name its primary features (23-24). Robert Walsh's 2013 University of Michigan doctoral thesis on the origins of Vancouverism has a more economical and graceful definition. Walsh identifies spaced

point towers, row house enclaves, active urban landscapes, outdoor urban rooms, and protected public views as the distinctive visual characteristics of the style (13-24). Though Walsh would disagree, Boddy finds precursors to Vancouver's spaced point towers in Hong Kong, in the reaction to its notoriously dense 1960s housing projects and the revision of building codes to avoid the block long fortresses of towers they created (Boddy, "New" 16). Early Concord Pacific architect Stanley Kwok has also acknowledged the resorts of Waikiki as one of his inspirations (Boddy, "Downtown's" 21). Active urban landscapes take the form of fountains, public art, paths for walking and cycling, and the city's extensive network of street trees. Walsh helpfully clarifies that the "podiums" of the oft-mentioned "tower and podium" style associated with Vancouverism are better described as "town house enclaves." These salute Jane Jacobs's "eyes on the street"<sup>5</sup> and are not thick podiums, though they may appear so from the street. Instead they circle around courtyard gardens that act as shared private enclosures. Outdoor urban rooms are formed in big developments when towers and low rises are grouped together to define larger room-like outdoor urban spaces. Protected public views solidify Vancouverism's cachet as twenty-seven view corridors frame perspectives of the North Shore mountains, skyline and surrounding water, especially from False Creek south looking across to downtown. The maintenance of these corridors has significantly impacted the built environment of the city, particularly downtown.

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<sup>5</sup> American-Canadian author and activist Jane Jacobs significantly influenced urban studies and urban planning. Her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* attacked urban renewal for its lack of respect for the needs of city-dwellers. The book's concept of "eyes on the street" migrated into architecture and planning, and in Vancouver took the form of podium suites at the base of Vancouverism's tower and podium condominiums.





**Figure 4 (Chapter 3) Map of Vancouver's View Corridors, Used with the Permission of the City of Vancouver, Planning Department**

Vancouver is remarkable for the extraordinary amount of authority it gives to planners in the city building process. Bula suggests that, “Vancouver’s colonial connections resulted in a British-style approach to planning” (15), and the level of control is also reminiscent of the short leash the CPR held on early Vancouver. The reign of the planners began with Harland Bartholomew in the 1920s and had its most profound effect on the central city under Larry Beasley, who led many of downtown’s large developments in the 1990s and 2000s, especially the most intensive period of the Concord Pacific expansion. In Vancouver’s model, plans are



enshrined in extensive planning documents for the city and its neighborhoods that map out directions for change and growth. Vancouver planners' decisions are uniquely shielded from mayoral and city council interference, allowing for long term growth and extricating staff from vote securing processes (Boddy, "Downtown's" 21). Beasley has publicly discussed the deference given him by Vancouver politicians running for office: "It's something they almost have to do because the planners are very highly respected by the electorate .... because we've delivered hundreds of millions of dollars of public goods – and the population knows that – through the negotiated process enabled by discretionary zoning" (Grant 368). Hand in hand with very high development cost charges, the approval process for new proposals is discretionary, allowing individual planners to exert pressure on developers and influence aesthetic decisions. Planners are also empowered to broker a unique deal with a developer that "effectively exchanges (super-profitable) density for (a measure of social) amenity" (Peck, Siemiatycki and Wyly 398). Heralded as one of the successes of "The Vancouver Achievement" (Punter xiv-xxxi), this density for amenity approach has siphoned off some of the wealth generated by the real estate market for the benefit of the citizenry, while increasing the value of new developments. Finally, a visual aesthetic for the city is enshrined in the "design guidelines" (Grant 2009) developed by the planning department, controlling building height, style, colour, and ensuring Vancouver's overarching visual homogeneity.

Vancouver prices are the most unaffordable in North America and they have grown to be so since 2000 (Todd). The recapitalization of downtown has been so successful that Vancouver is approaching what Mitchell describes as a "neoliberal fantasy of the city as pure exchange value" (44). Boddy predicts that soon condos in cities like Vancouver "will be traded on stock exchanges like commodities" ("Downtown's" 21). The work of the Neighbourhood Change

Research Partnership, as reported in *The Globe and Mail*, shows an alarming trend towards what David Ley calls “capital deepening” (an area becoming richer) in the downtown neighborhood (qtd. in Gold, “Avalanche”). The partnership’s research, based on census data, shows a total shift in the average individual income of downtown residents from “Middle Income” and “Very Low” in 1990 to “Very High” and “High” by 2015, the most dramatic shift for a neighborhood in a city where all neighbourhoods are trending upwards, even reaching out to the suburbs (Gold, “Avalanche”). Coming to power in 2017, BC’s New Democratic Party (NDP), has developed a thirty-point plan designed to “root out speculation and bring moderation to the housing market” (Carole James qtd. in Nasimi), the main feature of which is a foreign-buyer’s tax. Another feature is a vacancy tax (Nasimi) on the many empty homes hovering in the downtown skyline, collecting value as Vancouver’s speculative gamble careens into the future.

## Chapter 4: Playhouse Property

Embedded in the set décor for the opening production of the Arts Club Theatre Company's new Goldcorp Stage in December of 2015, was a gesture to the life and death of another theatre company whose story was intricately woven into the genesis of the new space. Rick Elice's Tony, Drama Desk and Obie-Award winning Broadway hit *Peter and the Starcatcher* was scenically re-imagined for this Vancouver opening by director David Mackay and set designer Lauchlin Johnston with some of the stage properties and musical instruments used in the show littering the edges of the playing space. The underside of a wooden dolly, propped up for the audience to see, bore the message "Property of Vancouver Playhouse" (Figure 5). Originally intended as a production centre and second stage for the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company (VPTC), what is now the Goldcorp Stage passed to the Arts Club and the production centre to the Arts Club and Bard on the Beach, after the VPTC folded on 9 March 2012. Initiated to help solve the spatial struggles that had dogged the company since its founding, the new venue instead became a reminder of its disappearance, and *Starcatcher* director Mackay wanted to capture that irony, at least for those enough in the know to interpret his visual citation: "I wanted to acknowledge the 'other' theatrical aspirations that went into building this great facility" (Mackay). The press release issued by, and announcing, the closure of the VPTC cited as the reasons for its failure, "challenging economic times, an inefficient operating model within the downtown theatre space, and the cost of temporary production facilities" (*A Sad*). Indeed, issues with, and lack of control over, property appeared to be at the core of the company's problems. Its stage props comprised most of the scarce material residue of this company which had once dominated the theatrical landscape in Vancouver. Purchased by an independent entrepreneur, they continued to be rented and to circulate in the theatre community

for several years after the VPTC closed.



**Figure 5 (Chapter 4) Prop from the Arts Club Theatre Company's Production of *Peter and the Starcatcher*, Designed by Lauchlin Johnston, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

Much potential confusion exists about the names of the theatre company and venue which are the subjects of this chapter. Though the producing company incorporated as the Vancouver Theatre Centre is often referred to as the Playhouse Theatre or Playhouse Theatre Company, in this study I will refer to it by its final official name: the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company and often with the acronym VPTC. I will also truncate other organizations to acronyms for ease of reading. Throughout this chapter I will refer to the main venue I discuss by

the name currently used by Vancouver Civic Theatres, the Vancouver Playhouse, though it has also been called the Queen Elizabeth Playhouse and simply the Playhouse.

This chapter attempts to dissect what the VPTC's final Artistic Director Max Reimer called "The Playhouse handicap" (Reimer 3), a skewed operating model imposed on the company from its genesis, defined by constraints on access to space, and detailed in one of his last public missives before the company's collapse. Reimer asserts that this unprecedented and unfair disadvantage made it impossible for the company to compete with, or thrive like, its sister companies across the country (Reimer). One of my goals with this chapter, in addition to generating an overall understanding of the Queen Elizabeth complex's imbrication in the culture of Vancouver, is to detail the origins of the mechanisms that controlled the VPTC's relationship to its performance venue, the Vancouver Playhouse, as well as the social forces that put those mechanisms in place. The first half of the chapter focuses on the decades prior to the venue launch in 1959 and the company launch in 1962. After that, my focus shifts to the smaller of the two venues in the Queen Elizabeth complex – the Vancouver Playhouse. It is, of necessity, a bifurcated story of a venue and of a company, and how they do and do not come together, and to that end I offer three performance analyses to demarcate pivotal moments in the intersecting histories of the two. My chief argument here is that, embedded in the organizational structures of the VPTC and in its founding drama is a manifestation of the geopathological malady gripping downtown: an alienation of producing theatre artist from theatre building that was never rectified in its forty-nine-year history. The company was both in, and not in, the space that it was a resident of, and this ontological paradox made it difficult for the company to thrive. The company was architecturally trapped and bureaucratically stifled.

The collapse of the VPTC provides a unique lens through which to view the venue and its impact on the cultural life of Vancouver. In this chapter I propose that material factors at play fifty to seventy years in advance of the VPTC's final days may have contributed to its collapse. In the narrative of Canada's cultural infrastructure, the company was an important link in the chain of regional theatres that sprang up across the country in the 1960s and 1970s. For all intents and purposes, however, these theatres are civic rather than regional centres, and often deeply enmeshed in civic growth patterns and power structures. For McKinnie, civic theatres are "indices of the city's attempts to adapt geographically and ideologically to economic forces over which it has decreasing influence, while attempting to construct a plausible, if not always consistent civic narrative" (xi). What emerges in the Playhouse's founding story is an index of post-World War II political and economic pressures fighting for prominence in a city that was, for a time, ahead of the curve of Canadian cultural development, bringing to fruition one of the country's first "regional" theatres.

In the days and months following the VPTC's demise the media and theatre community haggled over the appropriate place to assign blame for the catastrophe, but rarely did those arguments reach back more than five years.<sup>6</sup> Very little about the company's unique and

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<sup>6</sup> The most high-profile press about the VPTC's closure was a series of articles that Marsha Lederman wrote for *The Globe and Mail* in March of 2012. In discussing the Playhouse's financial issues she points to the VPTC's requirement to rent its theatre in several articles, but never goes into detail about the larger financial and operational difficulties created by that model (Lederman, "Supporters" "No" "Curtain" "All"). Neal Hall and Jeff Lee's article in *The Vancouver Sun* announcing the closure also mentions the flawed operating model, but the majority of the reporting detailed the COV's failed financial bail-out from the year previous (Hall). The only analysis that went into any kind of historical depth was playwright Mark Leiren-Young's "Curtains for the Vancouver Playhouse" in *The Tyee*, which laid some of the blame on "agreements that were made back when B.C.'s original regional theatre was formed" (Leiren-Young).

problematic operating structure seemed to be widely understood and little of its founding was discussed in the press. Even a quarter of a century earlier the authors of the company's twenty-fifth anniversary booklet had a hard time understanding how it had come about: "Our greatest difficulty lay in piecing together the early days of the Playhouse. Written accounts of how the City got together with the Canada Council to choose a professional theatre group for the Queen Elizabeth Playhouse were scarce" (Chess and Groberman, epilogue). Very influential in my piecing together of these events were the Civic Theatres Department news clipping scrapbooks that contain material as far back as the 1920s and, while in deep disrepair, they feature a stream of newspaper reportage detailing the advocacy, design, build, and early animation of the Queen Elizabeth complex.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4.1 The Country and the City**

The ideas of British economist John Maynard Keynes were the main inspiration for economic policy makers in industrialized nations from World War II until the 1970s and are credited with fueling widespread post-World War II economic expansion. Keynesian economics advocates a managed market economy and a welfare state "in which the government increasingly assumed responsibility for the country's economic and social destiny" (Schafer and Fortier 7).

Though Alan Filewod finds an early articulation of state patronage of culture in the late

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<sup>7</sup> Much of the history of the struggle to get, build, and run the Queen Elizabeth and Vancouver Playhouse theatres, and to launch the VPTC, was laid out for me in this series of scrapbooks kept for years by what is now Vancouver Civic Theatres, and currently housed in the archives of the COV under the name "Civic Theatres Department newsclipping scrapbooks" with the Series designation S177. These scrapbooks form a chronicle of Vancouver's cultural history that would be impossible to recreate. At time of writing these scrapbooks are falling into disrepair and require champions, protection, and expert restoration.

nineteenth-century cultural policy of the Second International (40), and there is a map for state intervention in the arts in the US Federal Theatre Project of the late 1930s, its material establishment within the British Commonwealth begins with the creation of the British Arts Council (now Arts Council England) in 1946 as a cultural extension of the Keynesian welfare state. Ryan Edwardson has noted that Canada's significant role in World War II helped establish an independent identity from the mother country (6), and Filewod suggests that the war legitimized interventionist policies as it was "won by massive government intervention in all areas of business and economy" (43). Thus, Canada was attempting the first significant articulation of its culture as unique and independent from Britain, while at the same time imitating its economic and cultural policy by launching public funding for the arts. While a seeming contradiction, imitation of Britain, in this case, supported an emerging Canadian identity.

Don Rubin speaks of "the young giant which was Canada" (*Creeping* 13), as a way of describing this phase of the national evolution. This image pervades much of the description of the time: Tyrone Guthrie compared Canada to an "enormous young boy," who "has so far hardly spoken" (qtd. in Filewod 51). Filewod says of the appeal of this trope, "The notion of the adolescent nation coming into maturity is deep and resilient in Canadian cultural history" (42). In contrast to this strange and infantilizing image, Schafer and Fortier chronicle the 1944 "March on Ottawa," in which a coalition of arts committees went to Ottawa to present a joint brief to the Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment and demand support for the arts before the war had even finished. Imagining the arts as part of a major strategy of infrastructure and employment after the war, in 1945 the same groups formed the Canadian Conference of the Arts with playwright Herman Voaden as its first chairperson (5-6). After five years of lobbying



and pressure, in 1949 Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent finally recommended the formation of a two-year study of the matter: The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, to be headed by University of Toronto Chancellor Vincent Massey. Though what became known as the Massey-Levesque Commission would change the face of the arts in Canada, giving a voice to some members of Guthrie's mute colossus, it would take some time to do so, and face formidable resistance.

The national post-war economic and development boom had a strange impact on Vancouver's downtown. Bridges were built that facilitated an emptying out of the central area. Mills and warehouses migrated to the outer edges of the city and farming communities became commuter suburbs as the central city's population fell drastically (see Chapter 3 A Short History of Downtown Vancouver). What some have called "Vancouver's Suburban Involution" (Peck et al. 386-415) forced city leaders to scramble to get downtown booming again. The regional centrality of the downtown area was at stake (North and Hardwick 208), and City Council hired American planners and business experts to consult on the problem. One of their recommendations was for new cultural facilities strategically placed downtown (North and Hardwick 208).

## **4.2 Early Tries**

Though validated by these outsiders, the call for a city-built performing arts venue was a grassroots movement that had been articulated in stumbling attempts since the 1910s. Lance Berelowitz documents a civic centre design competition in 1913 that produced unrealized plans for an auditorium, art gallery, public library, and city hall over several city blocks in the same area where the Queen Elizabeth complex now stands (58-59). The first serious attempt to build a

civic theatre was considered and rejected by City Council in 1923 (Birnie, “It’s”), and then in 1929 *The Vancouver Sun* reported that the Associated Property Owners were working on Little Mountain Park as an ideal site (“Civic”). A 1937 article announced that the President of the Junior Board of Trade had convinced Mayor George C. Miller to appoint a Ways and Means Committee consisting of local businessmen “to consider choosing and financing a suitable site.” In the same article, Alderman John Bennett, looking for good parking options, troublingly suggested the Kitsilano Indian Reserve, and Vancouver Art Gallery founder Henry A. Stone said, “Vancouver can’t be a real city until it has a civic auditorium” (“Citizens”). Stone’s comment validates Bennett’s observation that cultural buildings “have long been indicators of civic growth at the same time as they stake claims to the kind of cultural richness that is considered paradigmatic for a ‘real’ city” (“Calgary’s” 48). It would take more than twenty years before this pre-requisite of “real city” status was achieved, and only with the help of the most influential cultural body in the history of Vancouver.

The Community Arts Council of Vancouver (CACV) was the first arts council in North America and was instrumental in the creation of the Queen Elizabeth and Vancouver Playhouse theatres, as well as many other Vancouver cultural institutions and events. It grew out of an initiative of the International Association of Junior Leagues - a network of charitable and educational women’s organizations. Towards the end of World War II, New York Consultant Virginia Lee Comer proposed that the League could broaden its service to the community by taking on support for the arts (O’Kiely 1), and it could begin by surveying the state of the arts in cities. Brought to Vancouver in 1945 to meet with the Vancouver branch and city delegates, Comer inspired Mayor Jonathan W. Cornett to form a committee to survey the city and prepare a constitution and bylaws for a prototype arts council. This committee included Group of Seven

painter Lawren Harris and it presented its survey report, “The Arts and Our Town: Vancouver, Canada,” to City Council in 1946. This report was to have major impact on post-war Vancouver and its strongest recommendations were for the establishment of a permanent arts council, which happened later that year, and the building of a civic auditorium (O’Keily 2, Applebe Introduction). However, an attempt to pass a by-law for a new civic centre through a plebiscite on 8 December 1947 was unsuccessful. The “Yes” vote had argued that the auditorium was needed to reflect the city’s growth (“Vote for”), but the “No” vote, sponsored by “a group of independent Vancouver Businessmen” cited the City Comptroller’s opinion that Vancouver could handle neither the expense nor the debt that would be incurred (“Exclusive!”).

The continued fight for the auditorium that followed this failure helped to solidify the CACV’s place in the Vancouver arts community. While the new Council’s civic aspirations were significantly ahead of their time, its members were no strangers to the mechanisms of power. As migrants from the Junior League they were generally highly educated spouses of local wealthy businessmen (including Thea Koerner, Mary Roaf, and Winnifred Arkell), who, on the founding documents of many of Vancouver’s major cultural institutions, noted their professions as “Housewife” (*Constitution*). After two consultancy visits from the British Arts Council (O’Keily 3, Applebe 47-49) and two more years of lobbying, Mayor Charles E. Thompson appointed yet another Ways and Means Committee to report back on a site (“Downtown Location”). This became known as the Vancouver Auditorium Development Committee and with significant CACV input it studied the issue for several years, chose Block 47 of downtown for the location, and submitted its report to City Council in 1953 (*All*). Even after all that work, it still took a “strenuous phoning and speaking campaign to have the civic theatre included in the City’s upcoming Five Year Plan” (O’Keily 7). Norman Sedawie reported in *The Vancouver Sun* that,

“There has been talk of an auditorium for so many years that many people in the entertainment business here say they will believe we have one when they step inside” (“Tenants”). Block 47 in Vancouver is bordered to the west and east by Hamilton and Cambie streets, and to the north and south by Dunsmuir and Georgia streets. The COV purchased it in the fall of 1954 and commissioned its own report from the COV’s Technical Planning Board. With the recommendations of the COV report, voters finally approved a 2.75 million allocation for the facility as part of a larger civic building plan.

Though concern about the decline of downtown allowed the auditorium movement to finally get some traction, the Downtown Business Association (DBA) still called it an “expensive toy” and maintained that, “While the building may do much to elevate a blighted area of the city, it should still pay its way” (“Tourist”). This refusal to accept the new civic structure as an amenity producing social benefit and needing continual subsidy would be a recurring theme as the building emerged. Efforts to force it to “pay its way” would have longstanding repercussions on the VPTC. Michael McKinnie has said that “civic theatre-building offers an ideal of civic accord that compensates for the anxieties of economic change” (29). In the case of Vancouver, anxieties were so high and the struggle over the city’s built environment so fierce that the ideal of civic accord the building promised almost never emerged.

#### **4.3 Design and Build**

With British Columbia’s Centennial looming in 1958, the COV decided to ready the auditorium for the festivities. An architectural competition was held in 1954, judged by Vancouver Director of Planning Gerald Sutton Brown, Head of the UBC Architecture

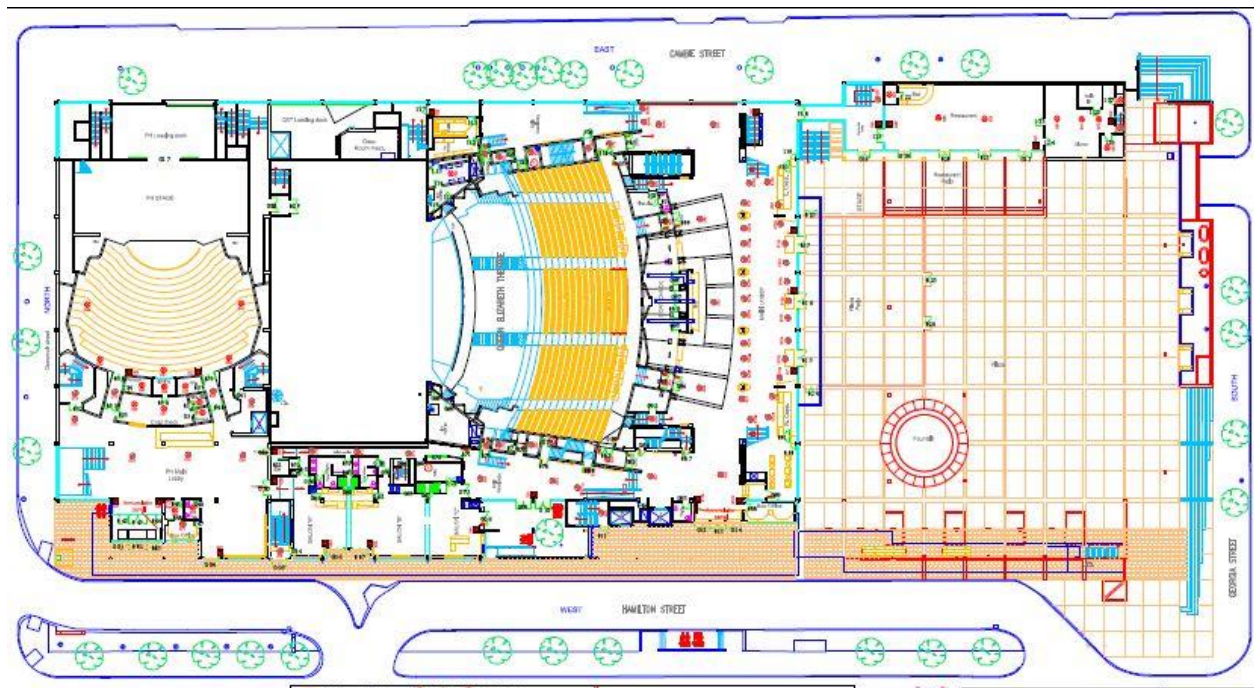
Department Fred Lasserre, and American-Finnish architect Eero Saarinen.<sup>8</sup> The winning design came from the firm of Affleck, Desbarats, Dimakopoulos, Lebensold, Michaud & Sis (later ARCOP – Architects in Co-partnership), with Fred Lebensold as the lead architect. Lebensold was to emerge as Canada’s premiere theatre architect of his era, with a formidable footprint on the nation that includes the Fathers of Confederation Memorial Building in Charlottetown, Place des Arts in Montreal, and the National Arts Centre in Ottawa (Schoenauer). The Vancouver Auditorium Development Committee had recommended, and the Five-Year Plan had included, not one but two theatres (one large and one mid-sized) to accommodate the varied needs of touring companies and multiple local producers. Marvin Carlson has discussed this modern impulse to make one site fit all needs: “A common development of the theatre as a public monument in the twentieth century has been into the arts complex where structures for theatre, dance, opera, and perhaps other arts as well are clustered together to form a kind of supermonument, an entire artistic enclave within the city” (*Places* 92). In the mid-1970s Joseph Papp would controversially criticize these “art conglomerates” as manifestations of “colonial enclave theory”; built to suit capitalist and financial priorities rather than artistic ones (97-106). Vancouver’s bifurcated building was modest compared to later multi-space complexes but the economic logic driving it was the same. In the rush to complete by the 1958 Centennial, the COV committed only to the construction of the larger 2,700 seat space, with the location of the

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<sup>8</sup> Saarinen is now widely regarded as one of the masters of American twentieth-century architecture and is noted for advancing the sculptural possibilities of reinforced concrete in buildings such as the TWA Terminal at Kennedy Airport in New York (1962). He also designed influential plastic furniture. See profile on the Museum of Finnish Architecture website (“Eero”).

smaller venue left empty. Construction began on this larger theatre in April 1957 with a completion target of November 1958 (Guildford 25-26).

Figure 6 shows a ground plan of the two-venue building along with its public plaza, arranged within Block 47. The smaller Playhouse Theatre is to the left of the plan and the larger Queen Elizabeth Theatre is in the middle. The plaza takes up the right one third of the plan.



**Figure 6 (Chapter 4.3) Queen Elizabeth Complex Ground Plan, Used with the Permission of Vancouver Civic Theatres**

The new theatre complex on block 47 was wedged between old downtown (Hastings St.) and new downtown (Granville St.) and was imagined as a sparkling jewel in a new district of shining modern amenities designed to solidify Vancouver’s “real city” status and resuscitate the civic core. The plans engage what Marvin Carlson has described as the “baroque concept of urban

design as an expression of imperial power and splendor” (*Places* 86). To the west of block 47 the new Main Post Office would be unveiled in 1958, the world’s largest welded steel structure when built (Kalman 131). To the north, Vancouver Vocational Institute (now VCC) had opened in 1950, a modernist design factory reflective of post-war expansion of public education and one of the earliest examples of the International Style in Vancouver (“Vancouver Vocational”). To the east, the rich history of Larwill Park was submerged beneath a busy bus station funneling people into the inner city. To the south, massive plans for a convention centre and coliseum (Project 58) were defeated by City Council in 1954 (Gutstein 70). It was the CACV that later suggested that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) locate to this block (they did so in 1975) to add to the feeling of an entertainment district. The clustering of these important facilities “affirms the centrality of the downtown – as both a physical and an imaginary space” (McKinnie 29) and was a major weapon in the fight to maintain downtown’s dominance in the rapidly shifting landscape of greater Vancouver.

Lebensold’s winning design was widely compared to the new and highly acclaimed Royal Festival Hall in London, which had opened in 1951. Rather than a point of embarrassment, this colonial knockoff aspect of the design was widely promoted. The building’s publicity brochure, *All the Details*, bragged that the building “compares favourably with such internationally-known buildings as the Royal Festival Hall in London,” and its stage was “the largest in Canada and one of the most spacious in the world” (*All*). In pointing to Vancouver’s “lack of a deep and sustained regionalist architecture,” Lance Berelowitz notes how “Vancouver has always borrowed from elsewhere when it comes to an architectural tradition” (183) and this winning design continued that trend. The complex’s massing and its foyer’s transparency and relationship to the open plaza on the south side of the block were the major elements that brought

discussions of the two buildings' similarities and suggested their use as examples of postwar high modernist style (see Figure 7). One of the tenets of architectural modernism is that the function would be expressed in the form; facades would be based on the uses of a space rather than masking them. As with some of Lebensold's other designs, building orientation is confusing and it is difficult to know where the front is. The entry-less south (front) facing prioritizes Georgia Street with its relationship to suburban vehicular typologies and on-ramp to the Georgia Viaduct. Besides the state-of-the-art acoustics, air conditioning, and a massive mural by Jack Shadbolt for the lobby,<sup>9</sup> a major selling point for the larger theatre was its catering to the period's car culture, especially in a famously rainy city. In addition to a huge underground parking garage, the side entrance's "drive-in box office located beneath a brilliantly lighted marquee offers theatre-goers shelter from the elements and extra convenience when obtaining tickets or when entering or leaving the theatre" (*All*).

Jen Harvie's observation that "the design and location of a theatre can ascribe an ideological endorsement of market economics to that theatre" (*Theatre* 31), becomes especially apparent at this phase of the building's emergence. The expressed glass frame of the Georgia Street side allowed passers-by to view the lobby action. The building thus featured the public promenade of the audience and encouraged audience members to be aware of their urban surroundings. The air and light that Lebensold's design allowed are primary concepts of modernism, as is the asymmetry evident in the QE complex's side entrance along Hamilton

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<sup>9</sup> Jack Shadbolt (1909-1998) was a renowned West Coast abstract painter whose work evolved from social realism in his early career, through a postwar surrealist phase, finally landing on abstractions of nature. See "Jack Shadbolt" in the Canadian Encyclopedia (Hunter).





**Figure 7 (Chapter 4.3) Queen Elizabeth Complex's Transparent Foyer Massing Opening onto South Plaza,  
Photo by Katrina Dunn**



**Figure 8 (Chapter 4.3) Queen Elizabeth Complex's Drive-Through Box Office, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

Street. Much of the footprint allotted to the site is taken up with a deep plaza separating the facade from Georgia Street. European architects used modernist principles to clear away pre-war detritus, urban blight and the refuse of aerial bombing. New public plazas celebrated democratic and republican principles and gave form to a sense of collective victory. The Queen Elizabeth complex's plaza, however, remained desolate for much of its life, lacking the active edges with shops and restaurant life that animated European plazas.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4.4 Infrastructure and Royal Dressing**

In 1956 a Management Board for the new facility was created by civic bylaw and named by City Council to work with an advisory during construction and then take over and operate the building once done. This entity eventually evolved into Vancouver Civic Theatres (VCT). Though the DBA had been critical of the expense of the building, the idea that it might pay for itself was attractive to City Council, who appointed H.D.G. Lee of the Eaton Company and Director of the DBA to the Board. They also appointed Reg Rose, Manager of the Vancouver Board of Trade, and Donald Baxter, a director of MacMillan Bloedel and Vice President of BC Packers ("Board"). Reporting to the COV Board of Administration, the Management Board's first task was to hire a manager for the new facility. An international search resulted in the hiring

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<sup>10</sup> Recently the QE plaza has experienced some revitalization akin to the type Susan Bennett chronicles for the Olympic Plaza in Calgary ("Calgary's" 50-52). In June of 2018, the COV gave Indigenous names to two of its downtown plazas: the Vancouver Art Gallery's north plaza and the QE plaza. The QE space was renamed ᓄᓂᓐᓴᓂᓐ ᓂᓐᓴᓂᓐ. Chosen in consultation with the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations, the new name is linked to the plaza's past use as a gathering place for the Walk for Reconciliation ("Downtown Vancouver"). In October 2019, a Brown's Socialhouse restaurant opened in the restaurant space attached to the plaza, which had never been successfully inhabited and had been empty for over a decade ("Brand").

of British theatre manager John W. Panrucker, unknown at that time in Canada, who was afterwards involved in construction and preparing the building for opening.

With the civic auditorium underway the CACV had energy for other initiatives, one of which was pushing the federal government to get action on The Massey-Levesque Report. Submitted to the Governor General in 1951 with no less than 150 recommendations, a good portion of the report rails against the substandard conditions in many Canadian venues. In satirical pieces included in the report, Robertson Davies's Lovewit and Trueman bemoan the school auditoriums and halls in which they are forced to perform ("Massey" 163), and Davies's caustic alter-ego Samuel Marchbanks opens the Recommendations section with the pronouncement, "Every great drama, as you know, has been shaped by its playhouse" ("Massey" 173). The CACV's strongest advocacy worked to realize the recommendation for "a body to be created to be known as the Canada Council for the Encouragement of the Arts, Letters, Humanities, and Social Sciences" (qtd. in Benson and Conolly 71). Though histories of Canadian culture present a largely positive picture of the uptake of the Massey-Levesque Report and the creation of the Canada Council by an act of Parliament in 1957, more could be said about the six years of inaction between report and implementation, and the political and economic conservatives intent on stalling the recommendations into oblivion. The CACV was the most organized and vocal entity lobbying the federal government for action (Applebe 56-57), but it took a huge endowment totaling fifty million dollars from two benefactors<sup>11</sup> (Izaak Killam and

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed description and more financial information about this little known and very important fact concerning the founding of the Canada Council, see Douglas How's *A Very Private Person: The Story of Izaak Walton Killam and Dorothy Johnston Killam*, published by the estate of the late Dorothy J. Killam in 1976, and reprinted in 2004 and 2012. For a copy contact The Trustees of the Estate of Dorothy J. Killam.

James Dunn) to release the naysayers from any political or financial commitment. “The footnotes of history indicate that politicians hesitated at that time to follow such a course, but pressure was strong, and a spectacular and unexpected windfall following the death of two prominent, wealthy Canadians, overcame any remaining resistance. Furthermore, the new Council’s endowment – of which only the revenues could be spent – enabled politicians, who had not yet dealt with artists, to keep their distance from them” (Schafer and Fortier 10).

Another of the CACV’s projects was created to launch at the same time as the new civic building. The brainchild of Iby Koerner, the Vancouver International Festival (VIF) was meant to raise the cultural life of Vancouver to European standards (the Koerner family had relocated to Vancouver from Germany just prior to World War II). Conceived as a large-scale, interdisciplinary, summer event mixing world class artists with local talent, the CACV began their work on the Festival by bringing Tyrone Guthrie to Vancouver in 1955, fresh from his victory with the founding of the Stratford Festival, to advise and generate ideas. Guthrie’s report for the CACV slams Vancouver’s existing venues as “gaudy, vulgar, dreary” (7), and proposes instead a wildly expensive provincial touring festival, highlighting BC’s natural attractions, including a raft theatre on Okanagan Lake (5). International stars would attract a fringe of “indigenous cultural efforts” (6) and the governing body should be a “group of eminent persons, including royalty for window dressing” (7). Guthrie’s recommendations seem to have been largely ignored (in all but their elitist sentiments) and Toronto impresario Nicholas Goldschmidt was engaged to get the festival going (O’Keily 7). As the first Vancouver group to get funding from the new Canada Council, the Festival’s big launch in 1958 was jeopardized when labour disputes delayed the completion of the new civic space, which failed to make its provincial Centennial deadline. Music acts were relocated to the Orpheum and theatre projects to the hot

and dilapidated Georgia Auditorium.<sup>12</sup> The Vancouver International Festival had a huge impact on the local arts scene through its ten years of existence, but, in his 1981 MA thesis on the development of Vancouver's professional theatres, Peter Guildford demonstrated that the benefit was felt mainly in the music and opera communities – local theatre practitioners participated mainly in the margins (27).

As the auditorium approached completion in the summer of 1959, the matter of its name became a topic of public debate and speculation. *The Vancouver Sun* ran an informal ballot that could be clipped out and mailed to the entertainment editor (Wedman, "What's"). As a visit from the Queen neared, in the haze of sovereign adoration it became clear that the moniker would be royal, and the Management Board lobbied to get the new venue on her itinerary. Though the first performance in the new space was the opening of the second Vancouver International Festival on 11 July 1959, the official opening was on July 15, when the Queen stopped in at a Festival music performance at intermission after visiting Theatre Under the Stars ("Queen"). As she was escorted inside, Management Board Chairman Reg Rose asked her permission to name the space the Queen Elizabeth Theatre (QET). She consented and he made the announcement from the stage after the audience rose to sing *God Save The Queen*. For this brief moment, under the familiar spell of colonial subjectivity and basking in the glow of royal approval, the "ideal of civic accord" (McKinnie 29) promised by the building seemed to emerge. John Kirkwood wrote

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<sup>12</sup> Originally known as the Denman Auditorium, the Georgia Auditorium was built in 1927 at the corner of West Georgia and Denman. Able to hold 2,500 seats, the space hosted boxing and wrestling matches, as well as important political rallies. In 1952, it was renovated as a concert venue and renamed the Georgia Auditorium. Although it gave a stage to local and touring singers, musicians, dancers, and actors (including John Geilgud in 1958), Guildford reports that local artists "found it impossible to create a desirable theatre atmosphere in the barn-like auditorium" (24). The venue's demise seems to have been directly linked to the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre in July 1959. It was torn down in September of 1959 and replaced by a parking lot (Hagemoen).

in *The Vancouver Sun*, “The pomp and the ceremony and the glitter and the sparkle made all the old arguments seem a bit tired, somehow in retrospect.”

#### **4.5 Embarrassment and Scandal**

Less than a month after the Queen had left Vancouver news of the final bill for the QET crowded out other civic and entertainment news in the local papers. In *The Vancouver Sun* on 5 August 1959, Chair of the Design Selection Committee Fred Lasserre announced that everyone involved in the building project was aware that the building could not be done for the \$2,750,000 approved by the taxpayers as part of the Five Year Plan. In addition, the rush to try to make the Provincial Centennial and the problems caused by the strikes and lockouts that had plagued the project had greatly increased the cost. The paper published a detailed breakdown of expenses totaling \$5,547,080. The COV revenues used included allocations from the approved bylaws and \$431,420 appropriated from the parking sites reserve for the underground garage, but another \$1,799,000 would need to come from general funds. To add to this, the architects were suing the city for more money as their fee was calculated on a percentage of the total project cost (Walden, “Auditorium”). Six years later, in 1965, the federal government would allocate \$60,000,000 for cultural infrastructure across the country in preparation for the “state-programmed orgy of patriotic sentimentality” that was the 1967 Centennial celebrations (Filewod 57). Many buildings like the one in Vancouver would emerge with this money, fueled by what McKinnie has called “an Oedipal rationale for cultural institution building: the country would throw off its colonial inheritance” (25-26). The QET, though ahead of the national curve in its timing, drained only the civic coffers, generating anger in some segments of the local population, and in its name validating, rather than denying, colonial ties.

One year later, in September of 1960, a scandal rocked the QET that would add to its financial precariousness and have long-standing impacts on its administration. John Panrucker, the Theatre Manager hired by the Management Board to run the new space, was suspended pending investigation into financial and payroll irregularities (Wedman, “Theatre”). No financial details were ever released, but eventually Panrucker was convicted of fraud and theft and sentenced to four years in prison. It also became clear that the Management Board had failed to do their due diligence in the hiring process, as he had been accused of similar crimes in Britain (Birnie, “It’s”). Because of the scandal, a new bylaw was passed taking away all of the Management Board’s financial powers. The Board, from that point forward, became purely advisory and the COV took the management of the theatre inside its governmental operations. Vancouver Civic Theatres was invested with the status of a Civic Department (*Civic*). What this meant for artists and producers using the venue (and its soon to come smaller sibling) is that instead of dealing with a Manager they were in fact dealing with the City. This would become a defining feature of the VPTC’s struggle.

Much had transpired in Vancouver’s civic theatre saga, but at this point only half of the building had actually been constructed – the 668-seat house intended to attach to the QET as yet existed only as an architect’s rendering. While still reeling from the expense of the larger theatre, the COV and Province of BC began to suffer an economic downturn in the early 1960s. City Councilors suggested delaying construction and *The Vancouver Sun* headlined an article with the Management Board’s Chairman proclaiming: “It’s Bound to Lose Money” (Walden, “Little”). Led by Frank Low-Beer, the CACV once again stepped up lobbying efforts to try to get the space built (O’Keily 9). The argument for the smaller space was all about community use, so on 22 March 1960 the CACV crammed thirty-nine arts groups into City Council chambers. The

COV was eventually convinced to go ahead and broke ground that spring, promoting the space as the “salvation of city drama groups” (“Vote to”). This time the theatre’s name was not a matter of public speculation as construction neared completion in June of 1961. The CACV suggested several names, one of which was the “Pauline Johnson” (Applebe 59-60), but there was no uptake from the COV. The Vancouver Playhouse became its name almost by default.

The interior of this smaller of the two venues has a wide rectangular proscenium from which emerges a raised semi-circular thrust. Floor seating for 668 patrons fans away from the semi-circle in a shallow rake to the lobby doors at the back. The balcony wraps around the entire upper tier to the proscenium. Despite these attempts to create intimacy and warmth, the space gained a reputation among theatre practitioners as a cold and vacuous hall that was also plagued by sound spilling through the wall from the Queen Elizabeth theatre. The entrance to the space is also on the side of the building, to the north of the QE entrance and box office. A modest opening ceremonies and dedication for the Vancouver Playhouse took place on 26 February 1962. The VSO played some classical music and, in an interesting gesture that spoke volumes about public arts amenities and ideas of property, ownership, and access, architect Fred Lebensold presented the key to the Vancouver Playhouse to the Mayor. The CACV took the opportunity to give Awards of Recognition to some outstanding local artists, one of whom was theatre director and educator Dorothy Somerset, after whom the UBC Dorothy Somerset black box theatre is named (Applebe 61-62).





**Figure 9 (Chapter 4.5) Front Entrance of the Vancouver Playhouse, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

The brochure for the new Vancouver Playhouse lacked the slickness of QET promotional materials and stressed local, rather than world class, connections: “Owned by the people, operated by the city, here then has been added to this metropolis another colour to the rainbow’s end, another sound of a surging seaport, another frame to encase the arts of learning and fulfillment, another outlet for its creativity” (*Brochure*). This promotional piece also makes it clear that the Vancouver Playhouse was to be a revenue-generating, multi-use space to be shared by professionals, amateurs, recitals, and “sales conferences.” Though the COV had assured the artistic community that the venue would be affordable, many were shocked by the rental rates,

and as a civic space it was obligated to use IATSE contracts and pay union rates to theatre technicians. By the spring of 1962 it was becoming clear that the venue was sitting empty most of the time: the “groups who wanted the Playhouse now say it’s too costly to use” (Tytherleigh, “Playhouse”). The BC Regional contest of the Dominion Drama Festival found it so expensive that they were forced to cancel their booking and move to a Victoria high school auditorium (Tytherleigh, “Our”).

*Province* columnist Mike Tytherleigh published numerous articles from the summer of 1962 to the summer of 1963 demanding a “full scale investigation of this civic asset to determine what can turn it from a futility into a utility” (Tytherleigh, “Give”). He argued that, “If it was a production centre for the arts, a place to create music and theatre and so on, everything would be just fine” (Tytherleigh, “Dollars”). His frustration with the state of civic costs and returns was palpable when he asked, “What did we hope to achieve with these theatres when we built them? And are we going to allow them to be operated as rental houses, contributing nothing to the citizens except annual deficits?” (Tytherleigh, “Theatre”). Provocatively, he revealed that “there are many who argue the city should not be in the entertainment business in any way” (Tytherleigh, “Empty”). Rattled by criticism and stuck with an empty theatre, Vancouver Civic Theatres reached out to the CACV for advice. The CACV recommended that a theatre company populate the space, but when it surveyed the existing organizations, “it came to the conclusion that none met the standards of good professional theatre” (Applebe 61-62). Led by financier Alec Walton, the CACV then “brought together a committee of knowledgeable theatre people to study the possibility of establishing a professional resident theatre company” (O’Keily 10).

#### **4.6 Disempowered Local Artists**

As demonstrated by the long arc of this narrative, Vancouver's regional theatre building did not emerge, as it did in other cities like Winnipeg and Halifax, from a desire to house an established professional or transitioning amateur group. Though local artists were involved in the lobbying efforts for both new civic theatres, they did not lead them. The leaders, though they were comfortable defining "the standards of good professional theatre," were philanthropists not artists, and while they talked about community access, they did not make it easy for local groups to feel ownership of the spaces. Despite the CACV's assessment, a generation of Vancouver theatre practitioners were actively producing, fueled by a strong desire to be professional. Guildford attributes the enormous growth in Vancouver's theatre community after World War II to a group of strong female directors, encouraging high standards and providing leadership. These included Dorothy Davies, Phoebe Smith, Yvonne Firkins, Jessie Richardson, Dorothy Goldrick and Dorothy Somerset (19). Somerset's students, coming into the community from the emerging theatre program at UBC, were driving the push towards more professional work. The initial Frederic Wood Theatre, in some old military buildings on campus, had been producing semi-professionally (mixing students with some professionals) in the winter season since 1953.

It is remarkable how many of the attempts to establish professional theatre in Vancouver in the 1950's encountered difficulties stemming from their relationships to space. In the fall of 1950, Sydney Risk moved his flagging touring operation to the Everyman Theatre Studio, atop a storefront at 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Main Street. The operation seemed to work for two seasons until they lost their lease on the space. A move to the much larger old vaudeville house the State Burlesque Theatre on Hastings Street in 1952 brought a whole new economic model that strained the company's dynamic and, in combination with the controversy around its production of

*Tobacco Road*, led to its demise (Guildford 19, Hoffman 49-56).<sup>13</sup> In 1951, Thor Arngrim and Stuart Baker launched Totem Theatre in Ambleside Park and then moved to the Electrical Workers Auditorium on Dunsmuir Street for the 51/52 and 52/53 seasons. Unable to renew their lease, they tried a short stint in Victoria and a summer season in the Georgia Auditorium in 1954 before also disappearing (Johnston 225-48). Sam Payne's Vanguard Productions tried again to animate the Georgia Auditorium in the summers of 1955, 56 and 57, but also failed to thrive (Guildford 24-25). Joy Coghill, a leading figure in the Everyman company, accepted Dorothy Somerset's offer to start a children's theatre company in the Frederic Wood in 1953. Using the CACV's Vancouver Children's Theatre as an infrastructure base for her new company (O'Keily 5), Coghill's Holiday Theatre played in the Frederic Wood for weekend matinees and toured to schools but was never able to pay actors a living wage (Guildford 24). Since 1940, Theatre Under the Stars had been producing successful summer seasons in Stanley Park's Malkin Bowl, but in the late 50s and early 60s the company encountered a number of disastrous summers due to rain, rising costs and competition from the Vancouver International Festival. They would close in 1964 and then reopen in 1969 with a community theatre producing model (Guildford

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<sup>13</sup> The *Tobacco Road* controversy is perhaps Vancouver's most significant episode of theatrical censorship and is fully documented in James Hoffman's "Sydney Risk and the Everyman Theatre" (49-56). In Everyman Theatre's latter incarnation as the resident company of the State Theatre (later called the Avon Theatre) the company staged Jack Kirkland's 1933 theatrical adaptation of Erskine Caldwell's steamy novel *Tobacco Road* set in depression-era rural Georgia, which had been a New York success. Violent and sexual, the play depicts a family of poor white tenant farmers living in such poverty that Everyman actors "made up in the coal bin of the theatre" (52). The Vancouver production opened on 7 January 1953 and within a week, complaints of lewdness made the COV prosecutor issue a police order to clean up the show or face closure by the morality squad. On 16 January 1953 actors were arrested onstage mid-performance and "charged with participating in an indecent performance under section 208 of the Criminal Code" (53). Members of the artistic team were convicted but most eventually had their convictions reversed. However, the stress of the prolonged criminal proceedings was a factor in the eventual collapse of Everyman Theatre in 1955.

29). A counter to these stories is the incremental rise of the Arts Club, founded in 1958 as a private club for artists, musicians, and actors. Years of energizing community activity would result in a successful grassroots space when Yvonne Firkins established a 250-seat theatre in a converted gospel hall on Seymour Street in 1964.

Two high profile attempts to claim the Queen Elizabeth Theatre and the Vancouver Playhouse for local theatre artists seemed to have had the opposite effect. The Barnstormers were a producing company led by Max Power, Ben Kapelow, and Doug Hellier (Guildford 25). A successful production of Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski's *Stalag 17* in the fall of 1956 had fueled their ambitions and, after a production per year, in March of 1960 they attempted to stage British playwright William Douglas-Home's *Now Barabbas* in the QET. Playing to tiny audiences in the enormous house, their failure earned the sympathy of *The Vancouver Sun* Drama Critic Jack Richards, who called them "the only group in Vancouver trying to promote professional theatre" (Richards, "Barnstormers"). In an article titled "Local Players? They Can't Be Good," Richards used the attempt as an occasion to question if local audiences could ever embrace Vancouver productions as high quality, noting that just a week before *Now Barabbas*, the Canadian Players, "of no higher caliber than the Barnstormers," had played to a near full house at the QET. The Barnstormers failed, "not because it was bad theatre but because we have a mass inferiority complex" (Richards, "Local").

Prior to the CACV's work on establishing a professional company in the Vancouver Playhouse, a local company gave an unsuccessful audition for the role. Peter Statner had launched a company at the Cambie Theatre early in 1961 with a production of John Osborne's *Epitaph for George Dillon*, followed by several other successful shows (Guildford 28). Cultural leaders were clearly on the lookout for a resident company as, in December of 1961, Statner was

flown to Ottawa to meet with the Canada Council. Though his request for \$15,000 for an eight-show season at the Vancouver Playhouse was denied, the new Civic Theatres Manager Ian Dobbin was impressed enough to offer him a slot in one of the venue's long empty stretches, with the idea that "a good production would have led to a permanent residency" (Guildford 28). Statner's production of Georges Feydeau's *Hotel Paradiso* in May of 1962, which starred Robert Clothier and featured a young Nicola Lipman (*Hotel*), failed miserably (Haworth 19-20). *The Vancouver Sun* announced that, "Home grown professional theatre burst upon Vancouver Wednesday night with a dull thud" (Richards, "French"). Two days later, Statner's ad in the *Sun*, somewhat desperately, offered free admission to the first one hundred people through the door ("Critics"). Months later, still decrying the lack of activity in the Playhouse venue, *The Province* commented that Statner's company had "flopped on its first attempt with all officialdom watching from the best seats, and the experience has chilled every group in the city" (Tytherleigh, "Our"). Alderman Marianne Linnell from Civic Theatres' now purely advisory Management Board said much the same thing when questioned by *The Province* about the venue problem: *Hotel Paradiso* had "caused a severe setback because it has discouraged other groups" ("Bid").

#### **4.7 Theatre Company by Committee**

Early in 1962, and in the life of Alec Walton's committee, they were charged with creating the new resident company, and he and fellow committee member Dr. Morris Wayman attended a meeting of theatre organizations in Ottawa. At this meeting the Canada Council laid out its nascent plan for seeding regional theatres across the country ("First"). By this point it was becoming clear to these federal funders that the Stratford Festival, for all its successes, could

never play the role of a national theatre. The Canada Council 1961-62 Annual Report notes that “Stratford reaches that part of a national audience which can pay to get there,” and suggests that “this audience must for convenience be broken down into regional audiences” (qtd. in Czarnecki 271). The flagging Canadian Players company was pressing home the difficulty and expense of national touring, but the long-standing amateur structure of the Dominion Drama Festival provided a compelling example of successful Canadian decentralization (Bessai 9). It is widely acknowledged, however, that much of the Council’s thinking on regional theatre was derived from observing the growth of the Manitoba Theatre Centre (MTC),<sup>14</sup> which also became the ideal for the regional theatre system in the US (Czarnecki 272). Established in 1958, MTC was an amalgamation of the long-established Winnipeg Little Theatre and Theatre 77. The latter was a new professional company founded in 1957 by John Hirsch and Tom Hendry, both of whom had come up through the ranks of the Little Theatre (Bessai 10). Described by Hendry as “a natural outgrowth of the Winnipeg community” (247), MTC combined amateur roots and inspired leadership to form a production company with a defined season, provincial touring, and a training facility. Its impactful efforts generated for Canada an unprecedented regional success story. By 1962 the Canada Council was formulating grantsmanship policies and programs to encourage copies across the country.

When questioned as to how such an influential model could have arisen in a minor Canadian city from such inglorious foundations, Hendry confessed that theirs was “a theatre modelled more on European patterns than anything to be found in North America” (244). In

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<sup>14</sup> In 2010 the theatre received a royal designation from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and officially became the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre (RMTC).

Britain, in an interesting parallel to the Canadian story, the regional repertory movement's "seeds lay in the campaigns mounted at the end of the nineteenth century to establish a national theatre" (Jackson). Opposed to the long runs and the star systems in place in the commercial theatres, regional theatres in Manchester and Liverpool were funded by wealthy entrepreneurs and charitable trusts until the arrival of public subsidy after World War II. In France in the 1920's, the Théâtre National Populaire (TNP) materialized as a populist attempt to abandon class hierarchy and run theatres as cultural services rather than commercial enterprises. The TNP's Jean Vilar is credited with inventing a model for subscription seasons in 1951 that was widely copied (Borgstrom). Eventually the TNP company would decentralize to Lyon under the directorship of Roger Planchon. Well-versed in such continental examples, and buoyed by MTC and his Canadian successes, Tyrone Guthrie would migrate these ideas into an American milieu in 1963 with the founding of Minnesota's Guthrie Theatre in 1963, widely acknowledged as the birthplace of the not-for-profit movement in the US (Cummings).

Committee members Walton and Wayman came back from their Ottawa meeting with a touch of the regional theatre fever that was gripping the continent, and the group they had assembled set about studying different examples. MTC was high on the list, but the governance structure that would be taken up by the new regionals originally came from Stratford. Hendry had said: "Stratford created a model for indigenous Canadian theatre: a non-profit organization .... Unashamedly welcoming subsidy support in return for placing its destiny – at a policy-making level – in the hands of a volunteer citizen Board of Governors" (246). The prototype Stratford Board comprised, "a map of the city's local compact of economic, state and cultural power .... which claims for itself the right to speak for the 'community' which the theatre serves. The theatre in that way functions to confirm that claim in a reciprocal structure of ideological



legitimation” (Filewod 55-56). Joseph Papp called these Board members the “do-gooders” (98) and noted that a problem with this model was that “production for use, not for profit” was basically a Marxist concept that bewildered the otherwise well-meaning stewards of these governance structures (99), and was anathema to the ideological basis of their wealth and power.

Alec Walton’s major recruit for the Board of his soon-to-be regional theatre was John G. Prentice, Chairman of Canadian Forest Products, who had big shares in other pulp and paper companies and was a major figure in the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Vancouver Board of Trade. He was also a major patron of the arts in Vancouver and would later become Chairman of the Canada Council (Gutstein 42). Barrister Hamish Cameron was brought on board to watch and protect the loan that Prentice had made to the new society to secure its line of credit. Also on the Board were Arthur Andrews, a senior partner in Price Waterhouse, Hugh Palmer, Director of CBC Television, Norah Gregory of the Koerner Foundation, and Mary Roaf, then president of the CACV. Guildford credits Walton with bringing local theatre artists Joy Coghill, Shirley Broderick and Robert Clothier onto the original exploratory committee (30). Of the very few artists who penetrated the circles of these well-heeled cultural infrastructure creators, Joy Coghill seems to have done so most successfully. Augmenting her UBC Bachelor of Arts with an MFA from the Art Institute of Chicago (Page, “Joy” 103-4), Coghill had foreign validation as well as local experience with Everyman and Holiday. Her fierce drive and entrepreneurial streak (as well as her participation in many VIF productions) endeared her to this elite group. At a CACV Board Meeting in October of 1962, when a motion was passed to assemble a stewardship Board for the new resident theatre company, Coghill was elected as a Director, and her signature graces its constitution dated 13 December 1962 (*Constitution*).

Michael Johnson, a Production Manager with VIF who had been administering the work of the exploratory committee, was hired as the company's new Managing Producer.

#### **4.8 Opening Night**

The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary booklet of the VPTC attempted to paint a picture of the moment from which the company arose: "The Americans were in Vietnam, Prime Minister Pearson was thinking of changing the Canadian flag, *Oliver!* was on the Broadway stage" (Chess and Groberman). Malcolm Page identifies the few months in 1963/64 that saw the first productions of the VPTC at the Vancouver Playhouse and then the Arts Club Theatre in their new Seymour Street venue as absolutely key to the growth of professional theatre in Vancouver ("Change"). As a financial base, the VPTC had secured an \$8,000 grant from the Canada Council, \$25,000 in public donations, and had begun to sell subscriptions (Richards, "Johnson"). Support from the COV came in the form of \$7,500 worth of free rent in the building. The Civic Theatres department would charge the company rent for their time in the space, and then the COV would pay out a grant to the company to match this amount, although it was clear from the beginning that this arrangement would not cover all of the expenses associated with being in the building. The Vancouver Playhouse building was not designed with in-house theatre production in mind – there was no shop or storage – so facilities had to be found and equipped to generate sets, props, and costumes for the six-show offering. It is not clear who did the programming for that first season: the Board of Directors chose not to hire an Artistic Director. Michael Johnson had experience in Canadian theatre from Toronto's Crest Theatre, VIF and TUTS, and had recently studied international examples of repertory theatres courtesy of a grant from the Canada Council (*Vancouver*), so it is possible that he took it on in addition to the massive managerial task of

founding a company and administering its operations. He also designed the sets for every show that first year.

#### **4.9 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 1: *The Hostage***

The season consisted of *The Hostage* by Brendan Behan, *Private Lives* by Noel Coward, *The Boyfriend* by Sandy Wilson, *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare, *The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter, and *Charley's Aunt* by Brandon Thomas ("Playhouse Production"). John Hirsch's name was proudly promoted in the season brochure as director of the opening production; regional theatre royalty come from Winnipeg to give credence to the new operation. When Hirsch had to be replaced a few weeks prior to rehearsal, Michael Johnson said, "We are under-budgeted for Hirsch. He wanted a Cadillac and we were on a compact budget" (Richards "Johnson"). Hirsch was hastily replaced by Malcolm Black, a Brit who, after emigrating to Canada in 1956, had built a strong reputation for his work with the Crest and was then directing in New York (Mullaly 53). Preview articles for *The Hostage* asserted that local actors were getting "a fair shake" (Richards "Johnson"), with only two from outside the city in a cast of fifteen. The show ran from 2-28 October 1963, with Sam Payne, Daphne Goldrick, and Marti Wright among the cast. In the program accompanying this first production, the new company boldly named its connection to the citizenry as one of ownership: "The Playhouse Theatre Company is the property of the people of Vancouver. It is their theatre" (*Hostage*).

Though most of the season's shows are recognizable as what would later be referred to as standard regional theatre fare, the opening show, *The Hostage*, was not. Though the play had long runs in both London's West End and Off-Broadway in New York after its premiere in 1958, and thus had the trappings of a commercial success, it was actually the creation of two highly

controversial theatre artists using revolutionary techniques to render very challenging subject matter. Irish playwright Brendan Behan had served time in a UK youth prison while volunteering with the Irish Republican Army. *The Hostage* was based on his Irish language one act play, *An Giall*, and is set in a house of ill-repute in Dublin owned by a former IRA commandant. A young British soldier is taken there as a hostage for the life of an IRA youth about to be hung in England for shooting a policeman. Among a combination of prostitutes and revolutionaries a love story develops between the hostage and a young girl resident. The play ends with news of the hanging and a raid of the brothel in which the hostage is killed. In the final scene his dead body rises and sings. This play was bringing Behan international prominence and encouraging his absorption into the angry young literary culture in England in the 1950s. Behan's attack was not just aimed at imperial oppressors: the play also reflected his disillusionment with Irish cultural nationalism. It appeared to mock the IRA and its nationalist dreams and ideals. In Ireland, there was ambivalence about whether *The Hostage* and Behan himself recapitulated stage-Irish stereotypes. Often intoxicated, Behan had endeared himself to the British public when he appeared visibly drunk on a popular televised English talk show.

*The Hostage* was the second collaboration between Behan and director Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop. One of the foremost directors of her time, Littlewood was also highly political: in 1940 she was blacklisted from the BBC for her communist sympathies (Holdsworth 2). She was dedicated to capturing the lives and attention of the working class, and she pioneered techniques of the creative ensemble, many of which inspired the collective creation movement and later, devised performance. With her company, she made extensive use of improvisation and drew on agit-prop and music hall as well as Brechtian-style song and direct address. In what was rumoured to be a troubled partnership, Littlewood's collaborative process

revised Behan's text substantially and contributed much of the bawdy slapstick and provocative contemporary references that do not exist in *An Giall* (Brannigan 102, 113). Of this complex interplay of English and Irish culture, reviewer Kenneth Tynan raved: "conventional terminology is totally inept to describe the uses to which Mr. Behan and his director, Joan Littlewood, are trying to put the theatre. The old pigeonholes will no longer serve" (qtd. In Brannigan 116).

Littlewood's anti-establishment, left-wing perspective in combination with Behan's caustic broken idealism were too much for Vancouver: *The Hostage* at the Vancouver Playhouse was widely panned. For Jack Richards of *The Vancouver Sun* the local ensemble emulating Littlewood's rough aesthetic "smacked of extreme amateurism." The review also has a strong moral dimension reacting negatively to the show's overt sexual and queer content: "The blatant vulgarity of the three homosexuals was not really very amusing .... If you like your theatre coarse and vulgar and loaded with the lowest in comedy, you may think it's great" ("Opening"). As a way of contextualizing the general social mores of Vancouver at this time, only one year earlier, in 1962, the citizens of Vancouver had voted to allow Sunday movies, but it would not be until 1964 that women were allowed to enter bars unescorted (Kloppenborg et al. 153). Richards and other reviewers also lambasted the "bad localized jokes about Cordova Street hotels and Stanley Park"; local allusions and gags characteristic of Theatre Workshop shows that replaced the London and New York bits, and built on the ad-libs that had entered the performance script after Behan's much-publicized drunken intervention in a performance during the New York run ("Behan's"). Richards concluded that *The Hostage* at The Playhouse "did nothing to prove that professional theatre has arrived" ("Opening"). In the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary booklet, Daphne Goldrick recalls an attempt by Playhouse publicist Freddy Hill to use the bad reviews to "stir up some kind of controversy to hype the box-office which was suffering." Hill had scaled Siwash Rock in

Stanley Park in the middle of the night to place a sign that read “The Hostage is Obscene” (Chess and Groberman).

The sexual politics of *The Hostage* were controversial enough to warrant self-referential asides to the audience about sections of the play: “The trouble we had getting that past the nice Lord Chamberlain. This next bit’s even worse” (Behan 97). More significant for the evolution of Canadian theatre, however, was the way the work “deployed irony and farce to destabilize the political identities produced in the competing discourses of nationalism and colonialism” (Brannigan 123). In scenes reminiscent of the monarchist frenzy of the Queen’s visit, IRA sympathizers in *The Hostage* comb through the papers eager for royal gossip. Richard Lane has said of BC theatre, that it “is constructed out of displacement, the move, the transference of cultural values” in a constant process of “the destabilizing of identity in the public realm” (7). In its critique of colonial subjugation and its anticipation of “the ideological limitations of nationalism as an emancipatory discourse” (Brannigan 12), both of which would eventually gain traction as themes in Canadian culture, *The Hostage* forced a public identity tremor that was deeply uncomfortable for its audience and the civic power structure. The messy blend of appropriation, authenticity, difference, and marginality that emanated from the play’s critiques, had yet to be legitimized as the discourse of post-colonialism and was deeply troubling. As Ryan Edwardson has said of the Canadian context: “Rival ideologies and positions of power meant that post-colonialism ended up taking shape as a ‘third space,’ as Homi Bhabha theorizes, one of overlap, compromise and functionality” (Edwardson 9, Bhabha). Behan’s play uncomfortably portrayed and mocked this compromised third space of cultural hybridity, and its core narrative of symbolic appropriation and ironic dislocation had deep resonance for the new company in relation to its performing venue. Vancouver Civic Theatres had refused to allow the VPTC to

erect any signage announcing their programming or their relation to the building. Resorting to civil disobedience, on 17 August 1963 *The Province* ran a photo of a young female actor running away from two banners that had been hastily attached to the front of the Vancouver Playhouse building. One announced the run of *The Hostage*, and the other, hanging crooked, named the site “Home of the Playhouse Theatre Company” (“Getting”).

#### **4.10 Carrying On**

In the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary booklet, Joy Coghill said of the VPTC leaders: “Life was always very difficult for Artistic Directors. We could probably have had a much nicer time elsewhere. But for most of us there was magic in Vancouver – and a constant challenge in its very bloody-mindedness” (Chess and Groberman). After the first season, the Board of Directors hired Malcolm Black as the first Artistic Director and, although a Brit, he is widely credited as one of the earliest champions of Canadian drama (Mullaly 53). Malcolm Page noted that “The Playhouse in the sixties gained a reputation for staging new Canadian work, before the rest of the country was showing much interest in local writers” (“Change”). Though just as guilty of what Susan Bennett calls “repertory standardization,” in which familiar classics are repeatedly restaged (*Theatre* 108-112), the VPTC’s early work in new play development led to what many chroniclers of Canadian theatre recognized as the birth place of modern Canadian drama (Benson and Conolly 81, Innes 145-66, Rubin, *Creeping* 16, Wasserman 14-15). George Ryga’s *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* brought the painful struggles of Canada’s Indigenous population onto the mainstream stage, and with its highly successful run at the Vancouver Playhouse, it “finally touched the nerve of English Canada” (Wasserman 14). Under Black’s successor, Joy Coghill, it toured to Ottawa in 1969 to open the new National Arts Centre complex. That the first theatre

work selected to play at this prestigious national facility should come from a regional company from the West, champion Indigenous causes, and be penned by a figure as marginal as Ryga, was nothing less than an enormous victory for the VPTC. Yet, during this time Artistic Directors turned over at a dizzying rate. From 1966/67 to 1971/72 the company went through four Artistic Directors in six years. All four were Canadian theatre luminaries, two of whom were dismissed by the Board of Directors (Coghill and David Gardner) and one left in disgust (Paxton Whitehead). Christopher Newton finally stabilized the company, remaining for six years (1973/74 – 1978/79), while Glynis Leyshon managed the longest run of eleven years (1997/98 – 2007/08) (“Playhouse Production”). No leader emerged, however, who was able to combat and transform the operational obstacles that lay at the core of the company and its venue, at least not in time to ensure its survival.

#### **4.11 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 2: *The Overcoat***

In 1997 a production premiered that both grew organically out of the theatrical culture in and around the Playhouse space and mirrored the struggle for property which animated so much of its history. Morris Panych and Wendy Gorling’s wordless *The Overcoat* set Nikolai Gogol’s 1842 story to the music of Dmitri Shostakovitch, and followed an insignificant, downtrodden draughtsman stuck in an impersonal state bureaucratic machine through his brief acquisition of status through a new overcoat. At the top of this scriptless work’s ‘Act Two,’ a chorus of bare-chested male tailors sexually and frenetically produce the glorious titular overcoat in a passage of complex choreography performed with drill team precision. When first presented with the coat the new owner feels “as if he was not alone at all but had some pleasant companion who had agreed to tread life’s path together with him” (Gogol 86). Panych and Gorling’s stage work crafts



a love-at-first-sight duet for The Man (Arkady in the story) and the new garment, with the overcoat taking on “a dynamic (puppet) life of its own” (Gilbert, “Panych” 294), an actor hidden in the coat’s long folds so the material “seems to have corporeal substance” (Citron). The romantic and sexual overtones are clear, but these scenes are also metonyms for the theatrical creation process. Panych and Gorling’s stunning creation took Vancouver by storm, went on to a significant life at other theatres across Canada, and toured to renowned international venues as well. Along the way, however, the creation danced away from the partner that had called it into being. As the production grew in currency, the VPTC lost control of the work and was unable to use its significant success to raise its own profile or increase its fortunes or capacity. Like the story’s hapless anti-hero, its defining property was taken.

Two women at the forefront of Vancouver theatre paved the way for *The Overcoat*’s emergence: Kathryn Shaw and Glynis Leyshon. Reid Gilbert has been the work’s main analyst in the academic realm, and has deftly narrated the evolution of Panych and Gorling’s physical creation process that “arose from the ongoing education and repertory performances of students at Studio 58” (“Speaking” 11-12). In the late 1980’s Shaw invited Panych to create a work for the students and involved Gorling, Studio 58’s teacher of clown, mask, commedia dell’arte, and movement. What emerged was a series of movement pieces set to the work of great composers, growing in sophistication over a period of seven years. These began with *Nocturne* set to Chopin (1989), followed by *Scenes from a Courtroom* set to Poulenc (1992), and culminated in *The Company* set to Prokofiev (1995). Coming from Victoria’s Belfry Theatre, Leyshon had been impressed by *The Company*, and for her inaugural season as Artistic Director of the VPTC commissioned Panych and Gorling to migrate their process from the tiny basement of Studio 58 to the regional theatre expanse of the Playhouse stage (Astle 102, Burdon and Elliot, Gilbert,

“Speaking” 12, “Panych” 286, Wood). The eventual VPTC premiere was produced “in association with Studio 58” (Gilbert, “Speaking” 11) in a groundbreaking “special training initiative supported by Canadian Actors Equity Association” (Burdon and Elliot) that allowed students to work in the professional setting and enable an unusually large cast for the work: twenty-two performers. Some critics also linked *The Overcoat*’s emergence to the same tradition of movement theatre in Vancouver that produced Axis Theatre and Touchstone Theatre’s *The Number 14* (K. Taylor), which also starred Peter Anderson and Colin Heath in leading roles.

Many critics have found the Panych/Gorling style “maddeningly difficult to categorize .... a musical without a single song, a narrative without a word of dialogue .... Not exactly dance, or mime, or, in a conventional sense, even acting .... A wholly unexpected entertainment that speaks in the slang of gesture and syntax of body language” (Wood). Gilbert suggests that the duo’s works “invite speculation about genre by evading the fixed roles of language in defining literary type” (“Panych” 282). Though he discusses the actors’ bodies as narratological sign vehicles, he carefully avoids the word “mime,” deferring instead to Panych/Gorling’s preferred term “non-verbal theatre.” Yet, it is Gorling’s status as a graduate of L’École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris that provides *The Overcoat* with its mime-based movement language. Growing beyond pure illusion, her style has both abstract and character-based elements and works from Lecoq’s notion of “*jouer jusqu’au bout* ... play right to the edge” (qtd. in Astle 101). A 2018 review called it “a jaw-dropping combination of Cirque du Soleil, 1940s Disney cartoon and rhetorical gesture” (Simeonov). In the source material of Gogol her movement found fertile ground in “characters [that] do not have psychological depth and are developed in the main purely by external physical descriptions” (Wilks 13). Gilbert draws strong parallels between Gogol’s anti-hero and a string of “cynical postmodern Everyman” characters in

Morris Panych's work beginning with *Man in 7 Stories* (1989) right through to *Holloman* in *Lawrence and Holloman* (1998) (Gilbert, "Speaking" 13). Where the short story's Arkady "had the strange knack of passing underneath windows just as some rubbish was being emptied" (Gogol 75), Panych's reoccurring protagonist is a "Chaplinesque character ... an unwilling protagonist in a drama .... each plot event leads him further from any identity other than that laid upon him by the most recent events directed by forces beyond him" ("Speaking" 13). Attempting to define the appeal of the hybrid that emerged from these two artists strengths, Gilbert calls it "sheer theatricality" ("Panych" 283) and suggests that it pulls audiences into a "pre-symbolic and pre-linguistic affinity .... [an] abstract super-reality" ("Speaking" 12) that is "chthonic" (15). In the underworld of pure sensation and without "the mortar of language, the physical graphemes of Panych and Gorling continually slip in many directions" ("Panych" 290). One of these slippages came to suggest the bureaucratic regime within which its producing company found itself trapped.

Ken McDonald's much lauded and now iconic set blew up the experimental theatre school aesthetic to spectacular proportions, suggesting "the looming city of *Metropolis* and the comic automation of *Modern Times*" (K. Taylor). Shifting forward almost eighty years from the short story, McDonald's 1920s setting featured a two-story factory-like wall of windows with a moving staircase, giant turning gears, and spinning drafting tables, beds, and pedal sewing machines. Where the Playhouse performance space had previously been critiqued for its extreme width, vacuous quality and lack of intimacy, *The Overcoat* set vaulted into the space and pushed at its edges; a visual rendition of the work's bravery and stylistic ambition. The play's success was immediate and dizzying, earning rave reviews and sold-out houses. It brought a brilliant sheen to the VPTC's otherwise perpetually rocky journey. As with Arkady's finest hour in the

short story, “everyone rushed into the lobby to look at his new acquisition. They so overwhelmed him with congratulations and good wishes that he smiled at first and then even began to feel quite embarrassed .... The whole day was like a triumphant holiday” (Gogol 89). The company managed a remount in Vancouver and a Canadian tour in 1999/2000 to Canadian Stage in Toronto, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and Manitoba Theatre Centre in Winnipeg (Astle 103, Gilbert, “Speaking” 16). It was the first time the VPTC had toured the country since *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* travelled through Canada in 1967 (Wood). Even then, financial challenges were conspiring to change *The Overcoat* from a major success into a burden for the company. Disassembling McDonald’s massive set for the community group matinees that Vancouver Civic Theatres mandated during VPTC runs at the Playhouse was prohibitively expensive, and Canadian Actors Equity began to retreat from their willingness to allow student participation in the show. Ultimately, the VPTC was unable to raise the funds or undertake the financial risks associated with touring to the international locations that had expressed interest in hosting the show (Astle 95).

In Gogol’s story Arkady is cruelly robbed of his new garment while walking home from a party that his usually unfriendly colleagues have thrown for him. The grief of the loss kills him and his specter haunts St. Petersburg ripping coats off people’s backs. Panych and Gorling instead graft the end of Gogol’s *Diary of a Madman* (1835) onto the story, but the impact is the same – the loss undoes him. When the VPTC was unable to move on *The Overcoat*’s opportunities, one of its Canadian tour stops stepped in and grabbed the coat for themselves. In 2003, Toronto’s Canadian Stage mounted the show for the duMaurier WorldStage festival ahead of a run at the Barbican in London intended to drum up a full European tour (“CanStage”). In an interview from that year, Canadian Stage Executive Producer David Abel narrates the work’s

origin story as though it sprang from his Ontario regional theatre: “Toronto has been a strong theatre market for a long, long time .... What becomes incumbent upon us now is to start creating the work that travels internationally” (“CanStage”). Speaking of the gradual evolution of Toronto theatre and especially Canadian Stage and its pool of playwrights, the *Globe* article cites *The Overcoat* as “a prime example of how great things come from matured capability” (“CanStage”). It never mentions the work’s genesis in Vancouver or the VPTC. Under Canadian Stage’s auspices the work went on to tour dates in England, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, and the United States (Citron), spreading the company’s brand internationally. Gradually the work was no longer associated with the company that both commissioned and premiered it. In the spring of 2018, six years after the collapse of the VPTC, Canadian Stage and Vancouver Opera, in conjunction with Tapestry Opera, premiered *The Overcoat: A Musical Tailoring*, with a libretto by Panych and music by composer James Rolfe, in Toronto as part of Canadian Stage’s season, which was hailed as a major success. In the history of the VPTC “a shining visitor in the form of an overcoat suddenly appeared, brightening his wretched life for one fleeting moment” (Gogol 102), but even this triumph was not able to buoy up the fortunes of the artistic body that brought it into being. In the play’s final moments loss engenders disorder and disorientation, and ceaseless movement comes to an abrupt halt in a frozen tableau; “an implosion ... the cessation of movement in catatonia” (Gilbert, “Speaking” 14), an image that foreshadows its original producer’s crumbling infrastructure and finally, abrupt ending.

#### **4.12 The Production Centre**

A blog dedicated to keeping VPTC memories alive after the collapse maintains that “The struggle to find and maintain a permanent and unified production centre has been a constant

theme throughout the Playhouse's history," and provides the details of that struggle ("First"). The lack of production facilities at its venue had saddled the company at its founding with a seemingly unsolvable organizational puzzle, and the decades that followed saw the company chased around the city by a series of civic developments and mega-events. In 1970 the VPTC was using a property on Marine Drive for some production elements that it had inherited when Joy Coghill merged her children's theatre, Holiday Theatre, with the company during her tenure from 1967-69. The municipal government expropriated the site for a cloverleaf and the VPTC used the money to purchase a property at 575 Beatty Street, where it could finally centralize elements of its operations that had been housed in multiple locations since its inception. In 1982/83 that space was expropriated for the Stadium Skytrain station built in preparation for Expo 86. This loss forced the company out of the downtown core and it purchased and fitted out a new production centre at 543 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. In 1988, to solve a difficult financial situation, the VPTC sold the West 7<sup>th</sup> space and leased it back from the new owners, effectively eliminating its ownership possibilities for the rest of its life. During Susan Cox's tenure (1993/94 – 1996/97) the company's arrangement at West 7<sup>th</sup> expired and a new, leased facility was created at 160 West 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue, the present location of the Arts Club's Goldcorp Stage. In 2007 the West 1<sup>st</sup> production centre was demolished to make way for the redevelopment of the Southeast False Creek neighborhood and the 2010 Olympic Games Athlete's Village. By then the company had entered into a deal with a developer and the COV that would see it return to the site in a new state-of-the-art production facility and second stage at the base of a condominium development after the Olympics finished. When the development was delayed by Olympic security concerns and the 2008 economic downturn, the VPTC struggled to support expensive lease payments on its temporary facilities at East 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Main Street. As a planned eighteen-month stay

turned into years, the financial strain on the company began to jeopardize the West 1<sup>st</sup> capital campaign and the future of the company. Attempting to contextualize these decades of struggle, the VPTC's final Artistic Managing Director Max Reimer would write in 2011: "No large Canadian theatre company has been able to pay commercial venue rates out of operating proceeds for all of their rehearsal and production needs for any length of time. Production facilities are either already part of the theatre or they are paid for through capital campaigns with public and private assistance" (3).

In addition to its production centre struggles, the VPTC engaged in half a century-long battle with Vancouver Civic Theatres. Of the first fifteen years, the authors of a Vancouver Theatre space study (Nini Baird and Christopher Wootten) would say in 1977: "The facility's operation as a roadhouse conflicts with the requirements of the major local theatre company. The Vancouver Playhouse desires more control over how the space is managed and booked" (Baird and Wootten 41-42). Adding the Orpheum to its suite of theatres in 1977, VCT's 1998 Annual Report clearly orders the importance of the organization's functions: "to offer rental space to promoters of the world so that the audiences of Vancouver would be able to enjoy the same range of entertainment as other centres, and to provide a controlled facility for use by some of the local arts organizations" (1998). These local groups were "The Prime Performers," which included the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company, The Vancouver Recital Society, The Friends of Chamber Music, The Vancouver Symphony, and later the Vancouver Bach Choir and Ballet BC. Even though the VPTC's long runs and extensive season made it the strongest presence at the Vancouver Playhouse venue, the archives document a troubling feud between VCT and its tenant throughout the 1960s, with the VPTC struggling to gain priority booking of the space. A *Province* article from 1963 titled "QET 'landlord' acts only in business" had Civic

Theatre's Ian Dobbin engaging the corporate language of the day to describe his operation: "We're streamlined, IBM'd, clean, antiseptic ..." (French). Earlier that year, his letter to J.C. Oliver of the City's Board of Administration on the subject of the VPTC warns that, "Special care should be exercised to avoid a take-over of all facilities by this group on a 'Home Sweet Home' or 'Squatter' basis" (Dobbin). Though many attempts were made by different leaders, for forty-eight years the VPTC was never successful in getting VCT to disallow the one-offs by the Friends of Chamber Music and other renters that regularly interrupted their runs and demanded the costly dismantling and then rebuilding of sets for a single performance. Rae Ackerman, a former young designer for one of the VPTC's short-lived second stages, became a focal point for this struggle in his capacity as Director of Vancouver Civic Theatres from 1990 to the company's demise in 2012. Max Reimer pushed hard on Ackerman and "the uniquely awkward business terms under which we have operated since I was attending elementary school in North Vancouver" (Reimer 3), finally winning in 2010 some scheduling priority, as well as a permanent box office presence and some tenancy of the largely-unused Recital Hall in the basement of the theatre ("First").

Until 2011 the VPTC had been the only established arts organization in Vancouver that had never been assisted with an annual municipal operating grant. Instead, as per the initial arrangement in 1963, the COV charged the company and then paid it back a sum each year in the form of a rental grant for the company to be a limited resident of the Vancouver Playhouse. The COV argued that this made the VPTC ineligible for operating support, although what Max Reimer called this "city-to-itself accounting" did not prohibit other arts organizations with rental arrangements from receiving annual operating grants. Reimer took on rectifying this situation as well by demonstrating that the VPTC was the only "A" category regional theatre (as defined by



the Canadian Theatre Agreement) that received no operating funding from their city. By way of comparison, Toronto's Canadian Stage received civic support amounting to \$789,000 per annum in 2011. He also noted that other Vancouver venues are usable year-round by the resident theatre company for \$1 per year and that city-owned venues in other major cities are provided year-round to their companies. In attempting to counter media reports that the COV's eventual allowing of a municipal grant in 2011 was a "bail-out," Reimer suggested that: "The Playhouse's limited permission to use the Vancouver Playhouse, in stark contrast to every other resident theatre company in all other civically owned facilities in Vancouver and Canada, was more akin to the partial concession rent given nontheatre companies, non-residents, and shorter duration users" (Reimer 2).

Reimer's successes likely came too late for the Playhouse: the collapse in 2012 revealed a dire financial situation, though the company was no stranger to economic challenges. From 1963 to 1970 the company's audience grew from 37,000 to 292,000 and its budget grew by 420% in both expenses and revenues, but it still regularly posted deficits (*Comparative*). The archive reveals feuding between the VPTC and VCT over rental charges and regular applications for emergency funds from all three levels of government. In a financial review prepared by the company's treasurer in 1970 it was noted that, "Since its formation in 1962, the Playhouse has essentially operated from year to year on the 'crisis method' of financing. Solutions were always temporary, but somehow always managed to avert disaster" (Hepburn 3). Though the company did have periods of financial stability it would always eventually falter, and by the 1980s the Arts Club Theatre, well endowed with non-downtown venues over which it had enviable control, would become a fierce competitor. The final audited financial statements of the VPTC, dated 30 June 2011, show an accumulated net asset deficiency of \$871,553, with a warning from auditor

Grant Thornton that their assessments “indicate the existence of a material uncertainty that may cast significant doubt about the Playhouse’s ability to continue as a going concern”

(*Consolidated*).

#### **4.13 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 3: *God of Carnage***

For many the announcement on 9 March 2012 that the VPTC would cease operations the following day “came out of nowhere.” Arts and culture writers reported that “the media attending the press conference Friday expected the unveiling of the stage company’s new season” (Prokosh). The company closed on 10 March following the final performance of Catalyst Theatre’s *Hunchback*, which it was hosting as the second to last show in its season. The final show, Yasmina Reza’s *God of Carnage*, a co-production with the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, was running in Winnipeg when the news hit, and the fate of the second leg of the show’s run was thrown into uncertainty. Protests staged by Vancouver theatre artists outside the Vancouver Playhouse in the days after the announcement garnered national publicity (see Footnote 6). Oddly mirroring *The Hostage* publicity stunt forty-nine years earlier, both protests made emotional but unconvincing attempts to lay claim to a building that refused artistic ownership. “This is a beautiful world class city,” rally organizer/actor Jennifer Clement told the crowd while standing on top of a white station wagon. “We hosted the Olympics and we can’t even host a professional theatre in our downtown core?” (Lederman, “Supporters”). After prolonged wrangling (Lederman, “Attendance”), and banking on the success of the well-attended run in Winnipeg, Vancouver Civic Theatres announced that it would present *God of Carnage* at the Vancouver Playhouse and honour Playhouse subscription tickets (BC Alliance). Billed in Vancouver as a Vancouver Civic Theatres/Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre co-production, the

show ran from 14 April to 5 May 2012, but its low attendance cast doubt on the strength of the local community's desire for a continued or revived VPTC. The show opened to a half empty theatre: 343 seats of the 668 were occupied, and the media seized on this fact to mock the protesters: "They carried clever signs, traded stories about the company's 49-year run, shed tears. They said they wanted a chance to show their commitment to the Playhouse" (Lederman, "Attendance"). Perhaps, however, the low attendance also reflects the community impact of the trend of financially-motivated, cost-sharing co-productions that began to flood the regional theatre producing model from the mid-1990s onward. Very little of this production of *God of Carnage* could be called Vancouver output. Only one member of the production team hailed from the city: longtime VPTC lighting designer Gerald King. Though the single Vancouver cast member, film actor John Cassini, called the opening night turnout "an embarrassing display" (qtd. in Lederman, "Attendance"), the same phrase might be used to describe the production's reflection of the VPTC's artistic legacy. The production failed to meet the 65% capacity that Vancouver Civic Theatres had budgeted for (Werb), extending the financial woes to that entity as well. Interestingly, Rae Ackerman laid the financial blame on a symbolic merging of venue and producing company that he himself had always resisted: "The Playhouse Theatre Company closed its door, everybody knew about it, and people confused it with the theatre itself closing" (qtd. in Werb).

In some ways the VPTC closed as it had opened; with a contemporary script that grew out of European context. Premiering in 2006, *God of Carnage* won the 2009 Olivier Award for Best Play in London and the 2009 Tony Award for Best Play in New York in its English translation by Christopher Hampton. Though some critics have labelled Reza's oeuvre as "'big ideas lite'" (Karwowski 75), her blistering social comedies have produced wonders at the box

office: “*Art* is reputed to have earned well over \$200 million dollars” (Karwowski 75) in the decades since it premiered. Bringing together elements of her other works, *God of Carnage* depicts a descent into savagery that exposes the artifice of civility. It centres around a fight between two eleven-year old boys in which one has had two teeth broken. The boys’ parents meet at the victim’s home to try to settle the matter in a civilized way. Navigating the tension between upholding decorum and protecting their own interests, each of the four parents overreact and reveal their own contradictions. The play’s core thematic concern defies its genre: “By representing the many ways violence manifests itself in our so-called civilized society, *God of Carnage* seeks to investigate the roots cause of violence and whether society is able to control our innate violence .... These issues are the staple plots of most tragedies, but rarely do comedies tackle such grim material” (Jacomard 241). The play multiplies the boys’ fight exponentially to include major geopolitical conflicts and systemic corporate violence. Veronica has a book coming out on the Darfur tragedy and the father of her son’s attacker, Alan, just came back from the Congo where he witnessed the lives of child soldiers. Engaged in defending a greedy and careless big pharma company, Alan is a corporate lawyer whose philosophy of violence undermines societal codes that dictate civility: “You see Veronica, I believe in the god of carnage. He has ruled, uninterruptedly, since the dawn of time” (52). As the play progresses, this god gains greater sway over the proceedings and the social contract evaporates, exposing all four characters’ tenuous commitment to it. Alan celebrates this: “Morality decrees that we should control our impulses, but sometimes it’s good not to control them. You don’t want to be singing ‘Ave Maria’ when you’re fucking” (54).

What is interesting for the VPTC saga is how often aggression emerges in Reza’s play in “indirect acts of violence, attacking objects” (Jacomard 249), often artistic property. Growing

on the debate about the value of artistic production that is central to *Art*, in *Carnage* the battle gets raw and physical. As Karwowski notes, Reza often “introduces the most subversive ideas through some of the play’s most hysterical moments” (77), and in one of these moments the symbolic violence portrayed is manifested in the aesthetic realm: “*Annette vomits violently. A brutal and catastrophic spray, part of which goes over Alan. The art books on the coffee table are likewise deluged*” (27). A memorable piece of somatically-affecting onstage trickery, the vomit damages Veronica’s art books, symbols of her belief in the civilizing force of culture: “I’m standing up for civilization! And its lucky there are people who are prepared to do that” (Reza 41), and culture as an antidote to violence: “We’re eccentric enough to believe in the pacifying abilities of culture!” (17). Reza suggests, however, that Veronica is more interested in the currency of culture: she disregards Annette’s health and focuses on the value and irreplaceability of her vintage art catalogues and photographic collections of Indigenous peoples. Her earlier conversation with Annette about Francis Bacon’s paintings - “Cruelty. Majesty .... Chaos. Balance” - point to how art transforms brutality (Reza 17), but the disgusting upchuck unleashes self-centered chaos and further symbols of culture also take hits. In Jaccomard’s analysis, Alan’s philosophy of carnage “denies noble motives to any humanistic endeavors” (243), and Veronica retaliates her loss later in the play by throwing Annette’s designer handbag across the room. Annette punishes her distracted husband with an attack on his cell phone, which, to him, represents “his whole life” (38). Jaccomard describes this act as a castration which the other male, Michael, then tries to rectify, ironically with his wife’s hair dryer (249). Adding to these injured symbols of urbanity, identity, and sexual potency, near the end of the play Annette slaps a vase of tulips across the room: “*Flowers fly, disintegrate and scatter all over the place*” (Reza 66). This final assault topples any beauty and decorum left in the world of the play and translates

into action Michael's earlier confession: "We tried to be nice, we bought tulips, my wife passed me off as a lefty, but the truth is I can't keep this up anymore, I'm fundamentally uncouth" (41).

Harkening back to the decades-long battle for the establishment of a civic auditorium in Vancouver this clash between the survivalist arena of the market and the ideal of civic accord and advancement through culture once again reared its head in the VPTC's final production, and onstage and offstage culture lost. *God of Carnage*'s director Miles Potter, a former Artistic Director of Victoria's Belfry Theatre, blamed the company's collapse on a fundamental lack of commitment: "It's an inheritance of years and years of neglect .... The theatre has not been a priority for the city or the province" (Prokosh). Vancouver Civic Theatres attempted to promote *God of Carnage* from a local economic benefit perspective: "Over its three-week run, 23 performances will be presented providing direct employment for 17 people locally as well as the visiting MTC company of four actors and two stage managers. It will also generate 168 hotel nights" (BC Alliance), but the resulting statistics failed to compel. Jaccomard and Reza critic Amanda Giguere have both recorded how differently the tone of Reza's plays is interpreted in different locales, with the Anglophone countries playing her much lighter than their French, German, and Swiss counterparts (Jacomard 252, Giguere n.p.). Karwowski has linked her form of "comic tragedy" to the style and tone of Chekhov (76), and Reza herself has stated that her works are "funny tragedies, but they are tragedies" (qtd. in Poirer). Though the VPTC collapse overshadowed critical discussion of the VCT/RMTC co-production, one Vancouver critic took the time to weigh in on how this tonally complex play, under Potter's direction, "slips sideways into farce" (Ledingham), leaving its tougher questions unexplored in the performances. The production in Vancouver did succeed, however, in sending the audience home with a chilling sense of loss. In the final moments of the play Veronica attempts to console her nine-year-old

daughter over the phone because the child's father has discarded her annoying hamster in their suburban street just last night. "I took it and put it out on the street. I thought they loved drains and gutters and so on, but not a bit of it, it just sat there paralysed on the pavement" (Reza 7).

Veronica works hard to reassure her daughter: "But you know my love, Nibbles is very resourceful, I think you have to have faith in her. You think she was happy in a cage?" (67).

Veronica had gone out to search for Nibbles in the morning, but just one day after the cataclysm of dissolution, the irritating, vulnerable, and cherished creature had vanished.

#### **4.14 Conclusion**

Guy Sprung's comment in his forward to the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary booklet, that "The history of the Playhouse is a chronicle of the evolution of the soul of the city," has resonance in this study for reasons he likely did not intend. As in Alan Filewod's figuration, this "soul" has an economic dimension: "The theatre replicates the methods and structures of production in a society" (39). Returning to Michael McKinnie's idea that civic theatres are an attempt to adapt to economic forces and create a streamlined civic narrative, the Queen Elizabeth complex did play a role in the reinstatement of Vancouver's downtown as a cultural and retail centre in the 1960s, and helped to establish the city as "real" and "world class" for visitors and its own citizenry. Local director and producer John Juliani once called the Centennial era's prioritizing of the social morphology of buildings of high culture over artistic development an "Edifice complex" (qtd. in McKinnie 20, Rubin, "John" 152), and Vancouver's early entry into the cultural infrastructure boom made it especially susceptible to that complex's neurotic manifestations. In the "mutually legitimating symbolic economies" (Knowles, *Reading* 66) that formed between the

COV and its Department responsible for generating revenue from theatres, a vacuum was created which left the local regional theatre struggling to survive.

Under the Keynesian welfare state government run facilities and support for the arts were supposed to create a democratic field that would reconcile class and social differences (Filewod 40-41). Joseph Papp has pointed out, however, that in practice many of these new structures enveloped existing systems of elitist private patronage and merged them with democratic-style funding networks (97-98). The post-World War II cultural infrastructure-generating work of wealthy philanthropists in Vancouver had massive impact on the local arts, but the value systems of these powerful individuals – European, imperial, and capitalist - migrated into the structures they built, in this case those of the CACV and VCT. Thus, Vancouver's signature civic performing arts building, which in other cities would be erected to assert a post-colonial Canadian identity, was created through elite influence and backwardly celebrated the nation's colonial status. The economic and class-based vectors encoded in the CACV and VCT emanated outward in the form of their programs and policies, and in the case of VCT manifested as a kind of Lefebvrian social control over access to space and resources. Wiles had said of this process, "When monuments lose their force through the oppression or dispersal of people ... they yield to a chaos of mere buildings that are not integrated with 'moments' of social practice" (*Short* 12). This kind of process generates the alienation of producing theatre artist from theatre building that so characterized the life of the VPTC. The company's final production centre at East 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Main Street sat empty for years after it folded, its sign cracking and fading, the building a chrysalis waiting its turn for the apotheosis that has become the "soul" of contemporary Vancouver – transformation into condominiums.



Though assembled quickly by a committee trying to fill an empty theatre and take advantage of a unique moment in cultural policy, the VPTC emerged from its birthing process a formidable artistic force that had a substantial impact on Canadian theatre. What was birthed in that process, however, was not something that its creators wanted. An amalgam of the previous decade's tenacious but deeply under-resourced first generation of professional theatre aspirants, and the coming generation's anti-establishment rebels, the company occupied a thirdspace of strained hybridity that posed a threat to the patrons of cultural power who held the keys to the buildings. To use the trope of emergent cultural nationalism, the company was a lumpy adolescent monster squatting in an expensive civic asset. To allow it to animate and capitalize on its built environment in the way that other regional theatres have done and continue to do would have increased the company's power, and thus decreased the parental power of VCT and its ability to generate revenue from the Vancouver Playhouse venue. What is shocking is not that the VPTC failed but that it survived for forty-nine years in a disabling partnership, and that there was so little shift in that relationship for so long. "Although the process of building theatres first and hoping theatrical talent will fill it later is patently cart before horse, it does not condemn the horse to follow the cart forever" (Czarnecki 281). This chapter does not argue that the conversations about mandate, programming, and management style that comprised most of the post-collapse public dialogue about the company had no validity, but only that the VPTC's attempts to find an operating model without the real estate and agency that so defines most regional theatres was doomed to fail. Instead, the company subsisted in ironic dislocation, uncomfortably navigating its geopathological quandary.

In a 1968 letter from Joy Coghill to Malcolm Black soliciting advice on Boards, budgets, and programming, Coghill names the VPTC's difficult subsistence the "limbo of How":

My dear Malcolm,

Oh will I ever come out of this strange sense of having lived a nightmare. Every now and then I am suddenly freed into my Self – like being free as an actor. What ? Why ? And ACTION. Then it closes down again and I’m dissociated in a limbo of How ? The insidious question that leaves you open to subtle attack mostly from yourself. What a strange way to begin a letter. (Letter, spacing in source)

Researching Joy Coghill for this chapter, I was enthralled by how often her archived administrative documents felt like poetry, and how often they acknowledged the importance of events by addressing themselves “to future historians” (*Annual*). In November 2016 at age ninety, just two months before her death, she returned to the Vancouver Playhouse building to receive a UBCP/ACTRA Award and used the occasion to assert theatre community ownership over the site:

“So here I am, home," she told the applauding audience, explaining that she used to be artistic director. "And you know what; it's so beautiful, I think we should get it back. Okay, that's what we'll work on next." (Lederman, “Remembering”)

## **Chapter 5: Resurrection Real Estate**

While the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company was characterized by struggles with property and a dramatic collapse, the large-scale performance venue that sprang up in 1995, only a half block south and one block west of the Queen Elizabeth complex, became notorious for its repeated collapses and dramatic resurrections. The building has been known by three different names in its relatively short life. These re-namings connect to a series of onsite attempts to centre a vision, audience, and economic model, attempts which, except for the most recent, failed. These names are The Ford Centre for the Performing Arts, The Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts, and then, most recently, The Centre (or Westside Church). In many ways this chapter reads like three separate case studies, profiling and dissecting the business models and performance outputs of the building's three eras, all of which represent highly unconventional animations of a theatrical space in Vancouver. While each onsite enterprise contrasts sharply with the other two and features idiosyncratic animators, contrasting visions, and varied economic approaches, in this chapter I also hope to demonstrate that there are several discernable themes that wend their way through the building's extraordinary narrative. Chief among these are that each building incarnation had far-reaching roots in transnational economics, each lacked substantial ties to the local culture of theatre production, and each was driven by a charismatic leader who possessed a missionary zeal. As I will demonstrate below, the cultural and aesthetic conversations that animated the stage of the new theatre were likewise weighty; race and religion surfaced as the thematic touchstones associated with some of the theatre's most notorious moments.

## 5.1 The Ford Centre for the Performing Arts

When he wrote about the activities associated with the development of Toronto's downtown cultural district during the forty years from 1967 to 2007, Michael McKinnie identified the district as a "civically affirmative enterprise" (59). Livent's Ford Centre for the Performing Arts, completed at 777 Homer St. in downtown in 1995, is arguably part of a similar enterprise attempted in Vancouver. In the program for its inaugural production, Livent hailed its new building as "the beginning of a new era in Vancouver Theatre ... the first such facility to be constructed in the city since the Queen Elizabeth Theatre" (*Show Boat Inaugural* 5). Indeed, the idea of a downtown cultural district encompassing the QE complex, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the CBC, Library Square, BC Place, the planned Rogers Arena, and this new commercial theatre promised to bring a vibrancy to the downtown core that had been absent since the early 1950s. However, in the more than thirty years between the launch of the QE and the completion of the Livent space, Vancouver had changed significantly, rendering old planning models obsolete. The cultural and financial borders opened by the North American Free Trade Agreement, as well as the Expo 86 branding of the city with a new Pacific Rim identity, had ushered in an era of economic globalism characterized by a less regulated flow of capital and profit (see Chapter 3 A Short History of Downtown Vancouver). While these changes were made in pursuit of economic strength and stability, the Ford Centre, as a manifestation of this new transnationalism, was ultimately characterized instead by instability, criminality, and demise.

The driving force behind the erection of the Ford Centre for the Performing Arts was Garth Drabinsky. When he took up the project he was already well-known in Canada as a musical theatre impresario. Strikingly, he has emphasized the role of disability in his professional successes and drive over time. He was born in 1949 and caught polio just as the

vaccine was beginning to make itself available. From age three to twelve he struggled with leg braces and pain and walked for the rest of his life with a visible limp. In his 1995 autobiography *Closer to the Sun* Drabinsky attributed his intense professional drive to this early struggle:

*Polio had grabbed me and tried to smash me down. I wouldn't let it. I wouldn't let anything smash me down. Fighting back gave me a hunger for life that has never left me.*

(Drabinsky and De Villiers 21, italics in source)

As the book's title suggests, Drabinsky reads his aspirations, daring, and accomplishments against the Icarus myth, arguing that the latter "just gave up too soon. He should have gotten himself another pair of wings and taken off again" (Drabinsky and De Villiers 430, Filewod 83). The book valorizes a reaching for great heights that ignores consequences, a theme that casts a painfully ironic shadow across Drabinsky's post-1995 life and is key to understanding the fragile economic foundation of his Vancouver live theatre venue.

In *Closer to the Sun* Drabinsky also points to the formative effects of his job at seventeen working at a scam handwriting analysis booth at Toronto's Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) owned by a family member who was the head of K-Tel International. Working the crowd Barnum-like with megaphone in hand, he later reported being "amazed at how credulous people were, how accepting of the most obvious con" (Drabinsky and De Villiers 32). His first large-scale imprint on the material landscape of North American entertainment came at the age of thirty, in 1979, with a visionary remodeling of Cineplex, a Canadian movie theatre distribution and exhibition chain. Cineplex's innovation of housing multiple screens at a single site was highly successful and influenced a massive remodeling of movie theatres across the industry. After purchasing competitor Odeon in 1984, the company became Cineplex Odeon, one of the largest circuits in North America with 1800 screens in 500 theatres. Drabinsky has

acknowledged the theatricality of his own career path right from these initial ventures: “I am the impresario of my own destiny” (Drabinsky and De Villiers xiv). Always with a hand in the redesign of the purchased cinemas, Drabinsky was known for a gauche regal aesthetic, often with marble and purple carpets, sparing no expense (Avrich). In 1989, after a decade of expansive growth that left the company with a large debt, he was pushed out of Cineplex Odeon by his partners and mentors, and suffered his first, fiery Icarus fall (Drabinsky and De Villiers 400-425, Avrich).

Upon his exit, Drabinsky and partner Myron Gottlieb negotiated to buy the company’s live division The Live Entertainment Corporation of Canada, Inc. (later called Livent). His first major success with this new vehicle was a full-scale production of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s 1986 smash West End and Broadway musical *Phantom of the Opera* (1989) at the restored Pantages theatre in Toronto. Again he credits his disability experience as a driving force in his efforts by explaining his empathy for the disfigured phantom: “I know what it’s like to be looked at differently” (qtd. in Ouzounian). As a producer he also operated differently, engaging a vertically integrated model that included venue construction and management, developing, producing, marketing, and licensing theatrical events, as well as casting, constructing, and rehearsing everything through a single company. Taking his cue from the old Hollywood studio system of the 1920’s,<sup>15</sup> everything was in house, unlike most Broadway productions which “are limited liability companies or partnerships created just for that show” (Vickery 20). Drabinsky arrived at the forefront of the commercial theatre scene with “the cunning of a master politician, the

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Filewod has also drawn a link even farther back in the history of entertainment industry practice, noting that Hollywood studios borrowed their model from the Theatrical Syndicate of the 1880s (85-89).

willingness of a snake oil salesman, and the fanatical drive of a megalomaniac” (Avrich). Further, stacking hit upon hit, he began to accumulate what Filewod has called “the cultural capital of critical distinction” (86). From 1989 to 1999 Livent launched seven shows, won nineteen Tony Awards, and worked on numerous venue projects, allowing Drabinsky to position himself as the saviour of the commercial musical.<sup>16</sup> However, Alan Filewod has argued that it was his borrowing of film industry practices that really infused a flagging Broadway, introducing the “diversified productive economies of transnational capital into the theatre” for the first time. Corporate sponsorships, saturation marketing, and tie-ins from other entertainment industries brought Livent productions to mass attention and inspired widespread adoption of many of Drabinsky’s methods (89).

In May 1993, while their production of *Show Boat* was in rehearsal, Drabinsky and Gottlieb capitalized their company on the stock market, ostensibly to finance the circuit of theatres they were building. Describing this decision as “difficult” because of the “accounting hassles” it would bring, Drabinsky recounts spending a week touring urban centres to talk up the opportunity before issuing shares to the public (*Closer* 470-71). He said: “We wanted to grow

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<sup>16</sup> Livent was founded in 1989 by Drabinsky and Myron Gottlieb and sold in 1999. Their venue projects included the Pantages Theatre in Toronto, the Oriental Theatre in Chicago (now the Nederlander Theatre), and the Ford Centre for the Performing Arts in North York (now the Meridian Arts Centre), in Vancouver (now Westside Church), and in New York (now the Lyric Theatre) (Avrich, Drabinsky and De Villiers). Livent’s productions included *Phantom of the Opera* (1989 Canadian production), *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (1992 Canadian production), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1992 Canadian production), *Show Boat* (1993 Canadian production), *Ragtime* (1996 original production), *Sunset Boulevard* (1995 Canadian production), and *Fosse* (1999 Broadway production). According to the Tony Awards website, the company was nominated for forty-three Tony Awards, winning nineteen of those nominations (<https://www.tonyawards.com/nominees/>). *Fosse* had eight nominations and three wins in 1999, including Best Musical, while *Ragtime* had thirteen nominations and four wins in 1998, including Best Book and Original Score. *Show Boat* had ten nominations and five wins in 1995, including Best Director and Best Revival, while *Kiss of the Spider Woman* had twelve nominations and seven wins in 1993, including Best Musical.

the company with minimum reliance on traditional bank financing and at the same time to see our ownership position appreciate through market recognition ... [we were] the first listing on a North American stock exchange of a company devoted entirely to live theatre production” (*Closer* 470). While retaining 56.6% of the shares themselves, Filewod suggests that the partners were intent on “showing the corporate community that theatre could be big business and a high yield investment” (83). Their outward successes seemed to support this: in 1996 a report in *The Toronto Star* noted that Livent was bringing in 20% of all North American live-theatre box office sales (Filewod 83). However, as a public company, they were subject to shareholder scrutiny and more corporate regulation than they had been in the past and needed to keep up a perception of profitability in order to continue to generate funds through investment.

In the short ten years of Livent’s life span the company built or renovated five theatres, representing an investment of half a billion dollars (Avrich). By the time Drabinsky brought his attention and corporate interest to Vancouver, Toronto’s historic Pantages Theatre and Chicago’s Oriental Theatre (now the Nederlander Theatre) had already been restored to their 1920s splendour, and the company had collaborated on the design and launch of the North York Performing Arts Complex (now the Meridian Arts Centre) which opened in 1993 in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In each of his live venue projects Drabinsky continued to pursue a lavish aesthetic, sparing no expense on the opulent material features that had characterized his cinemas. This rapid-fire acquisition of theatres would culminate in the pinnacle of his impresarial victory: the 1997 unveiling of a new theatre in New York’s Times Square. In 1992, however, he saw Vancouver as the next great site for growth in the commercial theatre industry. Expo 86 had marketed the city as a unique Pacific Rim nexus of wealth and development; seemingly an ideal site for a high-end cultural offering rooted in a transnational economics. The Vancouver project



was for Drabinsky “the first live theatre project that I am overseeing from the conception stage to fruition” (*Closer* 493) and the uniqueness of his undertaking was not lost on him: “Privately-owned theatres of this size are very rare in North America outside of New York City. A private party has never built a new live theatre building in Vancouver, or anywhere in Western Canada for that matter” (Letter).<sup>17</sup>

### **5.1.1 The Promise of Vancouver**

If Drabinsky’s pitch in 1994 to the COV and city cultural stakeholders inspired resistance, it was inaudible in the cascade of resounding applause. The site Livent had selected for the new theatre, 777 Homer St., was on the underdeveloped west side of the street between Robson and Georgia. Here Livent would build a freestanding theatre and their partner, Unimet Investments Ltd., would retain the rest for a mixed-use commercial and residential development (Crook “New”); now The Westin Grand hotel. Livent’s Project Manager worked with Vancouver Facts and Research, the market research division of Tourism Vancouver to create a report for Vancouver City Council titled *The Economic Value to Greater Vancouver of the new Live Entertainment Theatre*. Based on a projected 90% attendance, the report estimated that Livent attendees would spend 80.7 million per annum on city amenities. This spending activity was projected to generate 165.7 million in industry output, add 55.6 million to wages and salaries, support 2,900 full time jobs, generate 38 million in all levels of taxes, and contribute 105.9 million to the GPD (Vancouver Facts 1). Mayor Gordon Campbell saw the project as

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<sup>17</sup> McKinnie offers a provocative analysis of the importance and prestige of private ownership in the context of globalization, as well as the rivalry between the Mirvishes and Drabinsky in the context of Toronto’s Entertainment District on p. 63 of *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City*.

complementary to the COV's identified need for more cultural facilities (Dafoe) and supported its construction, though the COV never agreed to Drabinsky's request to lower the new theatre's property tax by designating it a heritage property (Drabinsky, Letter). Many civic cultural officials were convinced that it would lift the local arts scene. Rae Ackerman, the former Playhouse intern set designer who had come to his position as Director of Vancouver Civic Theatres directly from working for Livent as General Manager of the Pantages ("Rae"), said: "There's a gap in the city's theatre inventory that this would fill. If he wants to build it, I say let's go for it" (qtd. in Dafoe).

In the 1980's and 90's Vancouver grew by 100,000 people in only 13 years (Planning Dept. 4). Membership in the Greater Vancouver Professional Theatre Alliance doubled (see Footnote 2), with an explosion of young theatre companies engaged in a new diversity of practice. At the same time the federal government phased out urban-oriented capital projects for municipal infrastructure, and either eliminated or deeply cut all cultural infrastructure programs launched in the 1970s (Duxbury 5). With little government support, local arts organizations struggled to stay ahead of insidious cycles of gentrification in the city. The bravado of The Ford's arrival in Vancouver seemed to thumb its nose at the difficulties of the not-for-profit sector, but its collapse just three years after opening was a numbing confirmation of the unique kind of geopathological struggle that infused downtown during this era.

The financing Drabinsky put together built unconventional inroads into the not-for-profit sector. He borrowed 5.25 million of the 25.5 million he needed from the provincial government in the form of a commercial mortgage, with a unique string attached. A \$1 surcharge would be levied on each ticket and remitted to the Province of British Columbia for distribution to not-for-profit arts groups, a process which Drabinsky claimed would deliver \$630,000 per year during

the term of the mortgage (Crook “Ford”). Any rumbling fears of Livent gobbling up the audiences of longstanding, smaller, local companies would be allayed with this surcharge money. The ironies built into this arrangement were not lost on theatre critic Max Wyman: “Drabinsky seems to have come out of this remarkably well thanks to BC taxpayers. He has managed to get us to lend him money for a private enterprise that the banks were reluctant to back. He has managed to upload the compensation deal onto the shoulders of his ticket buyers, effectively forcing them to make a donation to the arts in BC if they want to see his shows” (“Raising”). The BC Arts Council (BCAC) distributed the ticket surcharge money through their Strategic Initiatives program,<sup>18</sup> which was designed to help arts and cultural organizations undertake initiatives that “enhance long-term self-sufficiency and/or ... ability to respond to economic change” (BCAC, “1999/2000” 9). The mechanisms through which the BCAC brought the surcharge money to the not-for-profit arts community through this fund are unclear, as are the

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<sup>18</sup> In the Annual Reports of the BC Arts Council (BCAC, 1996-2001 & 2001-06) the following sentence of acknowledgement was tagged onto the description of the Strategic Initiatives program in the years 1998/1999 to 2003/2004: “The Strategic Initiatives program is funded through proceeds of the LIVENT ticket surcharge agreement.” The amounts that the fund dispersed in the years that this acknowledgement was used are as follows: 1998/99: \$119,000, 1999/2000: \$191,749, 2000/2001: \$257,388, 2001/2002: \$244,086, 2002/2003: \$149,000, 2003/2004: \$110,000. Prior to the BCAC noting that this program was being funded by the Livent surcharge, the amounts for the fund were \$215,400 in 1996/1997 and \$83,900 in 1997/1998. After the removal of the acknowledgment the amount the fund dispersed dipped to \$25,645 in 2004/2005 and then rose back to \$133,945 in 2005/2006. Though there is some swelling of amounts during the Livent acknowledgement years, there is by no means a clear pattern to how the Livent money affected the BCAC’s ability to support the not-for-profit sector or encourage them to be less dependent on government funding. In the years noted here many of BC’s major theatre companies were granted funds from Strategic Initiatives, including the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company (2001/2002), the Greater Vancouver Professional Theatre Alliance (2000/2001), the Arts Club Theatre (1998/1999, 2002/2003, 2003/2004) Western Canada Theatre Company (2001/2002), Touchstone Theatre (1996/1997, 2002/2003), Rumble Productions (2002/2003), and the Belfry Theatre (1998/1999). The Vancouver Public Library holds copies of the Annual Reports of the BCAC during this period in their Arts Reference section.

specifics of the amount of benefit created. What is clear, however, is that the sums never approached the promised \$630,000 per year.

Fascinated by the architectural process, Drabinsky chose Canadian-Israeli architect Moshe Safdie to design the new theatre. Born in Haifa and a graduate of McGill University, Safdie rose to prominence with his radically innovative Habitat building at Expo 67. He had also designed Canada's National Art Gallery and Montreal's Musée des Beaux Arts. His success at winning Canadian architectural competitions has led Lance Berelowitz to dub him Canada's "court architect": the architect of choice for Canada's conservative cultural establishment" (186). By 1992 Safdie had won the competition for Vancouver's new Library Square, just across the street from 777 Homer, with a neo-classical design "resembling the Roman Colosseum in its ruined state" (Punter 263), or less kindly, "a simplistic (and cartoonish) quotation of the classic Roman Coliseum" (Berelowitz 184). Punter chronicles how Safdie's design was decried by architecture critics as a postmodern "piece of Disneyland" (264) but was loved and fiercely defended by the general public, which helped it to animate downtown east with unprecedented foot traffic (262-67). Drabinsky himself raved "If architecture is indeed 'frozen music,' then Safdie is a virtuoso" (*Closer* 486). He saw the new theatre as a structure that "expands and reinforces his superb architectural statement across Homer Street" (*Evening*). This would be Safdie's first theatre design and it did indeed continue Library Square's trend of mingling historical and postmodern shapes and references.

### **5.1.2 The Temple**

The building that emerged from Drabinsky and Safdie's collaboration shared a few attributes with the Queen Elizabeth complex designed by Fred Lebensold. Its major feature was a

faux expressed frame on the façade, “distinguished by a semi-elliptical, two-dimensional, cross-section of the auditorium representing the dress circle and the orchestra – as if the façade had been peeled away” (*Show Boat* 42). The idea of a ghost audience on display is rendered in flashy Tadoussac granite with a flamed finish and lead-coated copper shingles (*Show Boat* 42) and outlined in architectural light at night. Like a Broadway theatre, the building would eventually be flanked on both sides with only the façade visible. Hovering as a canopy over the main entrance is an eighty-two-foot transparent glass cone through which the building’s dramatic staircase is seen and “the exciting hustle and bustle caused by theatregoers ascending and descending” adds movement to the façade. Both Safdie and Lebensold’s creations make spectacles of their audiences (*Show Boat* 42). While Lebensold’s colonial knockoff drew praise, Safdie’s odd assemblage of Platonic solids was dubbed by Robin Ward in *The Vancouver Sun* as “an architectural clunker if there ever was one [...] the magician here is stumbling across the stage” (Ward). Ward also drew a connection between the building design and the corporate sponsor whose contribution finalized the new theatre’s name: “After a decade of postmodernism, the movement’s architectural theatrics seen on the Ford Centre for the Performing Arts are as dated as the Ford Edsel’s radiator grill.” The car manufacturer’s title sponsorship was announced in October of 1994, though the cost was withheld. Drabinsky would say only that “it is part of a national deal between the two companies” (Crook “Ford”). The bonds between Livent and Ford ran deep, with the Ford moniker gracing a number of Drabinsky’s other theatres and landing eventually, in an international evolution, on the Times Square theatre.



**Figure 10 (Chapter 5.1) Building Originally Called The Ford Centre for the Performing Arts, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

Inside Vancouver's Ford Theatre audiences were immediately met with Drabinsky's signature opulent materials. A white marble circular staircase led audience members to the three lobby levels, each replete with rich purple carpets and together encased in a 3,000 square foot segmented mirror on the surrounding curved wall that multiplied the perception of audience numbers and generated a dizzying kaleidoscopic effect. The oval-shaped lobbies constituted the only visual citation of neighboring Library Square (*Show Boat* 42) and allowed the audience to watch their deconstructed selves hobnob in the three-story mirror. Once inside the house,

beechwood paneling arched upward to form the beams of the vaulted ceiling (the arc we see on the façade) and the purple seats and carpets cast the audience as royalty. In designing the house, Safdie claimed to be “inspired by the traditional courtyard theatre,” and created an enveloping space with arcade boxes on both sides and a maximum distance from the proscenium arch to the back row of the balcony of just 103 feet (*Show Boat Inaugural* 6). However, much like the Queen Elizabeth Theatre unveiling, it was the grand scale of the theatre that was meant to impress, not its intimacy. Designed to house the mega-musicals for which he was already known, Drabinsky asserted that the new venue’s stage “is larger than that of any theatre on Broadway” (*Show Boat Inaugural* 6). Foreshadowing the building’s religious future, Drabinsky would opine: “This theatre, like all theatres, is a temple of the imagination where we gather to experience creative genius and the human condition” (qtd. in *Show Boat* 40-42).



**Figure 11 (Chapter 5.1) Cross-Section of the Auditorium on the Ford Centre Façade, Photo by Katrina Dunn**





**Figure 12 (Chapter 5.1) Ford Centre Mirrored Lobby Staircase, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

Worshipping at the altar of creative genius was a big part of Drabinsky's identity and professional drive: "I've got to the point where I can walk into the dressing rooms of major stars, listen to them rant and rave, and say, 'Believe me, I'll look after it. Go back to work and consider it done'.... They're now absolutely confident I'll protect them" (*Closer* 494-5). Actor Christopher Plummer, who fondly dubbed him "Darth Grabinsky" in the Forward to *Closer to the Sun*, recounted the story of "Darth" rescuing a failing production of *Macbeth* in 1988 and turning it into one of the highest grossing Shakespeare productions ever to run on Broadway, glowing, "Even I, as the unfortunate Thane, saw some of that gelt!" (Plummer xii). Theatre critic John Lahr lauded Drabinsky for sharing profits with artists, paying much higher fees than other engagers especially to performers he admired: "Garth did a very humane thing paying artists



properly” (qtd. in J. Scott). The financial respect he showed theatre makers generated a fierce loyalty to him that persisted long after financial scandal had eclipsed his success as a producer. Liza Minelli wrote “Garth is my hero .... when I think of him it’s with nothing but respect” (Jacket Quote), and both Martha Henry and Christopher Plummer filed letters in court arguing for leniency in his sentencing (Donnelly).



**Figure 13 (Chapter 5.1) Ford Centre Courtyard-Style Auditorium, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

### 5.1.3 Fiery Descent

Livent's productions at Vancouver's Ford Centre for the Performing Arts stumbled right from the start. A thirty-eight-week run of *Show Boat* closed a month early, 1997's *Phantom of the Opera* played to half-full houses, and only a heavy reduction in ticket prices kept *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and *Sunset Boulevard* running (Chow "Ford"). By November 1998, after only 36 months of operation, Livent ceased production at the Ford and was seeking bankruptcy protection. *The Economic Value to Greater Vancouver of the New Live Entertainment Theatre* had grossly overestimated potential regional audiences. Future controversial Donald Trump chief White House strategist and Breitbart media baron Steve Bannon, then an investment banker, was brought in to seek out new investors, eventually enticing former Hollywood agent and Head of Disney Michael Oritz to use a twenty-million-dollar investment to restructure the company (S. Anderson). This included demoting Drabinsky to "Chief Creative Director." Four months later Drabinsky and Gottlieb were fired, forcibly removed from their offices by new management, and forensic audits were initiated to investigate accounting irregularities. In 1995 Drabinsky had written "I can within the bounds of corporate and fiscal responsibility, do most anything I want" (*Closer* 493), but allegations suggested that those bounds had been radically overstepped. John Lahr commented that charges of financial wrongdoing came as no surprise to the entrepreneurs of the New York theatre community "because they can count." The visual evidence of half empty theatres stood in stark contrast to the more robust attendance figures Livent was posting and Lahr remembered noticing hundreds of complimentary tickets on the floor after shows (qtd. in J. Scott).

When the nature of the financial problems came to light, Drabinsky and Gottlieb were charged with defrauding investors of an estimated \$500 million (Sagan). Theatre historian Tony

Vickery, in a thorough analysis of the details of the fraud, has argued that it was Livent's vertically integrated model that allowed them to sustain the deception for as long as they did: "While the organization kept producing more shows and building more theatres it was able to manipulate the records to shift expenses from old, losing shows to new assets in order to continue amortizing costs" (20). Vickery has also itemized the irregular techniques Livent used. Accounting staff deleted expenses from the quarter in which they were incurred and re-entered them in later quarters or against productions still in preparation. Show-related expenses were posted against accounts used for theatre construction that were amortized over forty years. The sale of production and property rights to third parties were improperly recorded as revenue when they were actually loans. Livent's engineering and construction firms issued inflated invoices and then paid the balance directly back to Drabinsky and Gottlieb. The same firms purchased hundreds of thousands of dollars of tickets to the pre-Broadway run of *Ragtime* in Los Angeles to help inflate the flagging box office numbers, and then were reimbursed. The ultimate deception revealed that Livent tech staff wrote a custom software application that allowed them to modify entries in the accounting system without leaving an audit trail (Vickery 17-19). However, even with these illegal measures engaged, as projects closed and theatres were completed it was more difficult to manipulate the books. Once a clear financial picture was available, "[a]ccording to its restated financial statements Livent was not terribly profitable" (Vickery 20).

Drabinsky was found guilty of two counts of fraud and sentenced to a seven-year prison term in 2009 (reduced to five years on appeal in 2011), and spent time in Millhaven Institution and Beaver Creek Institution before being released on parole in January 2014 (Knelman). Everyone who testified for the prosecution was involved in the crime, and these Livent staff and

contractors spoke both of the manipulative pressure of the work environment and the justification that making beautiful art somehow made it all OK (Avrich, Small). Film producer David Brown noted that Drabinsky could not attend the Tony Awards where his *Fosse* won Best Production because there was a warrant for his arrest in the United States. By July 1999 Steve Bannon had found a buyer for the carcass of Livent (S. Anderson). In a deal valued at 100 million USD, SFX Entertainment's purchase of the company's assets included the Toronto, New York, and Chicago theatres, but left off Vancouver's Ford Centre for the Performing Arts because of the original deal with Unimet Investments ("B.C. government"). The venue sat as a property of the Provincial Government of British Columbia, inspiring nervous speculation that the Province would be unable to recover the balance of the 5.25 million-dollar loan from 1994. The Downtown Vancouver Association lobbied the Mayor and Council to secure the venue for the COV (Hudema), but ultimately the COV passed. Listed at a value of \$31 million dollars ("B.C. government"), the darkened theatre hovered in limbo.

## **5.2 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 1: *Show Boat***

When Livent's Vancouver theatre launched in early December 1995 it was with their Tony-award-winning production of *Show Boat*. With roots in the blackface minstrelsy born a generation before the American civil war, performance historian Todd Decker suggests that the work was a vehicle to proclaim "Hammerstein's popular music plot," which exposed and highlighted the African-American roots of American popular music. He also argues that its featuring of black and white performers together onstage challenged the then rarely acknowledged, but historically prevalent, racial segregation of Broadway casts. Further, he notes that while, in its narrative and lyrical structure, whites "dominate the story; blacks are featured in

many of its most effective musical moments” (7). Composer Jerome Kern and lyricist and author Oscar Hammerstein II adapted Edna Ferber’s 1926 novel of the same name, and the resulting musical’s 1927 premiere coincided with the Harlem Renaissance and the “African-Americanization of culture” that flowed from it (Block 39). Often cited as a milestone in the history of the American musical (Block 19), *Show Boat* was widely lauded at its first premiere for its “unprecedented integration of music and drama, its three-dimensional characters, and its bold and serious subject matter” (Block 20), but unlike most major musicals the piece never had an official script or score (Block 23). This meant that “*Show Boat* has always been an unstable text that enacts changing discourses of racial representation and surrogation” (Filewod 93) and has been flexible in the service of different directors’ visions. Thus, the version that Hal Prince assembled for Livent “was culled from the original 1927 production, the subsequent London script, the 1946 Broadway revival and the 1936 film” (Prince) and restored a number of songs cut before the original New York premiere.

Before coming to Vancouver, this version had a famously controversial and much-protested debut when Drabinsky unveiled it at the opening night gala to launch the North York Performing Arts Centre in 1993. Though a publicly funded facility, Livent had been given an untendered deal to manage and program the multi-million-dollar facility for forty years (Filewod 91). Led by poet, novelist, lawyer, and activist M. NourbeSe Philip, a “Coalition to Stop *Show Boat*” formed in advance of the opening, and its high profile and unprecedented thirty week protest garnered one hundred and twenty-five media pieces in the mainstream press, in what Alan Filewod has called “a contest over the control of iconographies” (91). The Coalition found *Show Boat* dangerously dated, “an example writ large of cultural appropriation and theft,” and “part of the overwhelming need of white Americans and white Canadians to convince

themselves of our inferiority” (Philip 59). North York Board of Education trustee Stephanie Payne introduced a motion to the local government alleging that *Show Boat* was “hate literature in the form of entertainment” (Drabinsky, *Closer* 475). Unfolding while the production was in rehearsal for its premiere, it is difficult to assess how much the Coalition’s pressure had an impact on what would be the final artistic product. Philip, Payne and other activists repeatedly asked to see the script, and Drabinsky repeatedly refused to release it. At the gala opening, the cadre of New York theatre critics that Drabinsky had flown to Canada to write about the premiere had a pre-show glimpse of picket lines monitored by a police detail. Though rattled by the prolonged outcry, Drabinsky ultimately came to see the controversy and protest as part of his *Show Boat*’s success: “It put pressure on the critics. It wasn’t just another review they would be writing” (qtd. in Decker 218). Once the show was finally up and before the mainstream, white audience attracted to the new theatre, critics hailed it as an important exploration of race and discounted the protesters.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Robin Breon’s 1995 article, “Show Boat: The Revival, the Racism” provides a valuable summary of the press reviews of the premiere of the Livent production (86-105). He states, “In an unprecedented display of unanimity, critics from the U.S. and Canada waxed ecstatic over the \$6.5 million dollar revival. The African Canadian community was chastened by many of these same critics for raising a hand against this American icon” (86-87). His summary includes quotes from *The New York Times*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Daily Variety*, *USA Today*, *Associated Press* and *The New Yorker*. His analysis also, however, finds some apprehension in a small selection of the raves the show received. For example, the *Time Magazine* review states bluntly: “The 1927 musical is racist” (Henry 84), and then later, “The real problem is that the show follows the wrong story. It assumes that black people are inherently less interesting than whites” (85). M. NourbeSe Philip dedicates a good portion of her Epilogue in *Showing Grit* to this same media response (101-121), stating, “In these apparent zero sum games there appear to be only winners and losers, and the *Coalition to Stop Show Boat (The Coalition)*, along with those opposing this production of *Show Boat* certainly appear to have lost” (101). However, after a detailed exposé of the sponsorship and investment relationships in place between many of the reviewing media outlets and Livent, Philip demonstrates how the reviews themselves play their part in the “finely tuned system” of racism which the Coalition was able to draw attention to but not dismantle (116). “If we understand how it has worked, and continues to work right up to the very present reality of Black concerns around *Show Boat* being dismissed, then we understand how this production is all of a piece with the tradition and practice of racism” (116).

Though Drabinsky maintained throughout the controversy that the real issue was freedom of artistic expression, reciprocal accusations of collective racism between Blacks and Jews surfaced on both sides. The book and score of the musical were the creation of Jewish artists, and M. NourbeSe Philip highlighted just how *Show Boat* inscribed “the appropriation of Black music for the profit of the very people who oppressed Blacks and Africans” (59). Politician Stephanie Payne was censured for making antisemitic comments on record (*Closer* 477), and though she later apologized (Philip 4), Drabinsky used this opportunity to appropriate the protesters’ anti-racism as his own position. He used his Jewish identity to position himself as a victim and characterize the show as a statement of tolerance. Alan Filewod calls this tactic “cultural minstrelsy” and suggests that his position “surrogated the historical experience of oppression and anti-racist struggle” (92) and was “oblivious to the social texts of North York in the 90s” (95): a diverse community attuned to injustice. This deeply divisive and emotion-fueled debate erupted into theatre in Toronto playwright Jason Sherman’s ten-minute play for the Tarragon Theatre’s 1993 Spring Arts Fair. *The Merchant of Show Boat* showed a fictional Black politician facing off against a white Jewish businessman to get him to understand racialized stereotyping: “you are enslaving us in your entertainments so that you can feel superior .... as your self-appointed masters felt superior to you, and it, yes, it makes you feel good ... it makes you feel like you have the whip” (123).

Once the show premiered, supporters of the Livent version of *Show Boat* pointed to directorial choices in the show that acknowledged racial prejudice onstage throughout. The multi-million-dollar production was regarded, at the time, as the most expensive musical in history, with over seventy in the cast and massive cinematic transitions. These relied heavily on Production Designer Eugene Lee’s huge transforming set and the culture of visual spectacle

characteristic of mega-musicals in the late twentieth century. The show's beginning focused on the stunning scenic arrival onstage of the massive show boat the Cotton Blossom, playing "the role of the chandelier in the *Phantom of the Opera* or the helicopter in *Miss Saigon* .... short-circuiting the musical contrast between blacks at work and whites at play" that is the show's traditional opening (Decker 227). Throughout, Prince and choreographer Susan Stroman used montages to highlight a culture in transition, with Act 2's leap of twenty-one years (1900-21) used to highlight the role of African-Americans in influencing white music and dance, particularly the Charleston. They cut the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago scene that opens Act 2, with its disturbing anthropological display of a living African village. M. NoubéSe Philip could not but help see the impact of the sustained protest on these choices: "Livent and Garth Drabinsky owe an apology to those who have opposed this show for the kind of contemptuous statements they have written about them, since from all reports the production now seems all set to win a Tony for the most 'socially acceptable', if not politically correct version, of *Show Boat* ever produced" (107-08).

It was, however, the reinterpretation of two female Black characters that made the strongest impact on the show's tone and created a somber documentary feel out of traditional musical comedy set ups. Both Queenie and Julie were originally roles for white performers, though they were both eventually claimed by women of colour. The original performance of Queenie was by Tess Gardella, the last surviving "mammy" of the 1920's, who played the role in blackface as her Aunt Jemima vaudeville character (Decker 10). Though there had been many Black Queenies since the mid-twentieth century, Prince cast opera singer Anita Berry in the role and revised Queenie's lyrics, removing caricature, and encouraging a performance "within the tropes of dignity and reserve" (Decker 225). The mixed-race character of Julie, seeking to pass



as white, was first played by a non-white actor in 1971 when Cleo Lane took on the role. Prince continued this new tradition, casting actors of colour Lonette McKee and then Julie Pettiford, and spelling out Julie's trials as a mixed-race performer with added lines and stage action (Decker 235).

Alan Filewod's critique of these choices suggests that they "authenticate the play's liberalism" and "alleviate race-based anxiety in the show's largely white audience" (94). When the show opened in New York it was protest free; for Drabinsky, without "a hint of the ghastly rhetoric we had suffered in Toronto" (*Closer* 487). Strikingly, the Vancouver production that inaugurated the new Ford theatre was likewise silent on the matter of race, making the Vancouver experience more akin to that of New York than that of Toronto. In Vancouver, Barbara Crook's review lauded the "three hours of wonderful music, stellar performances, and an epic story that spans forty years" ("Show"). Max Wyman was more critical but reserved his displeasure for Prince's overly slick staging and an over-crowded lobby ("It's"). Drabinsky claimed that the Vancouver run opened with eleven million in advance sales and a weekly gross of one million (Filewod 83). Like the North York debut, the Vancouver run was more than a production, "it was a celebration of the city's power to attract capital" (Filewod 91). In the case of Vancouver, however, this celebration would be premature. The city proved unable to generate the box office necessary to sustain a mega-musical enterprise of this scale. Even the irregular financial practices that Livent was employing could not prevent the show from closing a month early. Indeed, no show that the company produced in its Vancouver theatre met box office projections (Chow "Ford"). It was a simulacrum of a commercial theatre, neither authentically commercial nor widely popular and, though it did employ some local actors, technicians, and administrators, it lacked substantive roots in local production culture. With its collapse, Livent

cleared the way for new transnational funds to fuel an entirely different, though also fraught, intercultural program.

### **5.3 The Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts**

In 2000, during the three year period in which the Ford Theatre sat dormant, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) defined the phenomenon of globalization by identifying its four essential aspects: trade and transactions, capital and investment movements, migration and movement of people, and the dissemination of knowledge (International). All four aspects would play a role in reshaping the economy of 777 Homer Street when, late in 2001, a buyer for the building finally emerged. Dennis Law was a vascular and thoracic surgeon and former all-American fencer from Denver Colorado who, together with three of his brothers, ran Four Brothers Entertainment. Though the wealth of the Law brothers sprang mainly from retail and real estate holdings in Denver and Hong Kong, they had some history of involvement with the arts in Denver that brother Dennis attributed to his mother Loretta's interests, and also to his recent marriage to Chinese film and television star Moon Lee. In 2001 Four Brothers Entertainment's main artistic credit was producing the 35 million-dollar Chinese action-fantasy film *Warriors of Virtue*, which had the "dubious honour of being named the Broadcast Film Critics Association's Worst Movie of 1997" (Bramham). *Warriors* had filmed for six months in Vancouver, thus introducing the city to Law, though deeper roots lingered beneath this superficial connection. Father Joseph Law, a transnational real estate developer, was a "former business partner of Hong Kong tycoon Li Ka-shing" (Gill "Ford"), whose redevelopment of the Expo 86 North False Creek lands radically transformed the face of downtown Vancouver and helped to open the channel of money flowing into the city from Hong Kong (see Chapter 3 A

Short History of Vancouver's Downtown). Though the Four Brothers had emigrated to the United States in the 1970s from Hong Kong to attend American universities, as professor of cross-cultural studies Haiping Yan has observed, transnationals do not sever ties and transfer allegiances but instead develop multi-faceted identities and display a suite of loyalties (228). Thus the Ford performing arts venue passed from ownership by a public company whose leaders and majority shareholders were Canadian entrepreneurs operating with an American entertainment model that had arguably ceased to be viable fifty years before they tried it, to a family-owned business with roots in the United States, Hong Kong and China and no experience in live performance or venue management, but with a vast stream of revenue with which to underwrite their experimentation and enterprise.

At the time of the sale, Rae Ackerman drew a parallel between the business model of the Laws and the reigning royal family of Canadian commercial theatre: "Like the Mirvishes in Toronto they have their commercial retail empire. The economies of that let them survive the ups and downs of the theatre business" (qtd. in Birnie, "Neighbors"). Besides the more than a million square feet of commercial office space they managed under Global Pacific Properties, they also ran Product Partner International which published 100 million premium Pokémon cards for Frito Lay, and Holiday Creations Inc., a leading manufacturer of animated and seasonal products (Bramham). Dennis Law also made it clear that the nexus of power in the new space would remain internal: "We tend not to operate with partners because partners always end up changing the vision and goals .... A one-per-cent partner can be just as difficult as a 49-per-cent partner" (qtd. in Constantineau).

Though the asking price for the Ford had been 12.9 million, the Four Brothers paid 7.75 million, ending a long, and at times despairing, search for a buyer. The provincial government,

still owed 5.5 million on a second mortgage and \$300,000 in property taxes, had tried first with an international search that pitched every major BC developer and even talked to Drabinsky himself about purchasing the building (Gill, “Ford”). When no viable buyer emerged, the task was passed to Montreal Trust Co. acting on behalf of Vancouver-based lender Mortgage Fund One. Mortgage Fund One was owed 8.6 million, which was the result of compounded interest on Livent’s original 5 million first mortgage. They hired real estate company Colliers International, which eventually made the connection with the Laws. Collier employee John Gee was told he had to observe Chinese custom and meet with the family patriarch before the deal could be finalized and he flew to Hong Kong to dine with Joseph and Loretta Law at a five-star hotel (Chow, “Ford”). The sale closed on 28 December 2001, with 5.75 million going to Mortgage Fund One and the balance used to pay property taxes and the expenses of the sale (Chow, “Sale”). BC taxpayers’ investment, through the provincial government mortgage, would never be repaid.

Dennis Law began his relationship with Vancouver audiences by relieving them of blame for the Livent fiasco: “When I look at the numbers I think Vancouverites showed up reasonably well for what those shows were. They just ran too long” (qtd. in Birnie, “Resurrection”). Ackerman chimed in to agree and to hint at how the Laws might remedy the problem: “Garth overestimated the potential demographic base in this town. [English as a second language] is a major factor in this market and the actual population base for Western or American product is smaller than it looks” (qtd. in Gill, “Ford”). In his proposed programming model Law employed the unique positioning of transnational entrepreneur, described by Michael McKinnie as “simultaneously a financier and communitarian, a local patriot and a global migrant” (“Performing” 125). His vision was to “offer an eclectic program of large-scale Broadway-style

shows, international theatre and dance, music concerts, and high-definition digital broadcasts (HDTV), for which the theatre is being refitted” (Gill, “Ford”). While making it clear that they were not only gearing the work to Asian audiences, “a performance-arts gateway to the Pacific” was being set up (qtd. in Gill, “Ford”) through which the “best of China will be brought first to Vancouver” and the theatre would act as a “launching pad for Asian stage shows” (Gill, “East”). Mark Hume of *The National Post*, referencing Law’s medical practice, said the model “promised what amounts to heart surgery for Vancouver’s Arts scene” (Hume).

Rebranded as simply The Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts (dropping the corporate ties to Ford), Law identified that the theatre would not make money right off the bat: “We can carry the theatre for as long as we think we need to and that might be a long time” (qtd. in Constantineau). Vancouver theatre administrator Chris Wooten anticipated their difficulty in getting touring Broadway-style shows due to the lesser financial potential of the venue’s meagre 1800 seats (as opposed to the QE’s 2900) (qtd. in J. Smith, “Brothers”). This proved to be a major stumbling block for Dennis Law’s programming, and for onsite manager 22-year-old Michael Law, Dennis’s nephew, who was the only one of the Four Brothers team who actually lived in Vancouver due to being drafted to play Lacrosse for the Vancouver Ravens. By January 2004, just two years after purchase, in order to stem substantial losses, the Laws laid off marketing staff and cancelled the programmed spring shows *Hamlet* and *The Fantasticks* (Skelton and Culbert). Even with much shorter runs than Drabinsky offered they could not fill the house and by May of 2004 Dennis Law was calling his season “financial suicide” (qtd. in Bhatti). From this point on The Centre placed less emphasis on producing and presenting and focused more on bringing in outside programming and renting the space for corporate events and

film production. Even with this stopgap, Dennis Law would say of his theatre in 2006, “My loss every year is in the seven-digit figures” (qtd. in Yang).

In the midst of all of this, Law attempted to use The Centre to launch a new entertainment form of his own devising. Dubbed the “Action-Musical,” three of these creations emerged from the Centre during the Four Brothers tenure: *Of Heaven and Earth* (2002), *Terracotta Warriors* (2004) and *Tang Concubines* (2005). Like Drabinsky’s before him, Law’s innovations are rooted in personal experience. He explained that his inspiration and drive for these works is to create “a transnational theatre made by, of and for other transnationals” (Yan 242):

I became fascinated by classical Chinese dance in 2001 in Beijing and started questioning why I had not previously been exposed to such movement virtuosity before .... Since I felt comfortable with both western and Chinese culture, I saw a void where I could package Chinese performing arts to a new standard of international excellence. By creating shows that uniquely feature all sorts of visually stunning Chinese arts as a backbone, I can bypass language barriers and make my “Action-Musicals” appeal to people of all backgrounds. Therefore, in my musicals, the story is told through movement. (qtd. in “Interview”)

Promotional descriptions accompanying these productions were often rich with hybrid formulations: “a mix of Riverdance, Cirque du Soleil, and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” (Hume), or “a ‘dancrobatic spectacle’ .... [that] uses classical dance, opera, acrobatics and martial arts to tell a legendary story” (Gill, “East”). The shows mixed western music with Chinese instruments and contemporary electronic sounds, or as Peter Birnie put it, “plenty of Canto-pop style sounds pour forth” (“Heaven”). These hybrid forms mingling Chinese traditional culture with western stage traditions were massive in scale, underwritten solely with funds from

the Law empire, and produced and directed by Dennis Law himself. Although he drew from meaningful audience experiences at a range of international performances, Law did not have prior professional training in the forms he mingled. Mainstream critical response in Vancouver was generous at first, but soon turned scathing. Among more diverse media outlets there was more support, but even there some critics identified his lack of theatre skill as an obstacle to the success of the shows.<sup>20</sup> Though the productions were snubbed by Vancouver's annual Jessie Richardson Theatre Awards, it is striking that *Tang Concubines* won two Doras in 2006 for costumes and choreography when it toured to Toronto.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> On his Vancouver-based blog *Gung HAGGIS Fat Choy*, Todd Wong was a strong advocate for Law's work. In his review of *Terracotta Warriors*, Wong says, "In presenting the story of Qin, Dennis Law accomplishes what nobody else in North America has ever done before. He artistically puts Chinese art, culture and history not only as equal with Western art, but as historical and culturally significant. For the greater part of the last two hundred years, China and its culture has been regarded as inferior 3rd World quality by Western eyes" ("Terracotta"). Wong also deftly chronicles the controversy that surrounded the reviews for the production (see thread from "Terracotta" review) as well as his own attempts to publicly counter some of the negative press. Colin Thomas's review in *The Georgia Straight* is critical but notes the success of some of the spectacle elements and suggests that Law is improving in his craft. Jin Yang's article in *The Tyee* from 31 July 2006 helpfully compares the reception of Law's work by different cultural groups, showing that positive and negative response does not correlate simply with cultural background (Yang). Quoting mainstream critics in local and national media sources as well as local artists and Asian community supporters, Yang shows that a critique of Law's expertise and professionalism is also offered by some members of the Chinese community, and that non-Asian cultural commentators, such as director of Simon Fraser University's Asia-Canada Program Jan Walls, see real value in the work.

<sup>21</sup> In 2015 a group of concerned theatre artists in Vancouver (lead by ReAct), consisting of a significant portion of the Vancouver Theatre community, protested the lack of inclusivity at the Jessie Awards (Vancouver's professional theatre awards) by submitting "An Open Letter to the Jessie Richardson Board of Directors," the full text of which can be found here: <https://www.pitheatre.com/blog/open-letter-jessie-richardson-board-directors>. The letter detailed the group's perception of the society's historically exclusionary practice and noted a more progressive and inclusive situation at the Dora Awards (Toronto's professional theatre awards). Valerie Sing Turner's article "The Danger of a Single Story" recounts some of the community discomfort with the process of the Jessies and also notes the snub at the 2015 Jessies of a number of standout works by artists of colour, including Omari Newton's play *Sal Capone: The Lamentable Tragedy Of*, co-produced by Black Theatre Workshop and Urban Ink. One year prior to its presentation in Vancouver, *Sal Capone* had been nominated for five awards at the Montreal English Theatre Awards (META) including Outstanding Professional Production and Outstanding New Text: <http://metas.ca/awards/archives/2014-ceremony/>

#### 5.4 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 2: *Terracotta Warriors*

On 22 May 2002 the Centre premiered the action-musical that would become most associated with Law's tenure in the building and remain his obsession for the next fifteen years. *Terracotta Warriors* was written, produced, and directed by Dennis Law and took on the story of Emperor Qin Shi Huang through the eyes of his eunuch Zhao Gao. China's unifier and first emperor, Qin Shi Huang lived from 259-210 BCE and his legacy has garnered much contemporary attention due to the excavation, and international exhibition, of a selection of the seven thousand terracotta warriors with which he was buried. Like the other action-musicals Law created, this work combined western and Chinese dance. Analyzing the work for *Asian Theatre Journal*, Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. noted one scene where ballet was performed "side by side with a traditional water sleeve dance" (169). Composer Hao Wei Ya's score combined recorded fusion music overlaid with live singing and drumming. Though wordless, Chinese and English text was displayed electronically on either side of the stage offering translation of the songs. This device also helped both Chinese and English-speaking audiences create links between the twenty-four loosely connected scenes of a performance that Wetmore called more of "a historical pageant than narrative dance-drama," summarizing the action with quasi-Brechtian scene titles such as "the arrival of Qui into the afterlife with his army of terracotta warriors" (Wetmore 170). Wetmore's description of the show's loose structure points to Law's evident preference for showcasing extraordinary, seemingly super-human physicality over a coherent historical narrative.

In blending athletic ballet and gymnastic and martial arts-informed traditional Chinese styles, Law sought to use his Centre as the nexus of a new transnational spectacular body, admired for its extremes, though only superficially engaged with its derivative forms. Law cited



his medical background as a source for his passionate stage explorations of physical virtuosity and the expressions of the human body. Bringing most of his performers from China, he would say of his casting process, “The most incredible skills are in the young .... The older dancers are physically wrecked” (qtd. in Birnie, “Chinese”). Physical thrills provided by the Chinese performers positioned Law’s shows as new experiences of virtuosity and risk for Vancouver audiences. Eschewing story ballet’s many narrative devices and the stylized conventions of Chinese forms, Wetmore says of the production, it “emphasizes gymnastics and ‘action’ over everything else, including plot, acting, narrative logic, and consistency. Most scenes were gymnastic routines and dances set to prerecorded music” (170). The aesthetic even extended to complex dramatic moments: “in act 2, scene 5, the ghost of Confucius appears to torment Emperor Qin for becoming a tyrant who serves his own needs, not the state’s. After dancing his admonition, Confucius completes his accusation with a split kick and a back flip” (Wetmore 170).

Law suffered his own episode of Qin-like tyrannical hubris when confronted with the intensely negative critical press reviews that followed the premiere performance of *Terracotta Warriors*. Plagued by many technical problems on opening night, Law replied in writing to negative reviews in *The Vancouver Sun*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *The Westender* with claims that the reviews were culturally insensitive and that the show was being assessed “from a Western perspective” (qtd. in Andrews). *The Westender*’s Leanne Campbell was banned from attending any future shows at the Centre, with Law perceiving her review as a personal attack. Blogger Todd Wong sided with Law, noting that, in the context of 2004’s Asian Heritage Month, Campbell comparing the music and smoke effects of the show to a Heavy Metal concert “smacks of cultural ignorance similar to bebop jazz music being derogatorily called ‘Chinese Music’”

(Wong, “War”). Other reviewers, however, echoed some of Campbell’s critique, with Alexandra Gill of *The Globe & Mail* suggesting that “Law obviously doesn’t have the experience to pull it together behind the scenes and he hasn’t handed the reigns to anyone who might. The overall effect is painfully amateur” (Yang). Soon after the premiere Law called a press conference to address his desperate attendance situation, appealing to local arts lovers for help, though eventually the event degenerated into an irate confrontation between Campbell and Law (Andrews).

Law’s programming was definitely ahead of the curve in addressing Vancouver’s diverse demographic. However, without substantive professional training in any of the forms he attempted to merge in his action musicals, he was also “appropriating multiculturalism in the service of globalization,” as Ric Knowles suggests (“Multicultural” 83), attempting to do with performance what he had successfully achieved with property and retail items. Unaware of the deeper resonance of cultural products, he may also have been unwittingly guiding “the audience away from any genuine representation of China,” as Wetmore asserts (171). In 2006 Law blamed his failure with The Centre on Vancouver’s false sense of multiculturalism: “Vancouver is a segregated society. The Koreans don’t see Chinese shows and the Chinese don’t see the Japanese shows” (qtd. in Yang). Outside of The Centre and as late as 2015, Law has continued to develop *Terracotta Warriors*, combining the transnational virtuosic body with the newest innovations in technical spectacle in a touring a version with enhanced 3D projection (Law).

Though Law had dramatically scaled back productions by 2006, it was not until May 2013 that the building was once again sold, this time to owners who would no longer use it as a traditional performing arts venue. Four Brothers Entertainment kept the length of time that the theatre was on the market and the sale price private, thus sharpening the shock of the transaction

for some local artists. Coming just a year after the closure of the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company, for some the sale of the Centre felt like another blow to Vancouver's arts community already struggling to process the failure to thrive of homegrown large-scale theatre downtown. Former City Planner Brent Toderian opined, "How much the city can do to prevent such losses, though, is always a question because they have to be economically viable" (J. Smith, "Church"). Interviewed about the potential legacy of the Law's tenure at the Centre, theatre critic and scholar Jerry Wasserman remarked: "I don't think it leaves much of a legacy at all. This was a white elephant right from the beginning .... The Centre was a roadhouse that's basically been empty since a few years after it opened" (Allingham). The thriving entertainment district in Vancouver that many imagined would emerge as a result of the new theatre at 777 Homer Street, a central feature of most European cities and even present in other Western Canadian cities such as Calgary, Edmonton, and Winnipeg, had spectacularly failed to emerge.

In his article "PuShing Performance Brands in Vancouver," Peter Dickinson also notes the city's missing centralized economy of civic performance and maps out plans for a belatedly emerging cultural precinct rooted by the new Vancouver Art Gallery building sited for Larwill Park, across the street from the QE complex (134-35). This precinct would include both of the QE venues, Library Square, a new leisure complex built on the site of the old downtown Post Office, the CBC, and stretch all the way west to The Orpheum and The Vogue on Granville Street and east to the cultural aspects of the Woodward's site. Whether this district will emerge as vital or add itself to the many unrealized master plans for this part of the city (see Chapter 4.2 Early Tries) remains to be seen. What is clear is that The Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts has disappeared so significantly as to not even make its way into the plan (134 & 148-49).

## 5.5 Westside Church

In a 2013 video posted on Vimeo Pastor Norm Funk leads viewers on a journey downtown. The footage begins on Granville Island where Westside Church had been renting the Arts Club Granville Island stage for Sunday worship for a few years. Walking to the Aquabus, Funk describes “sensing a call from God” in 2005 while working at a church in Burnaby, which led him to “plant” Westside in a rented movie theatre, move it to a variety of itinerant venues, and in 2013 purchase Law’s Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts as the church base. On 10 May 2013 *The Georgia Straight* had reported that Westside had raised one third of the undisclosed purchase amount from donations, had the Purchase Sales Agreement in hand, and was evaluating whether the purchase was “feasible, prudent and God-directed” (J. Smith, “Church”). With the transaction now finalized, Funk’s filmed Aquabus ride docks in Yaletown, and he continues on foot past iconic Vancouver features such as BC Place, the Terry Fox Memorial, and Library Square to arrive at Safdie’s theatre, now renamed simply “The Centre.” The video was created “to articulate the mission and heart behind our move there” and culminates with Funk’s assertion that Vancouver “offers essentially everything that this world can offer but it doesn’t know Jesus” (*Journey*). Entering the theatre, the building’s spectacular features are displayed for future churchgoers all while Funk emphasizes that the beautiful structure will not help people get closer to God: “this is just a building. Jesus is Jesus.”

While Funk’s remark downplays the role of a building in connecting with God, it is nonetheless important to recognize how the remarkable growth and success of the American evangelical movement has been at least partially driven by how it has radically reimagined church space. Springing from “a series of revivals that swept the North Atlantic Anglo-American world in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (Stevenson 9), Randall Balmer defines

American evangelicalism using three distinct characteristics: “an embrace of the Holy Bible as inspired and God’s revelation to humanity, a belief in the centrality of the conversion or ‘born again’ experience, and the impulse to evangelize or bring others to the faith” (2, Stevenson 4). Part of the Protestant tradition, the movement stresses a personal, unmediated access to God and the empowering of lay people through Bible study; a decidedly democratic motif that has caused commentators like Jill Stevenson to note the “consonance between evangelical theology and certain foundational U.S. principles” (11). Until Christ’s second coming, the evangelical drive is to spread the message of damnation and the redemption of humanity through Christ’s sacrifice. This missionary impulse, which John Fletcher has linked to contemporary activism (9-16), motivated the emergence after 1990 of influential “New Wave” or Re-Envisioned churches designed to be “seeker-sensitive”; that is, attractive to new members curious about religion but not currently attending church. The attraction is created by “using the cultural vernacular to restate the claims of an ancient faith in a modern tongue” (Hart 175, Stevenson 6), both by adapting secular performance forms to the worship experience and through a revision of the semiotics of sacred space.

The Church Growth movement that bolstered the new seeker-sensitive churches borrowed research and marketing strategies from corporate capitalism and created a culture of God-directed entrepreneurial activity. Carpanzano has noted the similarity between the will of God and his invisible hand: the “automatic justice of the unregulated market” (338, Stevenson 12), a connection that allowed church leaders to embrace branding and business models to “generate kingdom results” (Stevenson 164). Evangelical churches grew in scale enormously using the movement’s strategies, developed a multi-site model reminiscent of franchising, and encouraged continuous new church “plants,” all monitored by a new “evangelical metrics of

growth” (Fletcher 140). Market research revealed that seekers were looking for less denominational specificity in a service and less “turn-or-burn” sermonizing (Fletcher 141). Thus, the baptism by immersion and membership courses and covenants would be kept in the background, out of sight of newcomers. Jill Stevenson has analyzed how evangelical church lobbies stage visitor’s bodies and trace familiarity into them allowing them to arrive at the service more gradually and openly (220-24). Seekers would meet greeters at the door reminiscent of a Walmart entry and enjoy a coffee at Starbucks in the lobby before entering the worship. In short, attraction is partially created by making church more like secular consumerism.

The megachurch is the most identifiable symbol of the contemporary evangelical movement and its sanctuary has been remodeled to imitate a performance amphitheatre.<sup>22</sup> In such churches pews have been replaced with comfortable tiered seating, there are multiple entrances for attendees, lighting is dimmable, and most have a large central screen to support multi-media engagement. The evangelical movement has consciously used the emblems of theatre structures to remove barriers between church going and non-churchgoers: the church experience has been overwritten with the markers of entertainment. As well as building new, adapting existing venues has proved useful for growing churches. In the western tradition, in its first instance in the Theatre of Dionysus, the religious space and theatrical space are one in the same. The re-purposing of theatres as religious spaces (and conversely the transformation of Christian

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<sup>22</sup> American megachurches are defined by having 2,000 or more attendees at weekend service (Thumma and Travis xviii, Stevenson 166, Fletcher 141). Westside’s venue has a couple of hundred seats less than that and there were approximately 1,200 people at the service I attended. Thus, using the American gage, they may not technically qualify as a megachurch, but they certainly share with megachurches the structural and marketing characteristics noted above. By Canadian standards, where megachurches are less prominent than in the US, Westside’s 1200 attendees is still very remarkable in comparison to an average Anglican or Protestant congregation in an urban centre.

churches into performing spaces) has some remarkable examples throughout western theatre history,<sup>23</sup> but contemporary evangelical reclamation of past performance venues has been remarkable for its savvy and effective uses of space. Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan provide many examples of cinema-to-church transformations (166 & 214) and Fletcher documents the massive Lakewood Church in Austin's relocation to the 16,000 seat Compaq Centre, formerly the home of the Houston Rockets (153). Although on a smaller scale, Westside Church at The Centre nonetheless aligns with many of the features of these spatial conversions.

The megachurch experience builds from the original theatre's secular, community-oriented, extraordinary, pleasure-promising semiotic systems. Safdie's peeled away façade of the building, with its two-dimensional, cross-section of the auditorium, instead of alluding to theatrical spectatorship, replaces the traditional crucifix with a focus on church congregants. Functioning now in the megachurch context, many of Safdie's other original architectural signifiers can be read anew in different ways. The eighty-two-foot transparent glass cone that hovers above the entrance uses triangular form and appears to give strength and direction to the church's mission and a heavenward thrust to the building. With virtually no indoor space on the ground floor, the spatial narrative associated with entering the church is all about communal ascension. While elevators are an option, the main route to worship is ascending the white marble circular staircase that leads seekers to the three lobby levels, slowly revolving while encased in the massive segmented mirror on the surrounding curved wall. This stunning effect

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<sup>23</sup> Of particular interest is the conversion of the Roman Colosseum into a Catholic sanctuary in the seventeenth century on the contested belief that the blood of Christians martyred there made it consecrated ground. For a full history and details of the debate see Hopkins, Keith and Mary Beard. *The Colosseum*. Profile Books, 2005, or <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04101b.htm>

reflects the journeying selves en route to the service and their returns to the quotidian world at the end. The canoe-shaped skylight that hovers over the three tiers of lobby draws little visual attention during traditional theatre's mostly nighttime public activities. At churchgoing hours, however, daylight draws the eye up and bathes the interior gently, sometimes even offering sunlight.

In addition to re-thinking the church venue, the church growth movement set out to “redesign the conventions and structures of the traditional church service around the preferences and prejudices of the unchurched/dechurched public” (Fletcher 138). This also meant drawing on secular forms that embedded familiarity, reassurance, and pleasure into the worship experience. Jill Stevenson has labelled the suite of tactics that megachurches employ “evangelical dramaturgy”; performance strategies “designed to manipulate the physical, rhythmic encounter between user and medium” (Stevenson 24). These strategies “reconfigure aesthetic information in ways that will support certain evangelical Christian epistemologies” (Stevenson 3). Using target marketing, they were trying to “reach adults born between the 1960s and the 1980s who were raised in a culture that emphasized ‘visual communication, music, sensations and feelings’” (Loveland and Wheeler 226, Stevenson 180). Thus, the shifts in service design were synesthetic, heightening audience sensoria by drawing on popular cultural experiences, and forging a unique genre of worship performance.





**Figure 14 (Chapter 5.5) Westside Church Entrance with Transparent Glass Cone, Photo by Katrina Dunn**



**Figure 15 (Chapter 5.5) Westside Church Skylight, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

### **5.6 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 3: *Sunday 1 July 2018***

The worship service on 1 July 2018 began with music and movement. When the musicians took up the preset rock band instruments and launched into a set of upbeat, amplified praise songs, most of the attendees stood up and began to move with the music. Engaging a concert aesthetic, most New Wave evangelical services begin with a musical segment between

20 and 40 minutes long that is both performative and participatory. The congregation sings along with the energy of a fun sing-a-long jukebox musical, reading lyrics off the screen, sometimes with the typical evangelical hands-in-the-air praising. Lots of repetition is built into the lyrics to encourage a democratic engagement with the songs, not dependent on any musical expertise (on July 1, “My Sin Has Been Erased” was the constant refrain in one of the most buoyant choruses). Melody lines are simple, catchy, and use the basic chord progressions and musical structures of pop songs. Fletcher has noted how using the form of love songs may increase the intimacy with God for worshippers. Unlike most traditional hymns, songs are directed *to* God rather than being about him, or about religious experience (139-144). Jill Stevenson concludes that rhythm is fundamental to evangelical dramaturgy and that this opening musical set allows people time to enter into a different emotional state: the songs are “not selling theology, as much as a specific physical encounter with that theology” (166). Church market researchers, along with scientists and phenomenologists, are gaining a clearer picture of “how we construct meaning through our bodies” (Stevenson 14), and the physical engagement with music has become such an important element that some evangelicals lament that musical style is often the deciding factor in choice of service: “Denominational loyalty has all but eroded, replaced by musical style” (Sheer 95, Stevenson 198). At Westside the band was young and hip and played a pop/rock synthesis recognizable as contemporary Christian rock.

Another important feature of Stevenson’s evangelical dramaturgy is its hypermedial *mise en scène*. Evangelicals have “embraced new media to create novel devotional vehicles” (30) and “shape the point of contact between worshipper and medium” (166). Most megachurches are endowed with large central screens as well as state-of-the-art sound and projection equipment. Continuing with the technological investments made by both Drabinsky and Law, Westside’s

massive screen hovers over four back-lit small screens representing columns. The large screen minimizes the accoutrements of the rest of the stage picture unfolding in front of it: the band set up stage left, a simple podium just right of centre, a small screen stage right repeating the large screen message for the benefit of those sitting too close to receive the big one, and lastly, a plain wooden cross, twelve feet tall but still somewhat unassuming skirting the edge of the stage right wing. When Pastor Matt Menzel entered after the musical set wearing jeans and white sneakers and began his sermon using a lavalier mic, he often wandered away from the podium to make his point. The screen punctuated his instruction with bible quotes and keywords (but notably no religious images). Menzel's hipster dress and evident ease with the media he used to share the key ideas was reminiscent of a Ted Talk aesthetic or a tech-heavy solo theatre show. Stevenson has chronicled how large-scale projections conjure the spectacular in megachurches, but also "allow worship leaders to control the space's sensory aesthetic strategically ... [and] craft precise sensual encounters for worshippers" (185). In a striking departure from the theatrical norms that guided the first use of this space, a key function of the screen in the megachurch context is also to drive congregants to their phones. The hall glowed with tiny dots of light as, during the sermon, attendees freely used bible apps on their mobile phones to read and consider the passages being discussed. Decisions made in advance and designed into a PowerPoint instruct followers to focus on particularly important bible passages for the sermon. Following along online through one's phone was both possible and encouraged, with the large screen also offering video edited sections set to music to flag transitions between the different segments of the service.

The highly exegetical sermon Menzel delivered on 1 July 2018, as part of Westside's Matthew Sermon Series, analyzed the fallout of one of western culture's most influential

narratives of space.<sup>24</sup> In Matthew 22:22-23 Jesus has just “cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves” (Joint, Matthew 21:12). He replaces those that had been licensed to do their business in what had become a “den of thieves” (21:13) with the spectacle of his own miraculous healing of the sick, claiming what has become a secular space for sacred uses only. Squatting in the Temple, he refuses re-entry to those who have tainted God’s house and left it desolate. Now he faces representatives of the Sad’du-ccees, the Jewish aristocratic ruling sect that maintained the Temple, all the while developing alliances with the occupying ruling force of Rome. The Sad’du-ccees had granted the licenses that allowed business transactions in the Temple and are now furious with this upstart’s challenge to their authority and attempt to “entangle him in his talk” (22:15). Jesus’s rhetorical strategy ultimately puts the authorities to silence and labels the Temple bureaucrats and priests corrupt hypocrites for allowing interest in profit to blinker them to the true work of faith. While the passage aligns well with a general Protestant skepticism of religious hierarchies and the “antisemitic legacy of Passion playing” (Stevenson 1), it fails to account for the evangelical movement’s complex business ethics or the church’s well-known, astounding capacity for revenue generation. Though Westside had no merchandise for sale in the lobby and no collection was taken during the service, they continue to rent out the venue for secular conferences, performances, and film festivals in a professed continued support of the local arts community (Ritchie). In a stunning feat of financial acumen, the church is the first

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<sup>24</sup> Westside Church makes high quality video documents of all of their sermons which are then hosted on their website, [wchurch.ca](http://wchurch.ca). A recording of the entire sermon I analyze is available for viewing in the Matthew Sermon Series section, with the date 1 July 2018: <https://www.wchurch.ca/matthewsermonseries>

owner of the venue to weather the first five years of programming without a major, public financial crisis.

A self-proclaimed “theology nerd,” Menzel’s homiletics attempted to link the lessons of Matthew’s scripture to attendees lives by emphasizing two of its themes: citizenship and courage. At this Canada Day service Menzel expressed gratitude for the relative freedom experienced by evangelicals in Canada but warned that winds of change may be coming for Christians. Menzel reminded the congregants that citizenship in the Kingdom of God trumps nations, as Jesus insists in his famous meditation on a Roman tribute penny: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22: 21). Beyond the transnationalism of Drabinsky’s Broadway or Law’s Pacific Rim network of cultural exchange, evangelical allegiance is transmortal, scrambling the logic of imperialism, taxes, and cultural identity. Believers must look past the Canada Day celebratory fireworks “to a better Kingdom, better city, better nation” in the afterlife (Menzel). Moreover, this transmortal citizenship should empower believers to tell those of other faiths and no faith that they are wrong. Now past the attraction phase of the service and into some of its more challenging content, Menzel engages what Fletcher describes as the need for Evangelicalism to “constantly remind its followers of the offensiveness and exclusivity of its message” (12). Bemoaning the contemporary reduction of God to a thing that makes us feel better; “an insurance policy” or a “divine weight scale” (Menzel), the Pastor wonders whether we are any more God-directed than the self-interested Sad’du-ccees. Unlike us, Jesus had the chutzpah to school these teachers of Israel in front of their students; to strike them out of their wits. It is ultimately a message of non-tolerance and speaking one’s truth to power.



Religious antitheatrical literature has long maintained that the experience of performance goes beyond representation: “Only the filthiness of plays and spectacles is such as maketh both the actors and beholders guilty alike” (Munday 66). Citing “Plato’s contention that imitation is formative and that you risk becoming what you enact” (21, Schafer 7), Jonas Barish gives numerous examples in *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* of a theatrical contagion feared “lest the custom of pleasure should touch us and convert us” (Northbrook 4). Conversely, it could also be argued that the faith experience and dramatic suspension of disbelief are cousins and that elements of the Christian service such as the ritual of the Eucharist “are on a continuum with the theatre” (Schafer 4, Sofer 31-60).<sup>25</sup> Despite its pagan roots, over time and in many ways, western theatre has used its powerful tools to enfold and centralize the Christian narrative (Schafer ix), with conflicting reactions from religious organizations in various regions and times. Theatre and Christianity share an ancient-future disposition that evangelical dramaturgy, with its catchy songs, high-tech staging and exegetical rhetoric, has leveraged to make evangelical Christianity the largest denomination in the US (Stevenson 9). In Vancouver, Westside Church’s growth has certainly benefitted from its building’s mega-musical to megachurch transition. The original designs in service of the former have been repurposed and mobilized remarkably effectively in service of the aesthetics of the latter. In a city where churches, like theatres, have often struggled to survive, it has established itself as a vital part of a cosmopolitan, highly ranked global city

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Sofer, in *The Stage Life of Props*, takes it one step further, describing how the mutability of the stage changed the Eucharist from the fixed Christian embodiment of Christ into a more flexible representation open to challenge, thereby placing it somewhere between “transubstantiation and representation, miracle and spectacle” (42).

that, as Norm Funk laments in his video, “doesn’t know Jesus” (*Journey*). Westside has ascended remarkably, buoyed by the resurrection of an edifice of failed theatrical ambition.

## 5.7 Conclusion

As Safdie’s postmodern vision borrowed and repurposed historical allusions and elements, so each ownership group at the Centre had some stake in revisiting and re-inscribing the past. Despite the concerted protests of contemporary artists of colour, Garth Drabinsky and Hal Prince’s revival of *Show Boat* made production choices that sought to mute the musical’s racist features and past while placing the cultural appropriation of African-American music within the storyline. Dennis Law’s dance biography of Qin Shi Huang largely sidelined Qin dynasty brutality and stifling of freedoms in an effort to create a heroic portrait from China’s past in line with the spectacular cultural embassy of the Terracotta Warriors. Menzel’s probing of the financial life of faith in Jesus’s time left out an important link between the tainted Temple in Jerusalem and megachurches’ repurposing for profit of large-scale, secular, entertainment sites. As a transnational building, in many ways removed from time and place, engaging with a clear or shared past proved challenging, a symptom of the form of geopathology that sprang from the new post-Expo downtown.

Beyond these historical attempts, the remarkable connection between the three groups that have shaped, owned, and produced work at 777 Homer Street is their unrelenting missionary zeal. Drabinsky’s “fanatical drive of a megalomaniac” (Avrich) is well documented, stopping at nothing to create a commercial theatre empire that was, as he imagined it, a financial impossibility. Norm Funk heeded a calling from God to plant a church and grow it to massive proportions in the space of ten years. Both of these individuals worked beyond reason from a



place of belief and spiritual hunger, with trust in forces outside of human laws to manage the financial risks. It is Dennis Law however, who drained a massive amount of his personal fortune on his programming mission, who most succinctly described the source of this zeal. For him, the building is “beyond real estate .... It’s about faith in the city ... Vancouver’s evolving greatness ... Arts and culture and elements that define humanity. Vancouver needs to be a leader” (qtd. in Hughes).

## Chapter 6: High Density House-work

Early in 2014 the northeast corner of a mini storage building on Howe between Pacific and Beach Avenues, which faces the ramps of the Granville Street bridge, began to host a perplexing message. The word "gesamtkunstwerk" in neon, stacked in its lexical components, shone its suggestion to thousands of commuters daily. For those with knowledge of German, art history, theatre, or opera, this aesthetically-charged concept stood in humorous juxtaposition to its roadside setting and the windowless drab brown stucco cube on which it was featured. In fact, the glowing word announced a master plan for the future of the then incongruous site. The plan embraced the term's full meaning as well as its utopian and problematic connotations. It also added a new layer to Vancouver's real estate obsession, with its spillover for so many other areas of life in the city. A year prior, the founder of Vancouver's Westbank, self-described as "Canada's leading luxury residential and mixed-use real estate development company" (Westbank, "Home"), discovered the concept of gesamtkunstwerk and began applying it to his and his collaborators' projects. The apotheosis of their new focus is Vancouver House, the tower and podium development created for the mini storage site, both next to and sandwiched in between the Granville Bridge and its ramps. This chapter investigates the inherent theatricality of Vancouver House, the performative scripts of three of its related public events, the relationship between architectural creation and performance, and the transformation of Vancouver's downtown into a stage for the spectacle of real estate geopolitics, even as downtown production of large-scale professional theatre works disappeared from view.

The zeal that characterized the three leaders of The Centre is also a factor in the story of Vancouver House's intensely driven developer, and polarizing local figure, Ian Gillespie. Growing up in modest circumstances in Port Moody, Gillespie connects his biographical

narrative to a spellbinding teenage encounter with his cousin's red Jaguar E-type convertible, which launched his desire to reach millionaire status by the age of 30 (*Building 13*). Through his cousin and his marriage, Gillespie inserted himself into two development genealogies which have substantially impacted the built environment of Western Canada. Rod Schroeder, the cousin, was the CFO of Daon Development at the time of the Jaguar incident, the massive property development juggernaut co-founded by Jack Poole. By the time Gillespie went to work for Schroeder after university his cousin was on his own with Schroeder Properties. However, the legacy of Poole's business models passed through Schroeder to Gillespie as the latter cut his teeth in the industry building Lower Mainland shopping centres (*Building 15-16*, Ebner). Gillespie married Stephanie Dong, the niece of Vancouver property magnate Robert H. Lee, a first-generation Chinese-Canadian who grew up in Vancouver's Chinatown, and then went on to form Prospero International Realty Inc., distinguishing himself as a community leader and benefactor. Lee's initial fortune was made in the 1960s and 70s when fear of a take-over of the then British colony of Hong Kong by Communist China prompted a first wave of immigration. Lee built a powerful real estate empire catering to the needs of the newcomers (C. Smith). Gillespie's output blends the ambition and scale of the Jack Poole genealogy with Lee's international focus and visionary scope, buoyed by a fortuitous synergy of local and global forces in the "strangest real estate market in the western world" (I. Young).

## **6.1 How Buildings Perform**

Gillespie credits Vancouver architect James K.M. Cheng with teaching him how buildings perform (Ebner). By "perform" I am not referring to the common use of the word in architecture to assess a building's energy use or the efficiency of a design practice, nor its more

recent application as a label for buildings animated by media and electronics (Rufford 37). Instead, I explore this attribute of architecture through a Richard Schechner-inspired performance studies lens in which a culture's values are displayed or contested through extra-theatrical practices (*Performance Theory*). I combine that with Judith Butler's reiterative notion of "performativity" in which identities, power constructs, and change are created through repeated discourse and gesture (*Excitable*). These ideas allow me to argue here that buildings perform in ways that can complement or contrast with the more overt theatricality of stage performances. They do so through architectural programme (action), with their narrative ability (story), and through a form of doubling (mimesis).

Architect and theorist Bernard Tschumi proposes, "if theatrical action corresponds to the ever-changing function of an architectural programme, then the theatrical spaces are no more and no less dramatic than architectural ones" (70). Under this rubric, buildings are stages and their programmes (the actions that take place in them) are "analogous to performance processes ... both time-based and dynamic" (Rufford 33). Tschumi has argued against the neutrality of programme (qtd. in Hammer) and "the inevitability of the form-function relationship – the mainstay of architectural modernism" (Rufford 33). Instead he suggests that the patterns of inhabitation scored into a building always affect, sometimes unpredictably, how it is understood. Moreover, influenced by performance-based notions of space, building activities can be "cross-programmed" (a concept influenced by cross-dressing – much like Butler's work), such as creating a performance space in a disused bunker, with powerful cultural and political outcomes (Hammer). A building's uses affect its materiality, just as its material features influence programme. Thus, buildings perform through their patterns of human use and, as Stewart Brand

suggests in *How Buildings Learn*, continue to grow and evolve with the stimulus of dynamic activation.

Tschumi also asks, “is there is such a thing as an architectural narrative?” (105), though he leaves this challenge for others to ponder. In her foreword to Westbank’s first self-published book *Building Artistry*, which profiles their development achievements to 2012, Leslie Van Duzer references a chapter title from Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, “The Book will Destroy the Edifice.” Harking back to a time when the built environment had a narrative function communicating society’s values and ideas (5), she suggests that Westbank’s integration of art in their projects brings back this narrative potential. If we accept this notion, we can wonder about the specificity of the scripts produced by buildings as well as their dramaturgical structure. Maria Kaika, for example, sees architecture as “the narrativisation of the desires of elites during a given era, and as a key component in instituting a society’s *radical imaginary* during moments of change” (968). Borrowing from Cornelius Castidoris’s work, Kaika posits iconic architecture as “urban totems .... constituting new social relations as real or naturalized” (970). As an example of this phenomenon, she suggests that the corporate skyscraper navigated the shift from state and church to corporate power (973). As her example suggests, buildings perform in part by telling the story of who and what is, or will soon be, a dominant force in society.

Other scholars have looked for performative qualities in buildings that go beyond, or underpin, narrative and are closer to the embodied role of the actor. Laura Levin, in her article “Can the City Speak: Site Specific Art after Poststructuralism,” draws on phenomenology and psychoanalysis “which interpret the world’s speech in terms of visual rather than verbal symbolization” (241), suggesting that the built environment engages in “physiognomic display”

(252) that taps into “a materialist unconscious” (254). Tschumi is also interested in how buildings set the unconscious in motion, exploring how space and action (building and programme) move beyond representation in his Antonin Artaud-inspired “Architecture and Its Double” (Rufford 33). Here, buildings are “a species of performer” (Rufford 11) in a long duration performance engaging what Kim Solga has called “space’s epistemological duality” (*Theory 2*); a species of Artaud’s doubling. This duality/doubling combines Kaika’s radical imaginary with Levin’s material unconscious and results in “fictional and physical, economic and artistic, creative and quotidian” output (9), similar to the uncanny doubling of mimesis, with its requisite suspension of disbelief. If Vancouver House is “a living sculpture” as Gillespie has suggested (*Fight 543*), mimicking or usurping the place of the actor on its civic stage, then its performance is likely to hold a vital key to Vancouver’s broader, evolving, and dynamic identity.

## **6.2 A Culture Company**

Questions of corporate identity were top of mind when Gillespie broke away from Schroeder Properties and formed Westbank in 1993. The name he selected for the company recognized an early desire to evolve, eventually, into merchant banking activities (*Building 358*). The architectural and artistic education that Cheng gifted Gillespie allowed the company to evolve its portfolio into a period of growing ambition that positioned bold towers across the downtown peninsula, dramatically altering its built environment. These include Coal Harbour’s Pallisades (1996), the Residences on Georgia (1998), the Shaw Tower (2005), Shangri-La Vancouver (2008), Woodward’s (2010), and the Fairmont Pacific Rim (2010). Westbank developments broke new ground with the mixed-use typology, cross-programming hotels, residences, retail, and office space and placing an uncommon emphasis on amenities and public

art. Their selling style was also unique: “Gillespie, Cheng and up-and-coming condo salesman Bob Rennie exploded onto the Vancouver development scene together in the mid-‘90s; the three represented development savvy, distinctive architecture and a new kind of lifestyle marketing” (dev). The lifestyle they were selling had a distinctly artistic bent. The brochure for the Shaw Tower featured no image of the building, just a theatrical dancer mid-performance: “we were selling residences and the idea was to do it with metaphor” (*Building* 360).

The project that really marked Westbank’s “cultural turn,” was its redevelopment of Woodward’s. Resolving a crisis that began with a high-profile mass squat of the historic Woodward’s building in 2002, the Westbank revival of the site demanded that the company grow in a number of ways. Merging a substantial increase in residential density with community, educational, heritage, and government demands was a massive feat, the success of which managed to allay at least some of the fears around gentrification and neighbourhood displacement that greeted the initial designs. The project’s success launched a new era for the company beyond its history with shopping malls and simpler condominium developments. Ever more provocative marketing for the Woodward’s condos featured images of homeless people, described the development as an “intellectual property,” and demanded that their target market “be bold or move to suburbia” (*Building* 387-89).

These marketing transformations also enveloped Westbank as a company. Branding and marketing expert Claudia Cristovao of global company AKQA helped the company navigate the shift to their preferred label of a “culture company” (*Fight* 544). As Gillespie explains, “we define ourselves as more than just a real estate company or property development company – we have become a bank that deals exclusively in cultural transactions, a global force for the exposition and propagation of cultural movements” (*Fight* 541). By 2018 the company had a

portfolio of projects collectively worth more than ten billion Canadian dollars and was expanding its “cultural transactions” to Toronto, Seattle, and Tokyo (Ebner). Their sales offices in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Taipei, and Tokyo help to make visible the economic engine at the core of all this growth. The marketing of luxury condos overseas, in mainly Asian markets, provides the capital for the artistry being built and disseminated, proving true a 2013 prediction that “the future of our firm would be directly connected to the growth of China” (*Building* 460). Banking on culture has not only allowed Westbank to transform Vancouver’s downtown, but also positioned them as a global destination for “a world awash in capital looking for safe returns” (*Fight* 398).

### **6.3 Big BIG**

In 2010 Gillespie previewed a presentation that Danish architect Bjarke Ingels was giving to the Vancouver architectural community and City Planning staff (*Fight* 37). Still a young architect, Ingels’s vision and accomplishments were nevertheless remarkable and numerous enough to generate a graphic nonfiction publication entitled *Yes is More: An Archicomic on Architectural Evolution* (2010). Cartooning was his passion as a youth, and in this book he uses it to trace a lineage from Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s modernist and minimalist “anonymous boxes,” to Robert Venturi Jr.’s postmodern counterrevolution reintroduction of symbology, then to Rem Koolhaas’s exploration of accumulation, finally culminating in his own “Pragmatic Utopianism” (2-12). Chapter titles like “Vertical Suburbia” (76-77), “Modular Mania” (108-09) and “Sheikh Chic” (344-45) introduce some of his work’s themes and tones, and hint at his later pre-occupation with “hedonistic sustainability,” which asserts that being green can be a blast (Bobkoff). His design firm’s tongue in cheek acronym (BIG for Bjarke Ingels Group) accurately



describes the massive scale of some of their projects as somewhere “between urbanism and architecture” and connects them to “the modernist ambition to have big ideas” (394). By 2016 Ingels’s star had ascended to the point that he was named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time Magazine* (Westbank, “Collaboration”) and he had begun work on the commission for 2 World Trade Centre, the last skyscraper to be built at the revered site of the 911 attacks (Alexa). He was also working on an experiment for the human habitation of Mars and had reportedly quipped to Gillespie, “I’m so over Earth” (qtd. in Ebner).

After their 2010 meeting, Gillespie handed Ingels an awkward piece of land both next to and running under the Granville Bridge and its cloverleaf on-and off-ramps. The eight-lane bridge was originally intended to be part of the proposed freeway that galvanized so much community resistance in the early 1970s and was never realized (Griffin) (See Chapter 3 A Short History of Downtown Vancouver). Gillespie had paid the city thirty-five million dollars for this piecemeal assemblage of sites and the few abject buildings that populated it (dev), which he suggests, “had never been fully integrated into the city because they generated oddly-shaped infill spaces” (*Fight* 160). The only possibility for major density was a very small and triangle-shaped tower footprint that remained after taking into account the bridge setbacks, proximity to other buildings, and shadowing constraints. The design solution that Ingels came up with responded directly to the complex site and the attendant bylaws restricting it, though he also claimed to be inspired by Vancouver artists Douglas Coupland and William Gibson (Ditmars). He envisioned a luxury condo tower building from the triangular floorplate and twisting, floor by cantilevered floor, into a rectangle once it cleared the bridge. In Gillespie’s description: “With an ever-changing plan and elevation, it is a continuous organic form rising out of a dully conformist context” (*Fight* 160). There are few places in the city where towers in Vancouver exceed height

restrictions, but with fifty-nine stories the building stands out in the skyline and at the time of writing it was the third largest tower in the city (Emporis).<sup>26</sup> Forming the tower's podium is a ten-story rental block and three triangular retail/commercial/leisure complexes framing and articulating an under-bridge neighborhood with public art selected to dynamize the area. The condo tower's inverted massing has a startling anti-gravitational effect that seems to defy physics. In contrast to the smooth glass surface of most Vancouver towers, Ingels's finish has significant depth within its pixelated surface, with each pixel enclosing a single apartment. The pixels reference state of the art digital drawing systems, but also, as Dallas Rogers has proposed in the *The Geopolitics of Real Estate*, the digital commodification of cities by global real estate tech companies that allow for the uploading of international properties as commodities (Rogers 133-52). A resident can inhabit their own individual digital transaction or leave it empty if they choose. The design was awarded the World Architecture Festival's Future Building of the Year in 2015 (*Fight* 166).

Juliet Rufford has noted that both theatre and architecture are "practices based on a central image of the house" (55). She cites Marvin Carlson's etymological explanation of the origins of the theatrical "house" as a contraction of the early modern "playhouse" (Carlson, "H"). Ingels and Gillespie chose the name "Vancouver House" for their new development, even as the notion of house ownership in the city had become a wild impossibility for the vast majority of its residents. Discussing the idea of "home" as a foundational trope of modern drama,

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<sup>26</sup> The tallest is the Living Shangri-La (Westbank's 2008 construction – sixty-two floors and 201 meters), the second tallest is the Trump International Hotel and Tower (2016 – fifty-nine floors and 188 meters), and the third tallest is Vancouver House (fifty-nine floors and 187 meters).  
<https://www.emporis.com/statistics/tallest-buildings/city/100997/vancouver-canada>

Solga and Tompkins suggest that “the more precious home becomes to us at the theatre, the further it recedes from our everyday grasp” (77). By 2012 the complex rezoning of the site required to make Vancouver House possible was making its way through City Planning’s bureaucratic processes. At the same time, the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company, in a shocking blow to the city’s and nation’s cultural communities, was winding down after protracted struggles. The public spectacle of the VPTC’s closure contrasted sharply with Vancouver House’s debut on the stage of Vancouver’s downtown. Marvin Carlson has written of the spatial ghosting that contributes to the configuration of cultural memory in performing spaces (*Haunted* 132-138). For many, the name Vancouver House is ghosted by the Vancouver Playhouse. In this case, it is the name of the theatre company that haunts the condo tower, layering its failure on the tower’s success and troubling further the complex performance of habitation in Vancouver.

In marketing their skyline addition, Gillespie and Ingels utilized the mimetic tendencies present in the visual propensities of postmodernism and in many of the “shallowly spectacular architectural projects of the twenty-first century” (Rufford 20, Frampton). In the tower shape the design team saw “the gestural metaphor of the curtain” (Boddy, “Curatorial” 9). Ingels says: “Think of our building as a giant curtain, at the moment of being pulled back to reveal the world to Vancouver and Vancouver to the world.” (qtd. in Boddy, *Gesamtkunstwerk* 32). Though currently only one side of a curtained stage is represented in architecture, Gillespie’s narration of the *Fight for Beauty* exhibit reveals that this was not the master plan: “We imagined two curtains. The second curtain would have been Vancouver House 2 which would have completed the entire vision” (qtd. in Ma, “Westbank’s”). Though rejected by the COV, the clear intent was for a giant theatrical proscenium, with a tower on either side of the bridge, hiving off downtown

from the rest of the world and engaging all the attendant connotations of theatrical illusionism.

The rich, complex, and performative relationships between theatrically structured illusion, architecture, and authority is well-trod ground in theatre studies (Carlson, *Places*, Wiles, *A Short*). Kim Solga's addition, glossing R. Darren Gobert, ties the emergence of the proscenium arch to the moment of Rene Descartes and Pierre Corneille and the reimagining of theatrical communication around the Cartesian mind-body. Renaissance spaces were replaced with ones that prized the singular objective experience over the collective and vision over the other senses (Solga *Theory* 25, Gobert 126-30). Solga suggests that "Cartesian thinking was architectural: the world, increasingly, was framed as a picture" (*Theory* 53), tailored to the eyeline of the most powerful person in the space. Wagner's Bayreuther Festspielhaus (1876) designed by Otto Brückwald and Karl Brandt, democratized eyelines somewhat, but took the singularity of the proscenium experience to new heights by confounding depth perception and plunging the audience into darkness, for an entrancing, intoxicating experience that Theodor Adorno critiqued as encouraging a passivity then utilized by fascism (*In Search*). Most significantly for Rufford, proscenium composition "excludes extraneous elements and hides peripheral subthemes" (49) and for Levin, it encourages "a false sense of mastery" (249). If, as Kaika suggests, iconic buildings are "the narrativisation of the desires of elites during a given era" then Vancouver House is a grand means of staging and reinforcing an illusory and elite version of Vancouver for a global audience.



**Figure 16 (Chapter 6.3) Vancouver House Condominium Tower, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

#### 6.4 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 1: *Gesamtkunstwerk*

As a way of exploring their new identity as an arts and culture company, in 2014 Westbank began to produce events with stronger ties to visual and performing arts than to real estate. The main floor of the same mini storage building that had beamed the neon word "gesamtkunstwerk" to commuters daily was renovated to resemble a first-class exhibition space with gleaming white walls and polished concrete floors. From March to May 2014, the free exhibition *Gesamtkunstwerk: Life as a Total Work of Art* animated the space with the macro and the micro thinking that went into the design of Vancouver House. Gillespie has said of the event, "we were trying to create a space for ourselves to be creative," though he also describes the nervousness of his team as they embarked on an activity different from anything they had done before (*Fight 346*). Architectural critic Trevor Boddy was hired as curator and BIG staff, led by Francesca Portesine as Designer and Edward Yung as Project Manager, put together the material exhibit. The spatial experience they created was inspired by BIG's New York studio: "much of the visual material would be pinned on the wall as if it were just put up for a casual review by colleagues and clients" (Boddy, "Curatorial" 13). Two long tables impaled by metal supports held scale models, drawings, and architectural specs. Wall text situated the building within the historical evolution of downtown city-building. At one end of the space a large screen encased in a bookshelf displayed video renderings of the buildings and interviews with the project's major players. As Boddy wrote in the souvenir catalogue, "I know of no other exhibition, here or abroad, that so thoroughly presents the complete range of thinking and designing that went into a building *that has not even commenced construction*" ("Curatorial" 13). Accompanying the exhibit was a Salon Series that ran from 8 April to 2 June 2014 with talks by local architectural and development luminaries such as Leslie Van Duzer, former City Planner Larry Beasley,

scholar Jeff Derkson, and architect James K.M. Cheng, whose talk was titled “You Have to Look Deeper to See the Spirit of a Building” (*Fight* 352-53). Despite Westbank’s nervousness, the experiment was a success for the company; in their corporate mythology it served as “a catalyzing force for a renewed interest in urban design and architecture in this city” (*Fight* 346). It also served as a “soft launch” for condo pre-sales (Dickinson, “Vancouverism” 40), as the space morphed, post-exhibition, into the Vancouver House sales centre.

Before the selling, however, the exhibit would have to grapple with the weighty founding myth of aesthetic modernism that formed its title. The term “gesamtkunstwerk” was first introduced into the discourse of the German Romantics by philosopher K.F. E. Trahdorff in his 1827 article “Ästhetik oder Lehre von Weltanschauung und Kunst,” but it is most closely linked with composer and director Richard Wagner and the synthesis of the arts that he wrote of and attempted to stage. Wagner was inspired by the Greek tragic festival, with its multi-modal engagement of the senses (J. Young 44-46) and its “gathering of community into a universal ethos” (58-59). He proposed, in the 1849 essays “The Artwork of the Future” and “Art and Revolution,” that the arts (music, dance, and poetry) should be merged with the drama into a single expressive aim that would reform society itself. Since then, artists and scholars have debated the prudence of such a merging, calling it everything from “a healing of the fragmentation of modernity” (Fischer-Lichte 598), to a form of despotic control inspiring “the totalitarian theatre of politics” (Roberts 91). Gesamtkunstwerk surfaced in visual art and design after World War II with the Bauhaus, who had embraced it as a foundational principle (Vidalis). Bauhaus practitioners aspired to remake entire environments “from teaspoons to cities” (Boddy, “Curatorial” 7), and thus in architecture, “total design” most often labels projects where architects are responsible for a building’s totality, including furnishings, decoration and

landscaping, such as in some of Frank Lloyd Wright's creations. For Wagner, however, architecture was a servant medium, vulnerable to the hungry grub of commerce and in need of redemption:

When the private person no longer sacrificed to gods in common, to Zeus and to Apollo, but solely to the lonely bliss purveyor Plutus, the God of Riches ... then did he take the architect also into his pay, and bade him build a temple for his idol, Egoism .... Only together with the redemption of the egoistically severed humanistic arts into the collective Art-work of the Future ... will architecture be redeemed from the bond of serfdom. (62-63)

Gillespie first encountered the idea of *gesamtkunstwerk* in the creations of West Coast architect Ron Thom and saw it as a way to incorporate his company's growing interest in collecting and commissioning: "We realized that, above all, our work expresses the integration of art and architecture" ("Exclusive"). Others interpreted it as an alternative way of expressing Westbank's propensity for mixed-use projects: "In an environment where there is a tendency to do single-use buildings, Westbank's buildings are always quite complex – they're functionally artistic you might say" (Larry Beasley qtd. in *Building* 242). In line with their evolving marketing strategy, the strangeness of this new term was incorporated into Vancouver's House's sales campaign: "the fact that this word was difficult to pronounce became the very theme of our advertisements" (*Fight* 160). Ingels, inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright and Ron Thom, designed the building interior to resonate with the exterior through custom designed appliances, plumbing, and light fixtures and the repetition of the copper balcony cladding as a kitchen backsplash (*Fight* 161). Each suite features a kitchen island which horizontally renders the form of the twisting tower (176), and the lobby builds on the anti-gravity theme with all its functional



elements appearing to float in space (284). There were, however, applications larger in scale than a single building in the company's incorporation of *gesamtkunstwerk*: "Just like Bauhaus created rules and influenced Modernism, Westbank could influence where culture is today and goes tomorrow" (*Fight* 541).

The 2014 exhibit profiled the two ways that Westbank would wield this influence: first, through a new vertically integrated structure for the company, and second, by extending the total work of art to include city-building. As with Drabinsky's empire (see Chapter 5 Resurrection Real Estate), the move towards total design has seen Gillespie move more of his development processes in house. He formed ICON West Construction to have more control over the construction process for Westbank buildings. He purchased Central Heating, which heats a good portion of the buildings on the downtown peninsula, and rebranded it as Creative Energy with plans to rethink the energy performance of buildings. He has made marketing internal and created branches of the company that take on the selling of Vancouver condo properties abroad. Ingels sees this as "undoing the fragmentation of the industry ... by integrating investment, development, sales, marketing, construction" (qtd. in *Fight* 5). Westbank's transformation is just a model, however, for a much bigger project: "taking the total work of art to a whole new scale ... enlightened city building" (Boddy, *Gesamtkunstwerk* 3). Westbank was looking for "opportunities to shape the entire build-out of the city" (*Fight* 160), in effect, to release architecture from its serfdom and to begin to reshape society along politically and economically embedded, unified, aesthetic principles. Westbank's 2014 *Gesamtkunstwerk* exhibit was not just an instance of a development company moving into territory usually populated by artists, but rather one of a developer using a controversial aesthetic movement and ideology to announce his hope for a masterfully redesigned city of illusion, with all abjection, blight, and contradiction

expunged.

## 6.5 Vancouverism

Trevor Boddy's curatorial essay for the *Gesamtkunstwerk* exhibit begins from a hugely ambitious, never-realized Arthur Erickson sketch entitled "Project 56"<sup>27</sup> which he attempts to connect to Vancouverism, thereby placing the gesamtkunstwerk concept within a chronology of Vancouverism that culminates in Vancouver House (6-13). By contrast, other scholars of Vancouver architecture argue that the downtown's transformation under the phenomenon of Vancouverism owed more to economic and social forces outside the city, especially as Erickson had been largely ignored as an architect during its period of major output (Ingram). Boddy's attempt does, however, raise the question of how much the total design of Vancouver House grew out of an existing civic trend. In fact, the "architectural signature that approaches performance art" (Boddy, "Vancouverism", Dickinson "Vancouverism" 44) now so associated with Vancouver emerged from crisis. As floundering commercial growth halted the building of office towers downtown in the mid-1980s, planners reimagined the area as residential space, conspiring to "populate the inner-city with complete new communities" (Beasley 48). Energized by the megaproject of Expo 86, the redevelopment of downtown was manifested using a discretionary approval processes that empowered individual planners who exerted pressure on developers and influenced aesthetic decisions. Later labelled "The Vancouver Achievement"

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<sup>27</sup> Erickson's Project 56 is not to be confused with the Project 58 I mention on p. 95 of this thesis. Though both were never realized, Erickson's was a massive residential complex framing the entrance to False Creek, and Project 58 was a plan for a convention centre and coliseum for the block now inhabited by the CBC in Vancouver, which was defeated by City Council in 1954.

(Punter xiv-xxxi), this planning model also included design guidelines developed by the City Planning Department (Grant 358-65) that ensured Vancouverism's visual homogeneity (see Chapter 3 A Short History of Downtown Vancouver). It has been this homogeneity, the result of a uniform application of Vancouverism's model, that has brought the strongest aesthetic critique of the style and might be seen as a type of total design. The flat skyline is perceived as bland and the style "has not led to dramatic architectural expression or extraordinary architectural icons for the city" (Beasley 291). In attempting to fill this void, Vancouver House is in fact a departure from Vancouverism, one that Peter Dickinson suggests is indicative of "a new kind of façadism" ("Vancouverism" 40) uncharacteristic of the style. Despite Westbank's claim to have created a new typology for downtown based on the tower and podium type now so associated with the city (Boddy, *Gesamtkunstwerk* 9), the development actually performs a script very much at odds with Vancouverism's history.

Where Vancouverism placed planners wielding fierce regulatory regimens in the directorial role of city-builder, Westbank sees the developer as the leading player in civic growth. Leslie Van Duzer has said of Gillespie, "there are probably in the history of architecture only a handful of developers who are important for city-building. He's one" (dev). Where Vancouverism was concerned with populating the inner city with new neighborhoods, Gillespie's obsession is staking claim to sites of entry with bold, personal architectural statements. His goal is the completion of "a loop of works that will see Westbank buildings at each of the gateways into the downtown peninsula of Vancouver" (*Fight* 22). With the Pallisades, Shaw Tower and Fairmont Pacific Rim visually prominent to the north, Vancouver House shining above the skyline to the south, new developments rising on Alberni Street to the west and more of the same rising on Beatty Street to the east (once the viaducts are lowered),

Westbank is reconfiguring the cityscape so that downtown functions as “Vancouver” despite the fact that the city has a much larger geographic footprint beyond that area. The physical geography of the city already functions to make the downtown into a separate city mostly protected by water, somewhat reminiscent of moats around a castle. By making its buildings the visual references for entry into this already existing demarcated space, Westbank is branding and commodifying the points of entry. Gillespie has written passionately about “the forgotten importance of civic gateways, both as a metaphor and as design” (*Fight* 146). As design, or Levin’s “physiognomic display,” these buildings will act as gatekeepers to the city’s energy and resources, suggesting control of both flow and access. In so doing, however, both materially and metaphorically, they announce new social relations based on unprecedented inequity and a surrender of common resources to a singular vision.

## **6.6 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 2: *Fight for Beauty***

From 14 October 2017 to 4 February 2018 Westbank took their experiment with exhibition to a whole new level. In the plaza between two Westbank developments in Coal Harbour: the Shaw Tower and the Fairmont Pacific Rim, they erected a temporary gallery space. The free exhibition they mounted there featured Westbank development projects, pieces from their visual art commissions, iconic fashion pieces they have collected, and a Fazioli piano that was played constantly for attendees. Less a profile of a single building than a chronology of Westbank’s achievements mixed with flashy examples of Gillespie’s personal taste, the exhibition enfolded each display within a narrative centred on how great beauty is achieved only through persistent struggle. It positioned Gillespie and Westbank as front-line warriors in the unrelenting aesthetic struggle for civic beauty, taking on vapid regulatory systems, visionless

planners, and misguided community groups as their foes. A poem by their branding consultant Claudia Cristovao was rendered in neon script at the entrance to the exhibit. It began with three questions:

When did we say yes to beauty being discarded, deleted and demeaned?

Where is the agreement that beauty is optional – not urgent for us to thrive?

Since when have we learned the price of everything yet know the value of nothing?

*(Fight 622)*

An audio tour of the exhibit's installations was narrated by Gillespie himself, and exhibit 13 chronicled Westbank's (failed) fight for Vancouver House 2 (arguably the stage left curtain for those who might see Vancouver House from the vantage point of a performer standing on the downtown stage and performing for those beyond the bridges). Strolling through the architectural models and listening to the Fazioli, attendees were dazzled by a sculptural glass forest by Omer Arbel, Martin Boyce's suspended lanterns from the Telus Garden project, reproductions of works by Stan Douglas, Douglas Coupland, and an original poem by Shane Koyczan. In the foreword to the 620 page exhibition book (which cost \$260) Bjarke Ingels conjured the patrons of Gaudi and Le Corbusier in an effort to place Westbank's *Fight* in a historical context: "some of the greatest paradigm-changing works of architecture have happened at the encounter between an architect with a vision and a patron with a mission" (*Fight* 5).



**Figure 17 (Chapter 6.6) Westbank's *Fight For Beauty* Exhibit, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

One of the outcomes of Westbank's blanketing of the city with their signature magenta advertising campaign for *Fight for Beauty* was that the event was met with significant negative criticism. Housing and arts advocate Melody Ma created a satirical digital exhibition called *The Real Fight for Beauty* that accused Westbank of being "not a culture company, but a culture displacing one" (Ma, "Blog") and profiled community activists and artists that have risen up against development initiatives. Ma and her collaborators rewrote Cristovao's poem: "Since when have we learned the price of beauty is set by how much money a company can throw at a self-curated exhibition about an empty fight for nothing but cash?" (Ma, "Overview") On 16 December 2017 a coalition of artists, activists and community members organized a protest outside of the Westbank exhibit, carrying magenta signs that read, "Beauty is Class War," "Violence Masquerading as Benevolence," and "Westbank is Evil" (Woodward's). They followed it with an alternative tour of sites around the exhibition space. The rallying cry of the fight against *Fight* was "artwashing": "co-opting the arts and culture to market luxury condos" (Zeidler) and the "attempt to rebrand gentrification and displacement as an art practice" (Woodward's). For them, the exhibition framed its "artworks as the spoils of victory" over government and community opposition (Woodward's), and propagated a false narrative of championing culture "while artists are being economically and physically displaced" by the impact that Westbank's developments have had on the city (Ma, "Overview").

## **6.7 Translucent Wealth**

How responsible are Gillespie and Westbank for Vancouver's affordability crisis? Some would say very. Prices at the yet to be built Bing Thom designed "Butterfly" downtown start at a million dollars for 500 square feet (Ebner). A 20 October 2017 Postmedia article appeared in *The*

*Vancouver Sun* in which Joanne Lee-Young reported that at a meeting of Vancouver developers, Urban Analytics partner Michael Ferreira called out Westbank for predatory pricing at their East Vancouver Joyce building, a low-income neighborhood near a skytrain station. The article later disappeared from all Postmedia online sources, though Melody Ma posted a screen shot on the *Real Fight for Beauty* site, accusing Westbank of pressuring the media outlet (Ma, “Blog”). In June 2018, further criticism arose when local housing activist Rohana Rezel published in English some of the contents of Westbank’s Chinese website promoting their high end real estate seminars at five-star hotels in Asia: “It describes potential attendees as immigrants and would-be-immigrants to Canada including ‘high-net-worth persons’ seeking ‘globally optimized asset allocation.’ It notes that ‘over 35 per cent of billionaires have already bought property in Canada’” (I. Young). After the resulting online furor, Westbank temporarily blocked Canadian IP addresses from their Chinese website and revised some of the content (Cheung), though the company has never hidden their pursuit of wealthy Asian clientele. Westbank employee Michael Braun wrote in *Building Artistry*, “if the Chinese market doesn’t want it, I have no interest in it” (262) and detailed their coordinated line of services offered through their Asian operations office, which includes immigration, banking, and property maintenance presumably to care for empty suites (260). A February 2018 article in *The Globe and Mail* profiled a reporter sent into a seminar in an Asian city who described being encouraged to “shadow flip,” a term which refers to the practice of buying suites as speculative investments and then flipping them before the building completes, thereby dodging some taxes (Gold, “Vancouver”). Trevor Boddy predicts that soon condos in cities like Vancouver, “will be traded on stock exchanges like commodities” with ever more suites sitting empty (“Last” 21). The translucent wealth of the city of glass thus



circulates, generating a bizarre rift in the city's materialist unconscious between the vacant built environment and embodied life on the street.

In David Ley's profile of the mechanisms used by Vancouver real estate companies to woo the Asian market, Westbank's tactics are nothing out of the ordinary (*Global* 23-25). Answering the critique of his business model, Gillespie points to the word "foreign" in much of the discourse, asserting that "there is an element of racism, or at least xenophobia involved" (*Fight* 397).<sup>28</sup> Former city planner Brent Toderian has said that Gillespie "does himself a disservice by drawing more attention to his expensive projects, when his projects in the other direction are some of the most interesting in our city" (Tanner). These include the social housing component of Woodward's and the 2012 development at 60 West Cordova (*Fight* 407). As part of *Fight for Beauty*, Gillespie said, "our success in the luxury market creates a greater responsibility to help address the affordability problem" (*Fight* 19) and named his company as "one of the larger affordable housing providers in the City" (396). The Vancouver House project partnered with the Home for Home program, which creates a humble abode for a family in a developing nation for each condo sold (Boddy, "Curatorial" 12). As well, Westbank pioneered the Local First initiative that gives locals the first thirty days of a pre-sales marketing campaign to buy into a property, which is now being replicated by other developers and municipalities (Gold "Vancouver", Cheung). In 2018, Westbank launched the not-for-profit Creative Housing Society and, convinced that added density will solve affordability, made a commitment to

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<sup>28</sup> Geographer David Ley has addressed the racist connotations of anti-foreign buyer movement. He reframes the conflict as being about class and wealth inequity, pointing out that Chinese-Canadians are equally hit with affordability problems and that many local affordable housing advocates are Chinese-Canadians (qtd. in Gold "Growth").

develop and own 8,000 rental properties in four cities in the next five years. Their courting of the federal government for support through Creative Housing drew ire: advocate Rezel proclaimed, “Giving Ian Gillespie tax dollars to the fix the housing crisis would be like giving a fentanyl dealer public money to buy Naxalone kits to sell back to his clients” (Rezel).

If Gillespie built his fortune in Asia, his next target appears to be the tech sector and its attendant cultural industries. “By creating spaces that appeal to technology and digital innovators” Westbank wants to “make a significant contribution to the growth of Vancouver’s creative economy” (*Fight 23*). In this language, as well as in the names of his affiliated organizations Creative Energy and Creative Housing Society, Gillespie positions himself as an all-in acolyte of urban studies theorist Richard Florida. Florida’s theories assert that cities with high concentrations of a “creative class”: technology workers, artists, and LGBTQ individuals, show higher levels of economic development, therefore regions that want to regenerate and prosper should focus on attracting populations of this kind (*Rise, Cities*). Numerous scholars have challenged Florida’s data, methods, and ideology (Glaeser, Peck, “Struggling”). Nevertheless, his ideas have significantly impacted business management and civic government policies in the last fifteen years. Westbank’s performance of the Creative City script, through its adoption of creativity as a concept and as nomenclature, is indebted to Florida, but also tells of its engagement with select high profile Vancouver artists as chronicled in *Fight for Beauty* and engendered by COV planning protocols.

Gillespie’s fascination with creativity is a legacy of the imperatives of civic bylaws that mandate public art components in new buildings. Vancouver was a leader in initiating public art policies, which *Fight for Beauty* traces back to 1980s mayor and former property developer Gordon Campbell (later premier of BC) (*Fight 203*). Solving the need to get art into urban plans,

Vancouver now mandates that structures over 100,000 square feet contribute \$1.95 per square foot towards public art (*Fight* 203). Gillespie grew enamoured with the artistic process while working on projects such as Stan Douglas's monumental photomural *Abbott & Cordova*, 7 August 1971 for the Woodward's site. Art practice has now become such a large part of Westbank's interests that they have a dedicated public art team and their massive five billion-dollar Oakridge development has an 8.2 million-dollar public art budget (Tanner). Summoning powerful historical art patrons such as the Medicis, Gillespie acknowledges that the "history of public art rests heavily in the ego" (*Fight* 202) but encourages other developers to get "out of their risk-averse decorative box" (204). Indeed, Westbank has been lauded for, and attracted high-caliber visual art collaborators by, not shying away from difficult or troubling public art. A case in point is Reece Terris's *Triumph of the Technocrat*, the featured artwork at Westbank's building The Lauren on Broughton Street in the West End. Constructed entirely from reclaimed wooden girders salvaged from the demolished St. John's Church, the previous building on the site, the piece self-reflexively critiques its own emergence, referencing the triumph of development over the substantial community resistance to the new building's height, shadowing, and lack of community consultation (Richardson).

## **6.8 PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS 3: *Spinning Chandelier***

The Vancouver House development's featured public artwork grows out of Westbank's desire to create a whole new neighborhood with iconic status for Vancouver. Under the bridge, Ingels and Gillespie have designed "an updated sibling to beloved sister place Granville Island, across False Creek," with shopping, dining, and public events imagined as shielded from potential rain by the bridge frame (Boddy, *Gesamtkunstwerk* 34). As well, the COV is renovating

the bridge to create more space for pedestrians and cyclists, adding an elevator to Granville Island that will further connect the two under-bridge spaces (Lee). Affixed to Vancouver House's bridge underside will be "light boxes" framing large backlit photographic transparencies inspired by the work of Jeff Wall and Rodney Graham, creating a "21<sup>st</sup> century Sistine Chapel" of the nighttime under-bridge streetscape (Boddy, *Gesamtkunstwerk* 41). The central focus of this new kind of urban performance is Rodney Graham's *Spinning Chandelier*, for which the COV waived their bylaw proviso demanding an open submission process and allowed Westbank to sole source their artist/artwork (Gillespie, *Fight* 204). Graham's piece builds on his 2005 film loop of an eighteenth-century French chandelier titled *Torqued Chandelier Release*, but the Vancouver House kinetic recreation is materially manifested of stainless steel, LED lamps, over 600 polyurethane "crystals," and measures 14 feet by 25.5 feet (Westbank, "Join"). Twice a day (currently at noon and 9pm) it lowers, illuminates and spins, and then ascends back to its starting point. Vancouver curator Reid Shier has described it as "the new 'Nine O'Clock Gun'"<sup>29</sup> – the gift of an extraordinary new urban ritual" (Boddy, *Gesamtkunstwerk* 40). Peter Dickinson has noted how *Spinning Chandelier*'s "highly visual symbol of gilded interior domesticity annexes the bridge as an extended private portico for the residents" of Vancouver House ("Vancouverism" 40). The scale of the work also suggests non-domestic public space, such as the chandelier-lit, ornate, indoor theatres prominent from the Renaissance to the Restoration.

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<sup>29</sup> The Nine O'Clock Gun is a naval cannon brought to Stanley Park in 1894 to warn fishermen of the 6pm Sunday close of fishing. In 1898 it was moved to Stanley Park and the 9pm firing was later established as a time signal for the general population and to allow the chronometers of ships in port to be accurately set. The gun was restored and sheltered by a new pavilion designed by architect Gregory Henriquez in 1986, and since 2012 has had its own Twitter parody account through which it tweets "BOOM!" every day at 9pm PST ("Vancouver's Nine").

On 27 November 2019, Graham's artwork was first unveiled to the Vancouver public. Citizens were summoned by email and through press coverage for 6:30pm and offered a live band and food trucks as a way of previewing what the new under-bridge neighborhood life might sound and taste like. The requisite speeches that accompany unveilings began with Eric Frederickson, Vancouver's new Public Art Program Manager who made it clear that Westbank (and not the COV) had commissioned and paid for the entire work. Though he did not mention its price tag, press relayed that the cost of the project had ballooned from an expected 1.2 million to 4.8 million (Griffin). Gillespie followed at the microphone, noting that *Spinning Chandelier* was Westbank's fifty-sixth work of public art and apologizing to neighbors for the prolonged multi-year construction disturbance. Mayor Kennedy Stewart's enthusiastic speech echoed press releases which continually described Graham's piece as an unprecedented work of major significance: "the most important piece of public art in the history of our city" (qtd. in Quan, Westbank, "Spinning"). Introducing his work, Rodney Graham thanked Sir Isaac Newton, "who proposed an experiment in support of his theory that absolute space is the reference of all motion" ("Unveiling"). Newton, he explained, had suspended a bucket half-filled with water from a coiled rope and let it unwind, inspiring Graham's contemporary kinetic experiments. Post-speeches, the massive, dim chandelier slowly descended from the bridge belly which was bathed in purple light. Over the heads of hundreds of gathered spectators, its LED illumination faded up on a three count and the purple background disappeared. After a pause the chandelier began to rotate, slowly picking up speed until its "crystals" floated upward, suspended airborne by the spinning motion, "like a flared wedding dress" (Quan). Light from the LED candles reflected off the faux crystal surfaces, bouncing shards of light around the entire structure. The sculpture spun for a minute and forty seconds before beginning its ascent, going dim once it

reached its resting height, and fading into the purple-washed bridged concrete again. The entire performance took about three minutes.



**Figure 18 (Chapter 6.8) Rodney Graham's *Spinning Chandelier*, Photo by Katrina Dunn**

Unlike the auditory urban ritual of the Nine O’Clock Gun that reverberates through much of the city, *Spinning Chandelier* is a visual experience. It requires proximity and prolonged focus and in this way is perhaps more akin to the Gastown Steam Clock in its requirement of a gathered audience.<sup>30</sup> Like the Steam Clock, it may prove effective as a tourist experience. The audience is required to look up to receive it, hence the “21<sup>st</sup> century Sistine Chapel” reference. In *The Vancouver Sun*, the COV’s Public Art Program Manager Eric Frederickson said: “I’m going to mix my metaphors because you don’t put a crystal chandelier in a cathedral .... Once the chandelier is tucked up under in its raised position it really turns that whole underside into a kind of beautiful structural neo-gothic form” (qtd. in Griffin). As with the Chapel, there are strong religious overtones in the reception experience that summon awe and suggest a restorative ceremony achieved by interfacing with artistically-crafted materials animated by the unknowable. Here the unknowable is no kind of god, but instead Newton’s imperceptible absolute space, the stage setting for all physical events, as well as the “neoliberal fantasy of the city as pure exchange value” (Mitchell 44): the realm of financialization where investors and developers execute wondrous transmogrifications between the material and immaterial realms. Like a theatrical *deus ex machina*, *Spinning Chandelier* is both stage machinery, lowering a fantastical spectacle from *the gods* (also a term for the fly gallery in the theatre), and plot device,

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<sup>30</sup> The Gastown Steam Clock is a steam-powered clock on the corner of Cambie and Water Street in Gastown, a part of Vancouver’s downtown. It was built in 1977 as part of a COV initiative to market Gastown as a heritage site for tourism after plans for a freeway through the area were rejected. It was also designed to cover a steam grate, part of Vancouver’s distributed steam heating system (now owned by Westbank as Creative Energy), as a way to harness the steam and to prevent the homeless from sleeping on the spot in cold weather (Robertson). The clock displays the time on four faces, produces a puff of steam from its top on the hour, and announces the quarter hours (and Gastown’s continued fixation on its colonial history) with a whistle chime that plays the Westminster Quarters, also used by London’s “Big Ben” (Nanji).

attempting to offer a satisfying resolution to the seemingly unsolvable predicaments set in motion by the strains of its drama. While it may succeed as spectacle, it will likely not offer a salve to the many civic wounds that Vancouver House aggravates.

Much of the media response to the chandelier's first public performance highlighted stark contrasts. The focus was on the work's price tag and much of the discourse unfortunately echoed familiar objections to new public artworks; that money used to create art is a waste and could be better spent elsewhere (Quan, Little, Griffin, Migdal, Lederman). Though a few critics were as dazzled as the audience that gathered for the event: "They whooped, applauded and posted selfies" (Lederman, "Vancouver"), many struggled to read and process this highly-charged symbol of opulence intentionally placed in a historically industrial area where the homeless have often sought refuge under the bridge. Alex Migdal of the CBC described it as "Versailles-like," and Douglas Quan in *The National Post* called it, "tone deaf in its excess, a middle finger of sorts to the city's affordability travails." Addressing some of the negativity in post-event interviews, Eric Frederickson admitted that the work might be seen by some as an "absurd gesture of grandeur" (qtd. in Quan) and that the artist was not necessarily considering the "social implications" of the work, "But they are now and I think they'll be part of the reading of the piece .... I'm curious as to how that conversation will play out over time" (qtd. in Migdal). Some placed the blame for the work's socio-economic insensitivity squarely on Gillespie. On Twitter, Vancouver School Board trustee Carrie Bercic called the piece evidence of, "shameless self-promotion and gentrification from a 'luxury' developer that only cares about money" (qtd. in Little). However, as a component of the Vancouver House development where a three-bedroom unit is listed at \$6.9 million (Migdal), a \$4 million chandelier may not seem that out of line. It is, in fact, symptomatic of the fierce geopathology that, in the whirl of its maelstrom, changes even



the most derelict of spaces into an engine of wealth for the rich and then offers it a label of “a total work of art.” In a twice daily hypnotic performance by the *Spinning Chandelier*, visitors and citizens of Vancouver will receive their small dose of luxury and excess and through this enticement, perhaps remember to agree and cooperate.

## 6.9 Conclusion

Richard Wagner wrote that the artwork of the future “forgets the confines of the auditorium and lives and breathes now only in the artwork which seems to it as Life itself, and on the stage which seems the wide expanse of the whole world” (76). Dimming the lights on the surrounding rabble, Vancouver House creates of the downtown a diegetic space-world unto itself: “a mimetic stage space built with a geometrical centre and a clear vanishing point in mind” (Solga *Theory* 25, Aaronson 88-89). The geometric guides are the city’s famous view corridors, described by Beasley as themselves “an important public amenity” (261), and the vanishing point is the mountain view that completes the enthralling picture (see Figure 4 Map of Vancouver's View Corridors). Interrogating how dramatic illusion cajoles us into accepting its fictions, Kim Solga encourages us to “think critically about how the city is staged for us, whose lives it values” (*Theory* 44). The view corridors are theatre in themselves, but they remind us, as does Vancouver House, that the city as an entity is “unclaimed/unclaimable by its citizens” (Kaika 977). Awash in the entertainment of “Vancouver’s emerging lifestyle myth” (Berlowitz 106) spectators/citizens risk losing sight of the mimetic gap, accepting the performance as truth. Most illusions, however, are imperfect. Westbank maintains that the curtain metaphor works in either direction – coming or going from downtown. However, the tower’s twisting form is much more

drape-like from the downtown side: the curtain opens for the exit from downtown and the wide world awaits those fleeing the increasingly impossible task of subsisting in Vancouver.

Juliet Rufford suggests that “when we build new architectural forms - we determine the sorts of organisms we will be” (84). Buildings, from this perspective, can be read as performing civic futures. The case of Vancouver House suggests a theatrical future, shaped by Westbank, where every facet of experience is configured as part and parcel of a total work of art. As Kim Solga suggests, “Architecture dreams a clean dream, but embeds the power of the messy, miraculous, intersubjective body” (“Line” 23). Thus, though some of Westbank’s intentions for the activation of the site are likely to be very successful, the economic usefulness of empty suites will undoubtedly have an impact on the patterns of civic human use. Condominiums cross-programmed as speculative investments have already demonstrated their negative cultural and political outcomes, yet Gillespie continues to argue for increased density (more units) rather than regulation (curtailing empty suites) as a panacea for a multitude of civic woes (*Building 459, Fight 20*, 398). The continuation of this pattern points to more empty dwellings to complement the empty theatres that have given over their performative power and stock of props to the fight for riches.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

McKinnie, in his work on the development of Toronto's cultural district in *City Stages*, states that "theatre-building in Toronto affirms the centrality of downtown - as both a physical and imaginary space – in creating a sense of civic well-being .... theatre building offers an ideal of civic accord that compensates for the anxieties of economic change" (29). As I suggested in the introduction, my work in this study confirms McKinnie's warning about the ecological fallacy of transposing his particular findings beyond Toronto's limits and using them to make national arguments (135). Theatre-building in Vancouver does *not* "affirm the centrality of downtown," nor has it compensated for the "anxieties of economic change." Instead, the massive economic changes that have animated the region have left theatre buildings adrift in an ocean of residence-based wealth. As the examples I have offered here demonstrate, this wealth has sometimes co-opted theatre's cultural signifiers to use for its own purposes. Instead of leveraging large theatre buildings to affirm its centrality, downtown in the period that I look at in this study, has always been geopathologically toxic. The source of the toxin has varied in ways that reflect the difficulties of the development of Vancouver at different points in the city's history. The city's most successful large theatre, the Arts Club Theatre Company, abandoned its connections to downtown in 1991 ("Original") and has thrived off the downtown peninsula in multiple locations (see Footnote 1). Similar to the pattern of involution described in Peck, Siemiatycki, and Wyly's "Vancouver's Suburban Involution," which notes the replacement of a culture of downtown business with a suburban-like residence economy, large theatre has disappeared from the downtown - its houses left empty or repurposed.

My three case studies narrate this disappearance and repurposing. The Queen Elizabeth complex did help to play a role in the reinstatement of Vancouver's downtown as a cultural and

retail centre in the 1960s and offered some hope for support, growth, and sustainability among the emerging professional arts scene. However, at a time of emerging cultural nationalism, the venue maintained a grip on Canada's historical colonial status and manifested a troubling control over access to space and resources that alienated producing theatre artists from the theatre building, especially in the case of the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company's residency in the Vancouver Playhouse side of the complex. The company's attempts to operate without the building infrastructure possessed by most regional theatres prevented it from succeeding and marshalling its artistic successes to increase its stability. Instead the company subsisted in a dislocated state, uncomfortably navigating its ontological paradox – trapped architecturally and, ultimately, failing.

The theatre constructed at 777 Homer Street in 1995 has gone by three different names, each characterizing a different era in the leadership and focus of activity in the building. The remarkable connections between the three groups that have shaped, owned and produced work there are their unrelenting missionary zeal and their transnational ties. Garth Drabinsky stopped at nothing to create a commercial theatre empire with his company Livent, of which his Ford Centre for the Performing Arts was a significant asset. Attempting to capitalize on the economic boon that Expo 86 promised, instead his theatre closed after only three years after having grossly overestimated the appetite for commercial musicals in Vancouver, and immersed in one of the most outrageous financial scandals of the contemporary performing arts. Next, charismatic transnational figure Dennis Law of Four Brothers Entertainment drained a substantial amount of his personal fortune on a programming mission that admirably sought to create a nexus of intercultural theatre in the city by blending the European-Canadian and Asian-Canadian communities via a similar aesthetic blend in his own work. He also grossly overestimated the

audience appetite for this experiment, and his reign was characterized by long periods where the theatre space sat empty. Norm Funk cited a calling from God to plant Westside Church in the building and grow it enormously in the space of ten years. Engaging a financial and worship model promoted by a highly successful American-based evangelical superstructure, the activities at 777 Homer have finally found some stability.

In some ways, the developer Westbank has filled the vacuum of theatrical activity that the losses and absences of the VPTC and The Centre have created, as evidenced by a sequence of events in 2012/13. The VPTC closed its doors amidst grief and outcry from the theatre community on 9 March 2012. In May 2013, the Centre in Vancouver for the Performing Arts was sold to Westside Church, ceasing its life as a producing theatre venue. In late 2013 the word “gesamtkunstwerk” mysteriously appeared, visible from the ramps of the downtown side of the Granville Street Bridge, written in neon on the side of a mini storage building. It announced the impending construction on the site of Vancouver House; a massive tower and podium condominium complex designed by Danish architect Bjarke Ingels based on the concept of gesamtkunstwerk and driven by theatrical metaphors. Announcing itself spectacularly as a total work of art, Vancouver House frames the downtown space theatrically. It also offers another act in the city’s real estate drama as it prompts some to arrive and others to leave due to affordability. Part of a merging of art practice with real estate development that has come to characterize Westbank, the critique of the economic and social malady gripping downtown (what I have called its geopathology) has found a new focus in the theatricality of Vancouver House’s public artwork *Spinning Chandelier*.

This study has developed in response to five primary research questions, two of which interrogate the urban context. The first of these asked how large-scale theatrical sites in

Vancouver's downtown core reflected the economic flows of capital and property in the city since 1945, given that all urban structures are part of an economic and social matrix unique to its period of genesis. Embedding the buildings in their respective economic and social contexts has been a significant part of my work, and I believe it is what constitutes the major contribution of this thesis. Each building is deeply reflective of its economic and social matrices though, as we can see from Chapters 4 and 5, that does not mean that these large-scale theatrical sites have thrived. In these cases, it means that they were either constructed on shaky financial and social foundations, or that the organizations and individuals controlling them had conflicting agendas that did not create a hospitable environment for producing artists.

What is revealed, another of the five main research questions asked, when we read these Vancouver buildings as performing theatrically within their specific urban context? This line of inquiry prompted the material performance analyses that I developed to accompany each case study. It also, however, helped me to understand the various public controversies and activist initiatives that erupted around the sites at various points in their histories. These controversies and activist events include the early rebellion of VPTC members against the control of VCT, the demonstrations after the company's closing (Chapter 4), the *Show Boat* protests, the collapse and litigation of Livent, Dennis Law's battle with the media (Chapter 5), and Melody Ma's organized activist campaign against Westbank's artwashing (Chapter 6). These public controversies and activist performances belie spaces of large-scale performance that sit uncomfortably in their urban context.

The remaining three guiding research questions focused on the recurring themes in the dramas of these buildings' histories and in the performances they have housed. In one direction I was interested in uncovering instances wherein the buildings' leaders failed to achieve their

stated aims and I sought to understand how those failures developed in relation to the space's conceptual, financial, legal, administrative, ethical, and artistic dimensions. In another direction, I asked how these unsuccessful ventures impacted their urban and cultural landscape. Of the numerous connecting points that emerge in the three case studies, the strongest recurring theme seems to be the desire to use a building to birth or solidify a "real city" or "world city" status for Vancouver (Susan Bennett narrates a similar drive in Calgary, and McKinnie in Toronto) (Bennett "Calgary's", McKinnie *City*). Each building's leadership has explicitly set the stage to do something remarkable and unprecedented. The Queen Elizabeth complex was exceptional in its size and in the architectural statement it made by imitating an important London performing arts space. The Ford Theatre for the Performing Arts stunned, again, with the size of its stage, but also by being built by a private entity, thus attempting to fold Vancouver into the economy of the Broadway musical. With Vancouver House's bold architecture and under-bridge neighbourhood/theatre Westbank is promoting a take on urban design that, arguably, brings world class, iconic architecture to the bland wash of Vancouverism's towers. While the precise contributions of these three buildings to Vancouver's shifting global status is debatable, it is very clear that Vancouver has succeeded remarkably at achieving world city status, though some of the notoriety associated with that achievement is negative and has come at a great cost.

I hope the research in this thesis will not only to contribute to the growing academic conversation on Theatre and the City and Theatre and Real Estate, but also encourage scholars to think of Vancouver as a major site of interest and study within these fields. Though a strength of this work is its geographical focus on the downtown, it is also, of course, a weakness. A clearer picture of the built environment of Vancouver theatre would surely be delivered with a larger geographical remit that would also take into account areas where theatre spaces have been

sustainable and even thrived. Future studies might focus on the unique theatre district that is Granville Island, the distinct urban contexts of all three of the Arts Club Theatre Company's venues, or on the housing of vital performance venues within community cultural centres, such as Studio 16 at La Maison de la Francophonie de Vancouver, or the performing space at the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre. My study also aims to give practitioners and venue managers more tools and language with which to address the significant challenge of rooting artistic creation in the city's built environment and may prove useful in future versions of cultural policy attempting to promote the healthy interface of cultural space and real estate in the city. While my select analyses of performance for each building offer glimpses of their performative output, more fulsome studies that focus purely on creative legacies will no doubt yield valuable insights for thinking further about these sites, especially the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company. Strong archival holdings and the recent memory of many of the prime players asks for a critical retrospective that might heal some of the anger associated with the dissolution and bring some of the company's achievements into the future.

The dislocations that have characterized the history of Vancouver's downtown (see Chapter 3 A Short History of Vancouver's Downtown) (Blomley), have made it spatially unstable. Following Una Chaudhuri and Joanne Tompkins, I have labelled this instability geopathology, defined by Kim Solga as "*a disease of place and space*" (italics in original, *Theory* 65), and pointed to both the roots and consequences of this structural disorder. All three of my case studies are symptomatic of the theatrical manifestations of the geopathology of downtown; the first two being cases of failure to thrive, and the third one of a hybrid outgrowth. Vancouver House can be explored as an adaptive workaround that, in the absence of other downtown theatre outlets, invokes theatrical language to interface with the heart of the city. In



*Seeing Like a City*, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift describe cities as living organisms in ways that would support this reading. Fluid and dynamic relational constructions are the circulatory system of the urban network in the shaping of social and cultural life, the dividing of resources, and the creation of order. "Seeing like a city," as they suggest, is a mimetic activity and means borrowing from theatre practice not only to increase understanding of the dense complexities of urban life, but also, in the case of Vancouver's downtown, to self-diagnose in an attempt to bring some medicine to the places that most require it.

The body scan one might undertake when seeing like Vancouver would certainly note the absence of large-scale, locally-produced theatre in the neighborhood of downtown. Marvin Carlson, in *Places of Performance*, details how theatre buildings are a constant in the Western city from antiquity to the present day. He insists that this is a marker of theatre's exceptional ability to accommodate itself to the transformations of cities. The evolution of performing spaces through various eras can be read as map of the theatre's accommodation to the political, social, philosophical, and economic form of cities (*Places* 14-36). It is troubling to consider that the political, social, philosophical, and economic form of Vancouver may have reached a point where theatre and the theatre building cannot adapt to it, at least not in the central downtown area - traditionally where theatres have been housed in Western cities. It might also be the case that the uptake of theatre concepts and imagery into the transnational residential real estate exchange *is* the adaptation. If this is true, then there is cause to worry about the type of performative offerings of which this adapted form of theatre is capable. If *Spinning Chandelier* is any indication, those offerings may be limited to spectacular celebrations of wealth and excess.

The civic-wide discussion that accompanied the reception of *Spinning Chandelier* suggest that it might represent a tipping point of what the citizenry is willing to tolerate as a

representation of its city and its city's value system. Two weeks after the unveiling, Vancouver City Council announced a \$14 million park design at Richards and Smithe downtown that features futuristic elevated ramps, conceptual art playground elements, overhead sky frames and a café structure. Significantly, \$8 million of the funding comes from the community amenity contributions of a Westbank project, the nearby Telus Garden, which was completed in 2015 (McElroy). While much of the City Council seemed to think the expense was exorbitant and some of the design features over the top, they were concerned that a redesign would raise the cost even more and passed it for that reason. Their comments to the media suggest an oversaturation of wealth and beauty. Councillor Jean Swanson said, "I don't need a chandelier-type park" (qtd. in McElroy). If the chandelier becomes a metaphor for a moment when the city was truly spinning out of control, perhaps there is a chance that it may also be the harbinger of a deceleration that will see the city work towards developing with more balance and care. Perhaps this will also allow a reinvigoration or a reclaiming of downtown and some of its building structures as sites for emplaced large-scale production and performance of theatre.

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