THE 'MONSTER' HOUSE REVISITED

Race and Representations of Urban Change in Vancouver

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ADVANCED STUDIES IN ARCHITECTURE

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

School of Architecture

We accept this thesis as conforming

to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September 1998

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The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date SEPTEMBER 15th, 1998

DE-6 (2/88)

ABSTRACT

In the last 15 years, urban change in Vancouver, British Columbia, has been broadly understood in racial terms. Media and academic treatments of landscape transformation have suggested that Vancouver, as a 'gateway city' to the Pacific Rim, will inevitably experience Asian-lead change, economism, and 'creative destruction'. Oppositely, white Canadians are often portrayed as the defenders of tradition, the environment, and Vancouver 'as is'. The epithet 'monster' house, used to describe large, new, and predominantly Chinese-owned houses in Vancouver's elite Anglo neighborhoods, evidences how built form has been strongly correlated with the concepts of race and culture in popular representations of landscape. This thesis problematizes these essentialist, race-driven narratives by examining the ways in which textual representations of urban change are embedded within existing relations of power, particularly taken-for-granted subject-object looking relations.

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Many thanks to Professor Sherry McKay

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INTRODUCTION

1997

Vancouver's past and its future [are] in collision as the old laid-back, nature-worshipping, European values confront massive, urbanized, Asian-propelled change.

Daniel Wood
Vancouver : The Art of Selling Air and Other West Coast Tales

1885

The Chinese character is of a fixed, persistent type, alien, beyond any control or chance of change, to everything that concerns Western civilization... [There are] two kinds of civilization, the one modern and West and the other ancient and East.

G. Sproat
Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration

The Chinaman is in every respect the reverse of a European except that he is a man.

Chief Justice Matthew Begbie
Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration

The epigrams are separated by more than 100 years and appeal to the distinct 'common sense' of their day. The words written in 1997 would have seemed laughable in 1885; the words said in 1885 would be met with contempt today. After all, the history of the relationship betweeen geography and race[1] has been a history of change. Baseless

[1] I will not use the cumbersome convention that some authors have adopted of using single quotation marks around the word *race*. I accept that the term is problematic and has been defined in various, sometimes conflicting ways. My awareness of the unstable and contested meaning of the term is

assumptions of biological race and racial hierarchy have been replaced by a myriad of reformulations, most notably the social construction of race. The clear inversion of who is 'ancient' and who is 'modern' in the quotations above, and the more nuanced shifts in the style and tone of writing, speak to the ideological distance that has been traveled in little over a century. But perhaps what is most strikingly evoked by the quotations is not a sense of change, but a feeling of stasis—that beyond the inversions, academic re-theorizations, and shifts in 'common sense', Chinese people and Europeans on the west coast of Canada have always been, and continue to be, defined in distinct and oppositional terms. Even the policies of multiculturalism enacted by the Canadian government since the 1970s have done little to dismantle the fundamental premise of racial difference. In fact, official multiculturalism has inadvertently continued to reproduce and strengthen the

> targeting [of minority groups] in both a semiotic and political sense... as long as the classification "Chinese" was given new forms of currency within the European community, cultural relativism could give way to classical forms of wielding outsider status.[1]

This targeting has continued to the present. In Vancouver, supposedly Canada's most racially tolerant city,[2] re-worked racial discourses have furthered the historic description of East and West as "two solitudes."[3]

The decade from the mid-1980s to the mid 1990s was a period of relative economic prosperity in Vancouver, British Columbia. It was also, however, a time of tremendous social unease and discontent. The period was marked by substantial changes to the built environment, exemplified by the transformation of the industrial lands around False Creek

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noted here, and will not be noted through the repeated use of quotation marks. Contrast this approach with Alastair Bonnett, *Radicalism, Anti-Racism, and Representation* (London : Routledge, 1993) 6.

[1] Kay Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown : Racial discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal & Kingston : McGill-Queens Press, 1991) 239.

[2] Ian Mulgrew, "Vancouver is Canada's most racially tolerant city," *Vancouver Sun* 6 October, 1997 : A1.

[3] Peter C. Newman, "Two Solitudes," *Vancouver Magazine* December 1992 : 26.

into the site of the 1986 World's Exposition. The fair was an invitation to international investment and tourism—an invitation that was widely accepted over the next ten years as Vancouver's identity shifted from a 'village on the edge of the rain forest' to a 'world-class city'.[1] One of the catalysts for the city's growing cosmopolitanism was its increasing ties with Pacific Rim nations. The latest economic boom cycle represented a period of unprecedented Asian immigration and capital flow to Vancouver. Consequently, much of the vocabulary, imagery, and scholarship on urban change in Vancouver became rooted in a discourse of racial difference. Popular wisdom suggested that Vancouver's Anglo-dominated past was destined to be subsumed by an Asian-led future. Asian money and culture were, quite simply, going to re-make the city.[2] Given this broad narrative, resistance and resentment against social and material changes in the city were often directed at those of Asian (especially Chinese) origin.[3] In particular, the construction of large, non-traditionally styled 'monster' houses in established Anglophile neighborhoods was a lighting rod for social debate (figure 1). In older elite neighbourhoods on Vancouver's west side such as Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale, many longer-established residents protested vehemently against the 'unneighborliness' of the new houses, which had become strongly associated with new Chinese immigrant owners. The protestors accused 'monster' houses of blocking existing views and sunlight, intruding upon the privacy of adjacent properties, and destroying traditional streetscapes through improperly-scaled and unsympathetic redevelopment. Some protestors even suggested that 'monster' houses were eroding Canadian heritage and threatening the 'Canadian way of life'.

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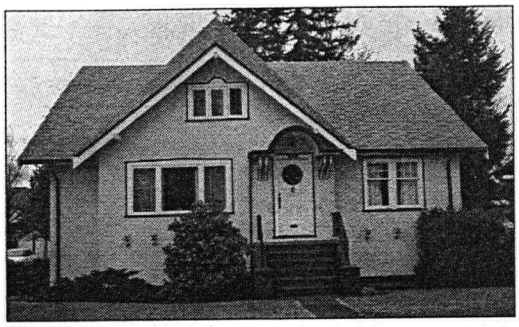
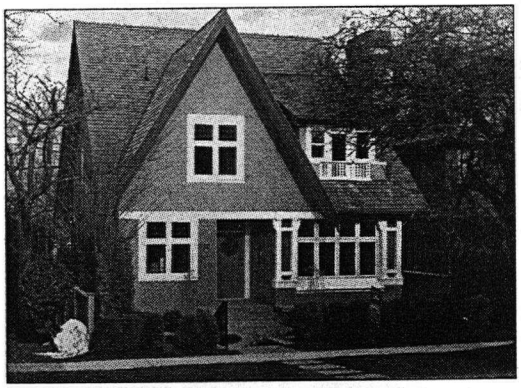
[1] David Ley, D. Hiebert, and G. Pratt, "Time to grow up? From urban village to world city," *Vancouver and its Region*, eds. G. Wynn and T. Oke (Vancouver : University of British Columbia Press, 1992).

[2] Vancouver has already been pejoratively dubbed 'Hongcouver' by some.

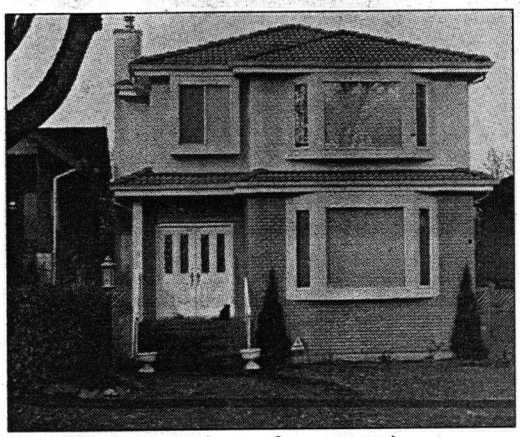
[3] In a 1992 *Vancouver Magazine* poll entitled "What you like least about Vancouver," the top three responses were (1) worsening traffic (2) The Asian gang threat (3) Monster houses. It is astonishing that two of the top three responses have such a clear racial association, and given the pervasive social myth that Chinese people are categorically the worst drivers and supposedly accident-prone (therefore worsening traffic), it is possible to read a racial allusion into all three top responses (I will demonstrate the racial association of the 'monster' house in this thesis). Judging from my own personal perspective, 1992 was at or near the height of local anti-Chinese sentiment. Anonymous, "Best and Worst," *Vancouver Magazine* September, 1992 : 50.



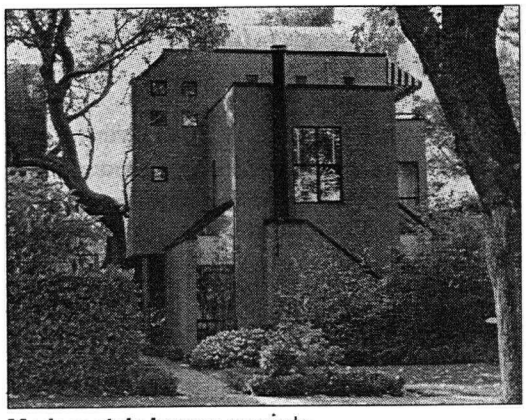
Older house: example



RS-5 house, full design review: example



RS-1 house, no design review: example



Modern style house: example

Figure 1 *- Contrast of housing styles : the 'monster' house is the "RS-1 house, no design review."*

Source : "Dunbar Community Visions" City of Vancouver, 1998.

The epithet 'monster house', a double entendre refering explicitly to built form but implicitly to the inhabitants within, gained popular currency through Vancouver's Caucasian-dominated media, which was initially sympathetic to the concerns of the protestors.[1] While news reports did become less partisan, representations of urban change in Vancouver became firmly grounded in a narrative of racial and cultural conflict. The discourse on the built environment, tainted by historically habituated ways of seeing structured within pre-existing relations of power, resurrected phenotypic distinctions between individuals as meaningful signifiers of difference. *Whiteness* and *Chineseness* were reinscribed as oppositional categories within the broader historic process of racialization unique to the west coast of Canada. As the urban change debate developed, racial categories increasingly became conflated with landscape ideologies : Chineseness came to be associated with 'monster' houses, urban development and "creative destruction,"[2] while whiteness signified controlled-growth and preservation.

My thesis interrogates and problematizes this race-driven narrative. I will reveal the hidden interests and lingering structures of power that inform seemingly neutral representations of place and urban change. This paper begins with the premiss that the process of racialization is neither inevitable nor universal, but is a product of specific social and historical forces, operating at multiple scales, that interact in particular spatio-temporal contexts. Given the material forces that drove change in Vancouver, it is perhaps surprising that race not only endured, but intensified, as a central source of meaning, identity, and power. Both Marxian and free market modernists had long anticipated the disappearance of

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[1] Titles of newpaper articles included "Monster mash," "Monster mishmash," "How we saved Shaughnessy from monsters," "A monster problem in Shaughnessy," and "There's a 'monster problem' on the street where they live."

Pamela Fayerman, "Monster Mash," *Vancouver Sun* 15 February, 1991 : B1.
Alison Appelbe, "Monster mismash," *Vancouver Courier* 28 March, 1990 : 1.
Paul Ohannesian, "How we saved Shaughnessy from monsters," *Vancouver Sun* 23 June, 1990 : D10.
Kevin Griffin, "A monster problem in Shaughnessy," *Vancouver Sun* 17 November, 1992 : B1
Elizabeth Aird, "There's a 'monster problem' on the street where they live," *Vancouver Sun* 2 October 1993 : A3.

[2] David Ley, "Between Europe and Asia : the case of the missing sequoias," *Ecumene* 2:2 (1995) 189.

race with the spread of a globalized economy.[1] All non-market identities and 'differences in colour' were supposed to collapse into the cash nexus and condense into the one colour—green. Vancouver's experience, however, shows that race is not a primordial essence that has fallen to the inevitable march of 'modern times', but a concept continually reshaped by socially and politically contested representations of difference.

Racialized discourse in Vancouver, especially that of the 'monster' house, has largely been built through media representation and persists due to the failure of academic responses to rigourously question and re-present dominant narratives. Academic treatments include David Ley's article "Between Europe and Asia : the case of the missing sequoias," which frames the landscape change controversy as a clash between two historically, economically, and culturally discrete diasporas : early British colonials (and their descendants), and recently arrived wealthy Chinese immigrants.[2] Ley demarcates the differences in landscape aesthetics and political philosophy between the two groups, contrasting, for example, the "preservationist ethos" of the British with the "creative destruction" of the Chinese.[3] Though he does take some pains to muddy the distinctions, Ley nevertheless concludes that the debate over landscape change is a marker of "a grander divisiveness across the Canadian nation, as people from their own subject positions, inflected by language, ethnicity, class, gender, region, colonial status, and interest group, all employing the rhetoric of rights, make the practice of citizenship a jostling, competitive fracas."[4] Ley's conclusion that multiculturalism rests upon unstable terrain is well taken, but the underlying premiss that "divisiveness" is a "structural implication"[5] of 'real' ethnic differences which fully pre-exist representation is problematic. This notion resonates with popular media narratives, and leaves issues of racialized description and reporting

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[1] M.P. Smith, and J.R. Feagin, "Putting 'race' in its place," *The Bubbling Cauldron : Race, ethnicity, and the Urban Crisis*, eds. Smith and Feagin (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 3.

[2] Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 186.

[3] Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 189.

[4] Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 204.

[5] Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 202.

unquestioned. In fact, Ley largely dismisses race as a legitimate idiom within which to examine Vancouver's landscape controversies.

Richard Cavell's article "The Race of Space" examines urban change in Vancouver by tracing the epistemology of the 'monster' house.[1] Drawing on diverse references from various historical periods such as Socrates, Hollywood horror films, Donna Haraway, Sigmund Freud, Rudolf Wittkower, and Charles Darwin, the author attempts to establish that "the history of the monster has been inseparable from issues of race and 'ethnography'."[2] The racial discourse of 'monstrosity' that arose in Vancouver, in the author's view, was not the result of specific local conditions, but was instead the inevitable product of a universal human psychological response to racial difference transcending space and time. The conclusion that the 'monster' house is rooted in the 'deep structures' of the human mind and thus can be deconstructed psychoanalytically is wholly inadequate, and is reached at the expense of a careful reading of place-specific interests, representations, and discourses.

Where racialized discourses of urban change in Vancouver have been challenged, they have often taken the form of crude and clumsy attempts to absolve affluent Chinese immigrants from any responsibility for landscape change. These challenges have been motivated by particular economic and political agendas. One example is the influencial report prepared by David Baxter, "Population and housing in metropolitan Vancouver : changing patterns of demographics and demand," which concludes that rising housing prices were a product of demand from aging Canadian baby-boomers, not new immigrants.[3] In a didactic tone, the author writes:

> If we seek someone to blame for this increase in demand, we will find only that the responsible group is everyone, not some unusual or exotic group of residents or migrants. In fact, there is no one to blame : the future growth in

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[1] Richard Cavell, "The race of space," *New Formations* October (1997).

[2] Cavell 49.

[3] David Baxter, *Population and housing in metropolitan Vancouver : Changing patterns of demographics and demand* (Vancouver : Copyright David Baxter, 1989).

> housing demand is a logical and normal extension of trends in the nation's population.[1]

One anchor person for a local news station related at a journalism conference that the Baxter report had an immediate impact on the way the media reported housing issues.[2] Both television and newspapers began dowplaying ethnic themes and focused increasingly on demographic trends or other factors such as municipal development levies as reasons for escalating housing prices. While the lens of examination certainly shifted away from race and culture, the real agenda of the Baxter report was to shift scrutiny away from capitalist activity. As Kathryne Mitchell has eloquently argued, an anti-racist facade was appropriated by free-market interests eager to promote international investment and capitalist development in Vancouver.[3] The Baxter report, therefore, cannot be considered a serious examination of the politics of race and place.

Another article that attempts to absolve Chinese immigrants is Peter S. Li's "Unneighbourly houses or unwelcome Chinese : the social construction of race in the battle over 'Monster Homes' in Vancouver, Canada."[4] Li attempts to problematize the view that race is a primordial feature which provides a rational basis for group identity and cultural preservation. This view of race suggests that some social conflicts can be traced to genuine differences in cultural values or behaviors. Li rejects these notions and suggests that race is a social construct of dominant groups. Furthermore, he argues that the significance given to the 'monster' house is a rationalized product of racial antagonisms. While I am sympathetic to the general thrust of the author's arguments, I feel that his argument for the social construction of race is overstated. In one particularly shaky passage, the author attempts to

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[1] Baxter quoted in Kathryne Mitchell, "Multiculturalism, or the united colours of capitalism?," *Antipode* 25:4 (1993) 284.

[2] Personal correspondence from David Ley.

[3] Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 285.

[4] Peter S. Li, "Unneighbourly houses or unwelcome Chinese : The social construction of race in the battle over 'Monster Homes' in Vancouver, Canada," *International Journal of Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies* 1:1 (1994).

cast doubts on the popular belief that Chinese immigrants were largely responsible for buying up large, new houses on Vancouver's west side by stating that

> Chinese names *only* accounted for *one-third* of the most expensive homes in Shaughnessy [valued over $750,000 Cdn], and *58 per cent* in Oakridge. How many of the most expensive homes in these two areas were new ones that would be considered by neighbours as 'unneighbourly' is unclear.[1]

The author's attempt to draw on statistical evidence to suggest that there is no 'real-world' relationship between Chinese people and expensive homes is embarassingly weak. In fact, the data seems to fly in the face of his arguments. By any measure, 58 per cent Chinese ownership of the most expensive homes in Oakridge is no trivial relationship, and supports the notion that affluent Chinese immigrants exhibited some broad purchasing patterns in regard to housing. When reading Li, his subject position as a Chinese person becomes relevant. His article can be characterized (in my own terms) as a classic 'ethnic defense'—an anti-racist work as unsubtle and sweeping as the arguments it attempts to problematize.

In this paper, I will **not** argue against the common perception that wealthy Chinese immigrants have contributed to the transformation of elite Anglo communities. Instead, I will address how *local* differences between discrete subsets of the Chinese and European 'communities' (recently arrived, wealthy, Hong Kong Chinese immigrants versus long-time, elite, Anglo-Canadian residents of Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale) have come to stand in for distinctions between the larger categories of race. This has occured because of the way representation in Canada is influenced by the politics of race. The conflation of localized difference with racial difference has allowed authors such as Wood to write about "laid-back, nature-worshipping" Europeans and urban (read : anti-environmental), change-driven Asians in an objective and disinterested tone.[2] I will argue that far from being objective or disinterested, such statements are in fact ideological, directly or indirectly serving and sustaining particular interests and relations of domination.

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[1] Li 26. Italics mine.

[2] Daniel Wood, "Vancouver : The art of selling air and other west coast tales," *En Route* November, 1997 : 56.

The act of 'reading' a landscape 'text' is a political one, informed by social and historical contexts and various cultural narratives and interests. While the 'monster' house issue has been examined in the academic literature as an interaction between place meaning, landscape imagery, and social identity, previous analyses are insufficient insofar as they have not specifically addressed race issues nor unpacked the complex relationship between race and representations of urban change. The literature has not explicitly interrogated how the contextually constructed race privileges of *whiteness* inform landscape readings. I will argue that landscape readings from the social position of whiteness often serve to obfuscate and mask white authorship and complicity in landscape change. Academic treatments have also failed to develop a political agenda that at once embraces anti-racism, localism, and progressive identity politics. In order to do so, my discussion of 'monster' houses will pay particular attention to issues of race privilege, the politics of examination, the media as a source of racial pedagogy, and the unemanicipatory effects of multiculturalism and postmodernism. Despite exhortations both sincere and hypocritical, it is not possible to be 'colour-blind' when looking at issues of urban change, yet the ways in which racialized looking relations have affected representations of Vancouver have been given scant attention. This thesis will address this oversight.

2

WORKING in the IDIOM of RACE

TALKING ABOUT RACE and RACISM

My discussion of urban change in Vancouver is unabashedly cast in the idiom of race and racism. This admission is bound to provoke anxiety and hand-wringing (if not anger and outrage) from some readers. I have chosen this idiom despite fair warning that the word 'racism' is "so vulnerable to manipulation" and easily abused.[1] These cautions are certainly serious, but of dubious sincerity when they are coupled with self-confident proclamations that racism is effectively a thing of the past. bell hooks has called the eagerness with which contemporary society does away with racism a "mythic erasure" that serves to mask certain realities.[2] Where racism is acknowledged to exist, it is often considered a fleeting social anomaly or an "institutional hangover"[3] that is quickly righted as soon as it is uncovered. Those, like me, who still see race and racism as ordering themes that influence everyday social relations are branded as overzealously 'politically correct', or even worse, paranoid. And therein lies the problem.

The supposed dangers of liberal social critique have been so overstated in the 90s' media frenzy over political correctness that many criticisms of mainstream culture today are

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[1] Neil Bissoondath, "I'm not racist but...," *The Broadview Reader*, eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Jane Flick (Peterborough : Broadview Press, 1987) 501.

[2] bell hooks, "Representing whiteness in the black imagination,"*Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Triechler (New York : Routledge, 1992) 345.

[3] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture : Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge : Blackwell, 1993) vii.

simply brushed aside as demands for special treatment. In the minds of many, to suggest racism (or any other social injustice, for that matter) is to cry wolf. One writer, Rob Nelson, responding to an article that I wrote for the *Vancouver Sun* on my experiences of racism, asserts that

> meaningful dialogue is being diminished through the all-too-frequent and far too loosely used cry of racism by some contributors. In many ways, an accusation of racism is to the '90s what being labelled a Communist was to the McCarthy era. If a position is advanced that does not agree with your point of view, a simple declaration of racism is a pretty sure way of silencing your opponent... We are fortunate to live in what is possibly the kindest and most tolerant society on earth. If we agree open dialogue is the most civilized way of overcoming our differences, then surely we can refrain from unwarranted declarations of racism.[1]

The author's rhetorical strategy is clear : appeal to emotion by claiming the status of victim. Singing the praises of Canadian society (with admirable Pollyannaism), he discredits any suggestion of racism as a cog in a vast conspiracy machine set out to attack fair-minded, decent individuals such as himself. The comparison to McCarthyism, however, is more than a little specious since Left-leaning social critique has no big government, big money, mass propaganda campaign, nor paramilitary force behind it.[2] To be blunt, the eroding plausibility of monolithic emancipatory ideals has left the Left disorganized. The suggestion that a motley crew of Green groups, Marxists, feminists, anti-racists, and gay and lesbian activists are cohesively and systematically blowing away canons and reshaping mainstream society begins to sound like an undeserved compliment (liberals should be so lucky). The reality is that majority culture is still flourishing. Marjorie Griffin Cohen, chair of the women's studies department at Simon Fraser University, argues that "we still have a culture that is identifiable and dominant."[3] Mainstream culture, despite the howls of protest, is quite simply not under any real threat. The potential that political correctness

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[1] Rob Nelson, "Cries of racism silence honest debate," *Vancouver Sun* 23 May, 1996 : A2.

[2] Rick Salutin, 1987, "Loose Canons,"*The Broadview Reader*, eds. Herbert Rosengarten and Jane Flick (Peterborough : Broadview Press, 1987) 182.

[3] Griffin Cohen quoted in M. Jimenez, "Sense and sensibilities," *Vancouver Sun* 21 February, 1998 : B10.

might actually trample over and re-make dominant culture is "minuscule compared to the orgy of media attention—the overkill—launched in its name."[1]

Critics such as Nelson have nevertheless upped the ante by arguing that non-whites do not own a monopoly on victimhood. Their point is granted. The word 'racism' has been abused and the odd case of anti-racist zealotry has surfaced. The belief that only whites can be racist is, in itself, a racist belief. But Nelson's arguments are not entirely innocent. After all, there is a certain glamour—a "victim chic"[2]—to claiming social marginalization, which the author exploits. Nelson's anger, moreover, has a false ring. He is every bit as interested in silencing opponents as the most zealous minority spokesperson. Despite his appeals for "meaningful" and "open dialogue," the author assumes the authority to determine what is warranted or "unwarranted" opinion. The assumption that his white middle-class male values can unproblematically stand in for what is "civilized" and normative closes off debate before it even begins. In relation to his subjective *qua* universal values, mine can only be flavoured as 'special interest', and therefore trifling, suspect, and not even worthy of consideration. "Open dialogue," then, does not describe a noisy arena of rigourous debate; it is a neo-conservative euphemism for 'dominant-culture monologue'.

Nelson does rightly argue that "[i]f one group becomes too afraid to speak honestly then the dialogue ceases."[3] But is political correctness the only threat to free speech? If we can accept that non-whites are not the only victims of racism, we should also accept that neo-conservatives are not the only ones bullied into silence. Accusations of Left-wing fascism or McCarthyism make up a "counterterror"[4] to political correctness that is equally meant to muzzle expression. Underneath the rhetoric of "overcoming our differences," then, is really an argument for the status quo. Nelson, unwilling to shift locations and see the world differently, is well behind the vanguard of change. A political stalemate,

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[1] Salutin 181.

[2] Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray, 1997, "Introduction," *White Trash : Race and Class in America,* eds. Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray (New York : Routledge, 1997) 5.

[3] Nelson A2.

[4] Salutin 182.

however, is a victory for dominant culture. Not surprisingly, neo-conservatives have hardly been distressed to see identity politics in Canada degenerate into a deadlocked tug-of-war of competing victimhoods.[1]

In a social climate where left-of-center critics have been labelled "storm troopers"[2] or "thought police,"[3] an essential question emerges : Can battles for justice and mutual understanding between people still come from vigorous social critique, or can it only come from an 'aw-shucks', feel-good celebration of difference? This paper argues for the continuing relevance of the former. The alternative is to be side-tracked by self-congratulatory double-speak that shouts down anyone who dares to suggest that Canadian society is not yet utopian. The rhetoric of "achieving harmony and understanding between the many cultures that make up our society" espoused by Nelson and his supporters artfully serves to gag critical calls for change. This paper is a conscious effort to combat such sugar-coated intimidation.

RACISM and EVERYDAY LIFE

My argument for the continuing relevance of social critiques of race and racism in Canada begs two questions : (1) What exactly is race? and (2) What exactly is racism? The answer to the first has been widely discussed in recent social science literature, with general agreement that race as a biological category is scientifically indefensible.[4] According to one source, classic 'biological racial characteristics' (skin, hair, and eye colour, etc.) account for only a miniscule .012 percent difference in human genetic material.[5] The lack of evidence for the genetic roots of race is critical to refuting biological reductionist

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[1] In this paper, members of 'dominant culture' / 'mainstream culture' are not synonymous with 'neo-conservatives.' Sentences which use these terms to refer to the same individuals describe a subset of people who intersect both categories. 'Neo-conservatives' in this case simply refers to those who argue that accusations of racism are nothing more than a symptom of overzealous political correctness. Moreover, these accusations are seen to be a form of oppression in themselves.

[2] Eugene Genovese quoted in Salutin 182.

[3] *Newsweek* title quoted in Salutin 181.

[4] See Bonnett 6; Anderson 10.

[5] Paul Hoffman, "The science of race," *Discover Magazine* November, 1994 : 4.

arguments. It has not, however, erased the idea of race from the practice of everyday life. The 'common sense' understanding that individuals belong to racial groups underscores the enduring significance of race as a *constructed* social and political category. Racialized discourses, narratives, representations, and practices comprise a contextual process through which race is constituted as fact in time and space. Racial categories are constantly being negotiated and re-worked and are therefore subject to reinforcement or resistance, and ultimately change. Nevertheless, the accepted constructions at any given historical moment affect human perceptions and behavior and thus produce observable, and sometimes quantifiable, consequences (the formation of identity groups, the relations of domination, conflict, and accomodation between them, racialized spatial segregation, etc.) This is almost inevitable since the notion of race, as a means of categorizing different human bodies, inherently seeks to systematize differences and relate them to differences of character and worth. It is in this social and political sense, then, that race is real.

The answer to the second question is also critical since the extent to which racism exists in any given society is partly a problem of definition. Not surprisingly, definitions have been used to serve particular agendas. I return again to the article written by Nelson. In order to support his view that Canada is "possibly the kindest and most tolerant society on earth," he employs a very specific understanding of racism. Responding to my experiences of school-yard harassment as a child, he writes :

> While not wanting to make light of what can be a traumatic event for a child, I can honestly say that I do not know of anybody who was not at one time taunted by their classmates for displaying a visible difference. Fat kids, skinny kids, too tall or too short, braces - whatever the visible difference, children can often be very cruel. Perhaps Mr. Wang's ancestry was his most obvious difference and while I will be the first to agree that his schoolmates were insensitive, boorish, and cruel, I would have a hard time accepting his assumption that the actions of children were *born out of ethnic hatred.*[1]

Nelson tries to downplay the significance of racial prejudice in two ways. First, he concludes that race, comparatively speaking, is an insignificant cue for school-yard teasing

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[1] Nelson A2. Italics mine.

since race is only one of countless visible differences that children point out. However, the significance of race would be drowned out only if each category of difference could be 'weighted equally'. They clearly cannot be. Visual differences are not equally perceived, equally prayed upon, equally invested with cultural meaning, nor equally important in identity formation. To compare race (a life-long, ascribed category of identity laden with social mythologies) with something such as 'having braces' (a very temporary, often avoidable, and socially uncharged experience) is to completely distort the relative significance of bodily markers. The argument that race is 'just another difference' trivializes the immense cultural inertia that prevents race from becoming an innocuous category of difference.

The second way that Nelson tries to downplay racism is also familiar and flawed. He simply tries to define racism out of existence by using the most extreme definition : ethnic hatred. Ethnic hatred, after all, is the stuff of Third Reichs and Balkan wars. Since we are free of mass persecution and genocide in Canada, we are also presumably free of racism as well. With the 'limbo-stick' used to gauge racism raised to unreasonable heights, almost any expression of racially motivated prejudice can easily shimmy underneath without being identified as a case of 'racism' per se.

I concede that 'ethnic hatred' is too strong a term to characterize children's motivations for taunting racially different others. I will not concede, however, that these motivations are simply benign vestiges of childhood. Children's feelings can be powerful expressions of racism—this I know firsthand. Nelson naively assumes that as a(n alleged!) victim of racism, I do not understand what it means to be its perpetrator. In fact, as I child I knew how to humiliate and belittle as much as I knew what it was to be humiliated and belittled. The surge of power and superiority that I felt as I joined in the chorus of school-yard slurs and threw back my own suffering onto others might not have been ethnic hatred, but it was still evidence of a well-developed cognitive ordering of the world—an ordering which allowed me to believe that people were naturally sorted into groups, and that

individuals could be shamed for their group belongingness. Is this not one of many possible expressions of racism? No amount of definitional niggling is going to erase racism's reality, and Nelson's attempt to do so is a double affront : it denies my experiences of racism on both sides of the phenomenon.

Race does not have a single transhistorical meaning, and similarly there is no generic *racism*, only historically specific racisms with their own time and place-specific causes. To define racism as 'ethnic hatred' is to take a sociotemporally specific expression of racism and use it as a universal benchmark. This definition is also dangerous since it alludes that racism is rooted in some form of 'deviant' psychology, rather than the normalized and naturalized attitudes of everyday life. It is critical to keep in mind that

> [t]here is no single (set of) transcendental determinant(s) that inevitably causes the occurrence of racism - be it nature, or drive, or mode of production, or class formation. There are only the minutiae that make up the fabric of daily life and specific interests and values, the cultures out of which racialized discourse and racist expressions arise.[1]

One of the aims of this paper, then, is to explore the "minutiae" that have synergistically contributed to expressions of racism in a spatially and temporally limited context. Rather than define racism outright and then search for moments of its articulation, I will examine some of the general discursive conditions that have lead to the emergence of racialized discourses and racisms specific to Vancouver in the 1980s and 90s.

Accepting that racism arises from the minutiae of daily life, however, presents a particular methodological problem. Causes and expressions of racism are often so nebulous, fleeting, or hidden that they cannot be easily collected into a store of quantifiable and verifiable evidence from which theory can be produced—at least according to the current dictates of 'rigourous' social science. I was advised once by a professor (with furrowed brow and a look of deep concern) to "document and record incidents of racism very very carefully." But, to recall a poignant question asked by Michel de Certeau, "Of all

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[1] Goldberg 90.

the things everyone does, how much gets written down?"[1] The truth is that so much of what makes up the minutiae of our daily lives simply cannot constitute 'data' nor be entered into the annals of social history. Nervous looks, aggressive tones of voice, and uncomfortable feelings do not produce numbers on a graph, and they do not even make very good anecdotal evidence. But they may be important parts of common racialized social interactions. There is an absence of concrete data, for example, on anti-Chinese attitudes and incidents of racism in Vancouver despite the admission by one white writer that

> *negative comments are legion* about how [Chinese] immigrants drive, cut down trees, build ugly monster houses, don't pay their fair share of taxes, don't hire long-time Canadians or want them as customers, don't contribute to charities, are rude in stores, crowd and bump people in public without apology, exploit our medical system, inflate real estate prices beyond the reach of the average person, leave teenaged children to live alone in west-side mansions with monthly allowances that stagger the imagination.[2]

Such a tantalizing disclosure suggests that a rich store of data is not being collected. There are several possible reasons why. The first is that the presence of a Chinese person in any social or academic setting usually leads to enough self-censorship in others that it becomes almost impossible to access anti-Chinese sentiments firsthand (the phenomenon of political correctness is not without its effects!). In other words, those individuals who are most likely to be politically motivated to collect data on racist attitudes are uniquely disadvantaged in accessing information. I contend that it is equally difficult for non-Chinese people to access racist attitudes emanating *from* the Chinese community, again because of the relationship between subjectivity and disclosure. The second difficulty in recording data, as I have already argued, is that racism is most commonly expressed through the prosaic events of daily life, not through flashpoints of societal discord. Social scientists quite simply do not have the resources nor the fortuity to show up with tape recorder in hand everywhere that racism rears its proverbial ugly head. The difficulty in documenting instances of racism does not mean, however, that they are less real. I am not

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[1] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1984) 42.

[2] Doug Shewan, 'The truth will help fight racism," *The Vancouver Sun* 30 September, 1996 : A11. My emphasis.

trying to excuse myself from gathering any 'hard evidence' at all; this paper does draw together anecdotal and textual evidence to show that recent representations of urban change in Vancouver were strongly racialized. My point is simply that whatever I have recorded will only represent a tiny fraction of the racial discourse in Vancouver, and that criticisms of my arguments on these grounds alone seem to miss an important point about the relationship between data and everyday life.

SPEAKING FOR OTHERS as ESSENTIALIST FICTION

Even if some readers have accepted my arguments up to this point, I am certain that some trepidation still remains regarding race-related work. This is because race-based work is so often guilty of creating 'heroes' and 'villains' with all the subtlety of a Hollywood script. And like a well-conditioned Hollywood audience, many readers will likely assume (due to my racial subjectivity) that my thesis will have a predictable anti-racist narrative : Chinese people play the role of heroes (glorified through victimization), while Euro-Canadians are again cast as the villains of society. While not surprising, this assumption of who I am 'naturally inclined to speak for' is deeply problematic and disturbing.

In any anti-racist project, an 'oppressed' or 'marginalized' group must be identified and be to some extent 'spoken for'. In the past, certain homogenizing political terms have been coined in order to reference a common experience of racism and marginalization. For example, the term 'black' in Britain suggested the existence of a singular and unified group, which in reality was comprised of a myriad of ethnic and racial identities.[1] This was a politically expeditious strategy for a marginalized group to forcefully come into representation and re-present the black subject against negative figurations. The price for political expediency was that the "innocent notion of the essential black subject" remained.[2] Stuart Hall has identified a move away from this form of struggle over the relations of

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[1] Stuart Hall, "New ethnicities," *Stuart Hall : Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London : Routledge, 1996) 441.

[2] Hall 443.

representation (and its attendant pitfalls) to a politics of representation itself.[1] This politics of representation acknowledges the immense diversity and differentiation of subjective positions, social experiences, and cultural identities which compose the category 'black', and begins to dismantle what was once an oversimplified but "necessary fiction."[2] The (theoretical, if not everyday) end of the essential black subject forces the recognition that race articulates itself historically through and against other categories of difference. Black politics, therefore, can no longer be played through a simple set of reversals, with a 'bad' essential subject replaced with a 'good' one.

Taking a cue from Hall and other theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, I am highly skeptical of the possibility of constructing an effective 'voice of the oppressed' that is not a kind of essentialist fiction. This paper makes no attempt to 'speak for' an essential Chineseness. After all, it is this myth of sameness that is at the heart of any racism. The Chinese subject is not another unproblematic field of knowing, which is the very assumption that my anti-racist project attempts to tear down and lay bare. This theoretical corrective, however,

> does not make it any easier to conceive of how a politics can be constructed which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities, and which can effectively draw the political boundary lines without which political contestation is impossible, without fixing those boundaries for eternity.[3]

Sacrificing the notion of a 'Chinese community' may be particularly debilitating to political struggle since Chinese-Canadians have not countered dominant regimes of representation with the force that black artists and activists in Britain and the United States have. In other words, Chinese people would be sacrificing what has been to some groups a historically "necessary fiction" of a 'positive racial subjectivity' without having ever benefited from its use. Even during periods when Chinese people were considered "a

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[1] Hall 442.
[2] Hall 444.
[3] Hall 444.

model minority who outwhite[d] the whites,"[1] this was much more a dominant culture label than a popular Chinese self-representation. The history of Chinese people in Canada is one devoid of well-known civil rights leaders, militant activist groups, influencial theorists, and popular entertainers. Chinese-Canadians today continue to have little control over their own representation in the mainstream media, evidenced by the continued visibility of Chinese stereotypes, particularly in entertainment programming.[2] Abandoning the idea that Chinese people can command a 'positive' reversal of their own representation is, in effect, abandoning a strategy that has yet to be effectively employed.

Yet the only theoretically justifiable form of self-representation available to Chinese people is one that emphasizes heterogeneity. 'Chinese' as a marginalized category must be identified in this paper since racial signifiers remain part of the vocabulary of everyday life, but I am unwilling and unable to render myself transparent, a disembodied voice for others. If, as contemporary thought suggests, subjectivity is fixed in language, my sense of belongingness to particular groups and who I wish to 'speak for' cannot be easily assumed. Indeed, I feel little if any affinity with new Chinese immigrants. Yet the perverse assumption that racial belongingness outweighs all other forms of social affinity persists. This is what I wish to challenge. Those who would criticize me for writing in the idiom of race and racism fail to see that I am merely responding to, not initiating, a racialized conversation.

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[1] D. Y. Takagi, "Post-Civil Rights politics and Asian-American identity : admissions and higher education," *Race*, eds. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (New Brunswick, New Jersey : Rugters University Press, 1994) 232.

[2] Stereotypical Chinese caricatures such as the gangster or the kung-fu master continue to flourish in the mainstream entertainment media. In a January, 1998 episode of *Twitch City*, a new CBC sitcom about the lives of '20-something' roommates, two Chinese actors played gangsters with heavy accents whose every appearance on the screen was marked by the bang of a gong. The two lead characters in the show were 90s, ironic, kitschy, and urbane white Gen-Xers. The show reveals a relationship between race and the privilege of 'postmodern identity play.' The constructed neutrality of whiteness allows whites the privilege of continually re-making identity in what Fredric Jameson calls a "field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity" while non-whites are denied identity play by the construction of 'authentic' cultural subjectivities. The essay deals with these themes in more depth in later sections.

My responses to questions of race and representation in Vancouver are grounded in the personal, with the firm belief that the personal is a legitimate site to anchor the theoretical. For some academic readers, my autobiographical intrusions may prove unnerving. However, it is my belief that such authorial visibility is necessary for two reasons : (1) revealing my inescapable personal entanglements in the issues which I address is critical to undermining the notion that 'objectivity' is necessary to the formation of knowledge, and (2) grounding my arguments within the limited experiences of my own subject position is critical to undermining any authority I may assume to have (based on common ancestry) to speak for others. Whatever blows to political solidarity are suffered by the abandonment of the essential Chinese subject is a necessary step towards a more nuanced identity politics. Speaking in an isolated, personal voice may be the only way to finally dismantle the notion that we are all the same.

3

LANDSCAPE CHANGE, RACIAL DISCOURSE

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Vancouver's urban environment has largely been shaped by several periods of capital investment, closely following the boom cycles of the economy.[1] In this sense, landscape change during the most recent economic upswing (from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s) does not represent a unique experience in the material history of Vancouver. Recent change, like that of the 1960s (when towering glass office buildings began to crowd into the city's downtown core), was simply part of an ongoing, long-term cycle. However, the speed and intensity of economic changes were accompanied by a new experience of rapid social and cultural change, owing to increased trade with Pacific Rim nations and heightened integration into the international networks of global capital. In the early 1990s, British Columbian exports across the Pacific surpassed, for the first time, exports to the United States.[2] In 1991, trade between Canada and Hong Kong totalled Cdn$2.6 billion, a trade increase of 15 per cent over the previous year.[3] This growth occured despite a period of national recession. Immigration from Asian countries also far outweighed other source countries during this boom cycle, significantly impacting the social geography of Vancouver. This new layer of social and cultural change, then, combined with cyclical

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[1] Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 266.
[2] Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 189.
[3] Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 189.

changes to the economic and physical fabric of the city, created an unprecedented ethos of urban transformation that proved to be a source of unease, controversy and social discord.

Beginning in the early 1980s, a concerted effort was made by municipal and provincial representatives and businesspeople to attract offshore Asian capital into Vancouver. A campaign to sell Vancouver as a secure, profitable, and livable city was launched by politicians of all political stripes in order to entice wealthy Chinese people, particularly the Hong Kong elite, to make investments in advance of the changeover to Chinese communist rule in 1997.[1] The category of business immigration was initiated in 1984 by the federal government and targeted Hong Kong elites in particular.[2] Business immigrants included both investors and entrepreneurs who were required to bring set amounts of money into Canada and were then given a higher processing priority for immigration. As of 1991, investors were required to have a minimum personal net worth of Cdn$500,000 and promise to commit Cdn$350,000 to a Canadian business over a three year period.[3] Statistics show that Asian immigrants have consistently lead in the category of business immigration. In 1995, for example, 5824 individuals from Asia (2516 from Hong Kong and 2242 from Taiwan—not including assisted relatives) immigrated to British Columbia as an investor or entrepreneur; this compares with only 333 individuals under the same categories from Europe.[4] The shift towards Asian immigration coinciding with a sharp decrease in the number of European immigrants (especially from the United Kingdom) has been a long-term trend evident in all categories of immigration. The disparity peaked in 1994, when Asian immigrants accounted for 78.6 per cent of all immigrants to British Columbia, compared to 10.7 per cent from Europe.[5] Fundamental changes in Canadian immigration policy enacted over the last four decades have shifted the focus away from Europe as a source area and favoured immigrants with middle-class or professional

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[1] Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 266.
[2] Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 267.
[3] Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 267.
[4] "Immigration highlights," *BC Stats* 95:4 (1995).
[5] "Immigration highlights," *BC Stats* 94:4 (1994).

profiles. This has ensured the recent wave of immigrants a vastly differently make-up from previous generations. The recent cohorts of 'designer' Asian immigrants have been "simply the richest, most politically powerful, and best educated people ever to leave one country en masse for another."[1] They, unlike past immigrants, have had the numbers, business savvy, and capital resources to significantly transform social and physical landscapes in a relatively short period of time. The dominance of Vancouver's traditional Anglo establishment has in the past dozen years been challenged by a diaspora of wealthy overseas Chinese, or what one writer has called an "alternative elite."[2]

RACIAL DISCOURSE and DOMINANT NARRATIVES

The epigrams at the beginning of this thesis provide a critical point of departure for my examination of urban change in Vancouver, a subject that has received no shortage of media and academic attention. Given the milieu of demographic change which I have just described, it is not surprising that the dominant narrative of urban change which emerged in the media (reflected in the quotation from Wood) was strongly racialized. It suggested that Vancouver as a 'gateway city' to the Pacific Rim would inevitably be reshaped by Asian cultures as it continued to integrate into a larger global economy. So great was the burgeoning social and economic influence of the Pacific Rim that some authors had already conceded or claimed (depending on their race!) the privilege to direct the future, calling the next century "the Asian century"[3] or "the era of the chopstick."[4] Other journalists echoed these sentiments, leaving little more to ask than, "To which Asian civilization will our city be pulled?"[5] Yet another author took an imaginary journey to 21st-century Vancouver to send us "greetings from Asia Town"[6] and to diagnose the various utopic and dystopic

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[1] Sam North, "Asia Town," *Vancouver Magazine* November, 1996 : 49.
[2] Ley, "Between Euopre and Asia" 189.
[3] R. Dolphin, "Zen and the art of mall raising," *Vancouver Magazine* March, 1995 : 38.
[4] Eva Lee Kwok quoted in Ian Mulgrew, "The Brainy Bunch," *Vancouver Magazine* March, 1996 : 51.
[5] P. Baylis, "To which (Asian) civilization will our city be pulled?," *Vancouver Sun* 4 November, 1996 : A10.
[6] North, front cover.

results of Asian influence. As Mitchell has noted, metaphors used to reference Asian immigration and capital flows often evoked images of water, specifically tides, waves, or floods.[1] These metaphors alluded to the (perceived) inevitability of change, or more egregiously, warned of impending engulfment or destruction.

One of the most contentious issues in Vancouver's postwar history—the transformation of 'traditional' urban landscapes within the city's long-established residential neighbourhoods—was foregrounded precisely within this *zeitgeist* of change. The architecture and garden landscaping in elite west-side Anglo-Canadian districts such as Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale had until recently been highly uniform, often reminiscent of a picturesque and bucolic Tudor English countryside. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, however, significant portions of Kerrisdale and some parts of Shaughnessy experienced steady transformation, with older houses being sold and demolished. The construction of large, non-traditionally styled 'monster' houses in their place and the felling of large trees became a persistent source of public controversy and neighbourhood anxiety.[2] Many long-time residents complained bitterly, calling the new houses "sterile," "offensive," "factories," "nightmares," and "abortions."[3] One west-side resident charged, "My sense of beauty is assaulted by those stark, tasteless monster houses, built right in the middle of our neighbourhoods, on clear cut lots without landscaping."[4] Although the debate often revolved around terms such as 'heritage', 'character', and 'design', the concepts of 'culture' and 'race' were increasingly drawn into the discourse on urban change. Though initially understated, much of the responsibility for the 'aesthetic ruin' of neighbourhoods landed squarely on the shoulders of wealthy Chinese immigrants who, unlike past immigrants, were able to bypass the traditional lower-cost immigrant corridor and move

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[1] Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 274.

[2] The history and general debate has already been well covered in other papers. See David Ley, *Between Europe and Asia*, and David Ley, D. Hiebert, and G. Pratt.

[3] Kim Alexander Read, *Continuity with Change : an investigation of the 'monster house' issue in Vancouver's Westside single-family neighbourhoods* (Unpublished MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989).

[4] Anonymous letter to a local newspaper, quoted in Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 197.

straight into prime real estate territory such as Kerrisdale and Shaughnessy.[1] The 'monster' house, then, became an important local referent in the continued construction, reproduction, and naturalization of racial categories in Vancouver.

British Columbia's present economic downturn, partly precipitated by the Asian financial crisis and an exodus of Asian immigants and offshore capital, suggests that the declarations of an inevitable Asian-ization of Vancouver were largely premature and overstated. Economic forecasts by Statistics Canada for 1998 predict that British Columbia will have the lowest per cent increase in real GDP of any province, and be the only province with negative job growth.[2] Recent federal government proposals to emphasize English or French language proficiency as a criterion for future immigration and Canada's foreign assets disclosure law[3] (both of which may reduce the number of Pacific Rim immigrants) also jeopardize the vision of an Asian future. Once taken for gospel, this vision is now being called "chimeric"[4] by one newspaper columnist, who has mused, "What was surprising was how quickly we here bought into [it]."[5]

The enthusiastic rise and the present fall of the Asian Future scenario raises serious questions about descriptions of place. By calling the scenario "chimeric," the newspaper columnist is simply suggesting that other journalists were prone to flights of fancy, over-enthusiasm, or exaggerated rhetoric in their reporting. But for academics, the word 'chimeric' may resonate at a deeper theoretical level. It is a reminder of the current critiques

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[1] Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 191.

[2] M. Kane, "Recession a B.C. reality, economists at TD say," *Vancouver Sun* 18 March, 1998 : D1.

[3] Wyng Chow, "More Canadians hiding assets overseas to avoid tax : Auditor" *Vancouver Sun* 6 June, 1998 : A1.

[4] Pete McMartin, "Many Canadians bought the chimeric Asia vision" *Vancouver Sun* 22 January, 1998 : A3.

[5] McMartin A3.

of representation proposed by literary theorists, art historians, and ethnographers which have resulted in the so-called 'crisis of representation.'[1] This 'crisis' was brought on by a broad attack launched in a number of academic disciplines upon the 'natural attitude' that undergirds mimetic representation. This 'natural attitude' was a product of Enlightenment philosophers, for whom language and imagery appeared to be perfect, transparent media through which the world of experience could be faithfully copied and revealed. Many of today's thinkers, however, argue that narratives of place which purport to be value-free, non-cultural, and non-ideological copies of the world are in fact fictions. This is because systems of representation which claim to be universal necessarily conceal their own historic specificity. Given this point, there is no neutral, objective world 'out there' to be described, since there is no world which is not already "clothed in our systems of representation."[2] In the words of art critic W.J.T. Mitchell, the "innocent eye is blind."[3] The Asian Future narrative, then, is not 'chimeric' to the academic because it has been intentionally hyperbolic or alarmist, but because it has been coolly presented as disinterested observation. It is critical to keep in mind that

> [a]ny discourse regardless of its claims, cannot create mimesis (reveal the naked truth); rather, through its ideological distortions, it operates in the service of power. By analysing these relations of power, we can more clearly see how interests play a constitutive role in vision and representation.[4]

The narratives, concepts, and ideologies inherent in descriptions of any realm of social practice (in this case, urban landscape change) constitute a *discourse*, which can be defined as

> the social framework of intelligibility within which all practices are communicated, negotiated, or challenged. These discourses are both enabling resources as well as constraints or limits within which certain ways

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[1] James Duncan and David Ley, "Introduction," *Place, Culture, Representation*, eds. James Duncan and David Ley (London : Routledge, 1993) 4.

[2] James Duncan, *The city as text : the politics of landscape interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1990) 14.

[3] Mitchell from Duncan 14.

[4] James Duncan, 1993, "Sites of representation : place, time and the discourse of the Other," *Place, Culture, Representation*, eds. James Duncan and David Ley (London : Routledge, 1993) 39.

> of thinking and acting seem natural and beyond which most who have learned to think within the discourse can not easily stray.[1]

A range of discourses, in turn, constitutes a *discursive field*, within which truth regimes jostle and compete for legitimacy and popular currency. Some discourses may become hegemonic over time while others remain contestatory. The sociohistorical conjucture that facilitates development of a discourse generally requires both material and conceptual conditions to interact over a period of time.[2] Building a city combines the traditional economic factors of land, labour, and capital, but it also depends on how symbolic languages are manipulated. The confluence of the two conditions (I have already discussed some of the material conditions, and I will discuss the conceptual / symbolic conditions in more depth below) in Vancouver fostered a discourse of inevitable Asian-led change which indeed enabled and constrained particular ways of thinking and acting. Broadly speaking, this narrative enabled free-market capitalists to enthusiastically chart a course towards greater global economic integration, while it constrained many individuals from seeing authorship for landscape change in terms other than race (i.e. Chinese people were exclusively responsible for negative landscape change). Unpacking the interests behind discourses is critical to understanding that the construction of meaning is not unique to an individual, but is shaped by one or more discourses within a larger discursive field.[3] Discourses are frameworks for conceptualizing and making sense of the world of experience. They 'position' subjects *vis-a-vis* others, and are therefore constitutive of, as well as constituted by, social and political relationships. In this way, the discursive field becomes a "site of negotiation and struggle over meanings, privileges, and duties"[4] in particular contexts.

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1 Duncan, *The city as text* 16.
2 Goldberg 43.
3 Duncan, "Sites of representation" 155.
4 Duncan, "Sites of representation" 155.

TEXTS and the PRODUCTION of DIFFERENCE

As modes of signification, discourses are embodied in texts (broadly construed), including landscapes.[1] But if texts cannot mirror the world, due to the limits of language and ideology of those who describe, what are we to make of them? Are they 'chimeric' in the truest sense, Potemkin Villages standing in for the realm of experience? And, if reception theorists (such as Barthes) are correct in saying that each reader has the autonomy to 'author' a new and unique text through personal interpretation, is there any hope for an author to communicate something of the 'real world'? While I support the critique of mimesis, I see that there is a potential danger in going too far which threatens any understanding of human experience at all. Taken to an extreme, radical postmodern relativism dengenerates into a cacophonous morass of competing voices, interpretations, interests, and fragmented codes of meaning that not only undermine any form of knowledge, but may actually reconstitute current configurations of power. A middle ground between theory-free empiricism and theory-laden interpretation is offered by hermeneutics, which problematizes mimesis but does not entirely discredit the production of knowledge. Hermeneuticians do not try to render themselves transparent in their work, but instead explicitly recognize and theorize the site of their representation.[2] What is seen as avoidable bias by the positivist is thereby acknowledged by the hermeneutician to be a crucial component in the formation of knowledge.[3] This model of academic work does not produce texts which attempt to mirror some pre-given reality. Instead, these texts, informed by theoretical and empirical elements culled from other texts (the *inter-textual field of reference*), selectively and self-consciously *re-present* the 'world outside' (the *extra-textual field of reference*).[4] What is produced is a version of the world that did not exist previously outside the text, but since the text mediates both extra-textual and inter-textual fields of

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[1] Duncan, "Sites of representation" 155.
[2] Duncan and Ley 8.
[3] Duncan and Ley 8.
[4] Duncan and Ley 9.

reference, it is neither wholly 'objective' and 'real' nor wholly 'constructed' and 'fictive'. Reality, then, can be thought of as the sum of the world 'out there' and the world as we choose to describe it.

Homi K. Bhabha's theoretical distinction between modes of conceptualizing culture[1] can be roughly correlated with the mimetic and the hermeneutic, and can be usefully employed in examining racialized discourses. He distinguishes the notion of *cultural diversity* from the notion of *cultural difference* as forms of cultural interpretation. As he explains,

> [c]ultural diversity is an epistemological object - culture as an object of empirical knowledge - whereas cultural difference is the process of *enunciation* of culture as 'knowledg*eable*', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics, or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity.[2]

In other words, cultural diversity conceptualizes cultures as pre-given, totalized entities whose differences can be unproblematically represented. Cultural difference, on the other hand, conceptualizes culture as a product of the moment of enunciation of cultural difference. The former aestheticizes archaic origins; the latter sees the social articulation of difference as an on-going negotiation. Bhabha argues that contemporary critical debates on culture all recognize that "the problem of cultural interaction emerges only at the significatory boundaries of cultures, where meanings and values are (mis)read or signs are misappropriated."[3] However, he suggests that the well-intentioned polemics against prejudice and stereotype, as well as sweeping declarations of individual or institutional

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[1] The notions of *race* and *culture* are often conflated in discussions on landscape change. The perceptual inability of many Canadians to distinguish between the subtleties of ethnic background results in race becoming the dominant signifier of cultural identity. The concepts of race and culture will be used more or less synonymously in this paper, with the understanding that the concept of culture is popularly misconstrued to be a function of race.

[2] Homi Bhabha, "Cultural diversity and cultural difference," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft et al (London : Routledge, 1995) 206. Emphasis original.

[3] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London : Routledge, 1994) 34.

racism, merely describe the effect rather than the structure of the problem. The real attack must be launched against the very signification and enunciation of cultural difference. By challenging articulations of difference, their authorship and authority are laid bare, and culture is revealed not to be a primordial truth, but a relative and referential truth altered by the contingencies of time and place. Media accounts of urban change in Vancouver, then, are texts of cultural difference (hermeneutics) that masquerade as texts cultural diversity (mimesis). The reporting of difference is, in actuality, a part of the larger process of constructing difference.

At the most general level of description, it is useful to distinguish between two sets of texts within the discursive field : the enunciative and the analytic.[1] Generally speaking, enunciative texts are ones which make straightforward truth-claims or representations. These texts are usually unself-conscious of the particular ideological biases that they represent, and may in fact purport to be objective accounts of events. Newspaper and magazine articles which 'reported' the eventual Asian-ization of Vancouver are examples of enunciative texts. On the other hand, analytic texts seek to examine and explain the historic development and logic of specific discourses. Texts such as this thesis, then, open up a level of metadiscursivity which can be properly included within the discursive field. Such texts are not bias-free, but are generally much more self-conscious of the particular agendas and interests that inform representations.

Enunciative texts on Vancouver's urban change in the last decade have tightly interwoven landscape discourses with racial discourses. The fundamental narrative thread, evidenced in Wood's opening epigram, was that land-use practice could be correlated with race. For example, in a 1992 *Vancouver Sun* article entitled "A monster problem in Shaughnessy," two photographs were starkly juxtaposed : one shows a white woman standing between a traditionally-styled home and a 'monster' house with her arms raised in

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[1] Goldberg 42.

IAN SMITH

CONTRASTING HOMES in Dunbar typify what Lissa Forshaw sees as the beginning of the end for her old neighborhood. She deplores the one on the left and applauds the one on the right. Henry Chou (below) doesn't agree.

Figure 2 *- Unequivocal racial narrative*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 17 November, 1992 : B4.

a gesture of defeat, while the photograph below shows the face of a Chinese man (figure 2). The caption between the two photographs reads,

> Contrasting homes in Dunbar typify what Lissa Forshaw sees as the beginning of the end for her old neighbourhood. She deplores the one on the left and applauds the one on the right. Henry Chou (below) doesn't agree.[1]

What is immediately signified is a difference in landscape ideology as a function of race. The phrase "the beginning of the end" also fits neatly into the dominant narrative of inevitable Asian-led change. It is a moment that Bhabha would call the enunciation of cultural difference, when truth-claims begin to shape a framework of intelligibility for conceptualizing difference. The easy marriage of landscape ideology and racial identity articulated by the photographs is made knowledg*eable* and authoritative. This representation, of course, can be subtlely critiqued at a theoretical level, but more importantly it can be critiqued as a blatant **mis**representation of the very contents of the accompanying article - contents which disfigure the boundaries drawn between racial groups. Near the end of the long article, the author writes,

> Chou said he actually likes smaller houses with gardens. But it was his wife. She wanted a big home... "If I could buy a new house, I would have a smaller one with a beautiful garden," [said Chou.] But Chou also said that when the couple was looking for a new house, the real estate agents only showed them big new houses like the one they bought. They wanted a new house but not necessarily one quite so big, he said.[2]

In reality, Chou and Forshaw essentially agree that smaller homes have a strong appeal, yet this agreement is completely distorted to produce an unequivocal racialized narrative. At the very end of the article, the author writes about another Chinese person :

> George Chen...[wants to] retain the unique character and appeal of Shaughnessy. He moved into the area about 10 years ago. He also lives in a Colonial-style house built in 1927. His wife gardens and he likes the tree-lined and, at this time of the year, leaf-covered streets. As for some of the new houses built in his neighbourhood - well, he's shocked at their size and incompatibility with surrounding houses.[3]

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[1] K. Griffin, "A monster problem in Shaughnessy," *Vancouver Sun* 17 November, 1992 : B4.
[2] Griffin B4.
[3] Griffin B4.

This description further complicates the relationship between race and landscape practice, yet this sort of complication is very rarely, if ever, clearly and explicitly communiciated in mainstream textual representations of the built environment.

READING LANDSCAPES, READING READINGS

Any debate over landscape aesthetics is an articulation of social identities and understandings of place. The ability to define landscapes is critical to the reproduction and legitimization of the set of values, histories, and practices embodied within a particular image of place.[1] Landscapes, then, are not inert and superficial end products of abstract spatial logic, but are in fact "constituent elements in socio-political processes of cultural reproduction and change."[2] Understanding the relationship between landscape and identity, and collapsing the positivist dualisms of subject / object, fact / value, has been an important research focus among social scientists in recent years. These researchers regard landscapes as signifying systems, or texts, which contain objects, practices, and semantic codes that can be interrogated and deconstructed to reveal meaning. The use of such a "self-consciously representational metaphor"[3] as text acknowledges the inherently unstable and negotiated nature of meaning. Consequently, recovering textual messages embedded within the built environment is not a matter of simple empirical observation, but of interpretation, or 'reading'. Given this insight,

> the act of 'reading' a landscape becomes a political one, our interpretations being the product of specific historical and social contexts and related cultural discourses. 'Readings' may be thought of as constructed by interpretive communities, which frequently, but not always, reflect hegemonic value systems.[4]

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[1] N.C. Majury, *Identity, place, power, and the 'text' : Kerry's Dale and the 'monster' house* (Unpublished MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990) 23.

[2] Duncan, *The city as text*, 11.

[3] Majury 23.

[4] Majury 23.

The notion of an interpretive or textual community refers to a group of people who gather around a shared reading of a set of texts.[1] The various actions, privileges, and duties that emerge from shared readings constitute a complex of social relations which contribute to the formation of a community.

In the 'monster' house debate, the line in the sand between interpretive communities was sharply drawn by journalists, academics, and novelists. Two diametrically opposed landscape readings emerged, one *romantic and expressive* (a traditionalist, subjective, aesthetic, use-value view of landscape), the other *rational and instrumental* (a modern, objective, functional, exchange-value view of landscape).[2] As the discourse on urban change in Vancouver showed,

> [e]xpresivism and instrumentalism are not free-floating spirits but the ideologies of discrete social groups who emerge in particular places at particular times when, according to the extent of their prominence, they may become significant cultural architects, moulding a repertoire of symbols and forms, including the built environment.[3]

The romantic reading was most strongly voiced by elite Anglo-Canadians concerned with protecting the symbolic investments made within their neighbourhoods. Recurring references to 'pastoral setting', 'heritage architecture', 'our village', 'single family', and 'urban rainforest' by many long-time residents of Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale recalled a communal and environmentally conservative way of life. These values along with links to an aristocratic British past served to express both class and ethnic separateness, and to mark landscapes with a 'natural' social and moral order. Oppositely, the rational reading was subscribed to by another discrete group : recent, affluent Chinese immigrants. Clustered around nineteenth-century economic liberalism, the ideology of this group was often couched in terms such as 'freedom', 'democracy', 'property rights', 'progress', and

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[1] Duncan, *The city as text* 156.

[2] David Ley, "Style of the times : liberal and neo-conservative landscape in inner Vancouver, 1968-1986," *Journal of Historical Geography* 13:1 (1987) 41.

[3] Ley 42.

'limited government'. The defense of their right to remove large trees, for example, even ones highly valued by residential neighbours, was expressed in the name of private property rights.[1] One prominent Chinese member of the business community, with unbridled enthusiasm for future progress, flatly stated, "Ten years from now, you won't even recognize Vancouver."[2] The 'monster' house issue, then, may be viewed as the conflict between two discrete social groups which mobilized around opposed readings of the built environment and attempted to assert theirs as the dominant, 'right', or 'common sense' interpretation. The vociferous debate over landscape aesthetics could be seen as part of a localized struggle over social identity and the meanings of specific places.

With all the agents involved in the 'monster' house debate unambiguously assigned to 'discrete interpretive communities', and the terms of the debate limited within clearly demarcated physical boundaries, the struggle over urban change in Vancouver begins to gain a measure of clarity, consistency, and comprehensibility. Classificatory neatness, after all, gives rise to explanatory power. Unfortunately, however, the 'monster' house issue did not remain a clear and consistent localized debate. It was always embedded within much larger social, historical, and geographic contexts. Broader themes of culture, nationalism, and race increasingly came into play as the struggle over place meanings grew in emotional intensity in the late 1980s. The mobilization of these themes was not innocent. Groups drew from this resevoir of symbolic and political capital in order to buttress particular land-use agendas and identity constructions.

The Anglophile elite, for example, garnered public support from residents outside their west-side neighbourhoods by conflating their elite landscape milieu with 'Canadian-ness', thereby playing upon ethnic themes still pervasive within British Columbia's

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[1] see Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" for an analytic text on the removal of two large sequioa trees by a Chinese property owner. For enunciative texts, see *The Vancouver Sun*, 1990, 9 March B1,B2; 3 April A1; 5 April A1; 5 April A19; 6 April A12; 7 April B4, B8; 16 April A9; 4 May B1.

[2] Bob Lee, the first non-white member of the elite Vancouver Club, quoted in Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 189.

dominant culture.[1] One long-time west-side resident claimed that, "Canadians see monster houses as an arrogant visible demonstration of the destruction of Canadian culture. Yes, we have a Canadian identity and Canadians should be aware of persons who say we don't while they try to rebuild Canada in a different mould for their own purpose and profit."[2] 'Difference' in this case clearly alludes to cultural and racial difference, and the statement attempts to mobilize a broader foundation of support based on ethnic or racial affiliation. Similarly, those supporting new development publicly charged 'slow-growth' advocates with racism, attempting to throw moral weight behind their arguments. Facing proposed rezoning changes that would decrease the size of new homes, a spokesman for the West Side Builders Association charged the proposals were "discriminatory, racist, and unfair... If these new building by-laws are brought into effect, it will be akin to returning to the early 1900s where some of our land titles specifically excluded people of certain origins from owning land."[3] Charges such as these were often invoked and widely reported in the media. Clearly, much more was at stake than mere landscape aesthetics. The fierce rhetoric employed to champion particular land-use ideologies wielded imagery, narratives, and histories resonant with people far removed from the original sites of contention.

Within the social framework of intelligibility produced by enunciative texts, the notion that landscape ideologies were reducible to race became an acceptable and meaningful description of difference. The conflation of localized difference between discrete social groups with racial difference became naturalized and taken for granted, the sources of its production largely uninterrogated. Possible convergences in landscape ideology based on class, occupation, tenure of residency, or education were obscured by the overriding belief in cultural and racial difference. This hegemonic narrative supports Majury's contention that the process of negotiating meaning between social groups can

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[1] Majury 120.
[2] Quoted from Mitchell 275.
[3] Non-white builder quoted in Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 200.

become sedimented into relatively permanent structures and relations of inequality.[1] Over time a discourse may develop around particular ideas which reflect and reproduce existing power relations. The belief in essential difference between racial groups is one such structure and relation of inequality. David Theo Goldberg calls these structures and relations that enable racialized expressions the "preconceptual elements of racialized discourse."[2] They

> are not abstract a priori essences,...[n]or are they to be confused with the actual, explicit concepts and terms by which racialized discourse is usually expressed. The primitive terms are manifestations of power relations vested in and between historically located subjects, and they are effects of a determinate social history...They generate the concepts and categories in terms of which racism is actually expressed and comprehended.... Normalization of racialized expression and racist exclusion turns on the embedding of their conditions of possibility deep in modernity's formative sociodiscursive structures and scientific vision. [3]

Specifically, preconceptual elements include classification, order, value, hierarchy, and authoritative representation. These concepts in turn support differentiation and identity, discrimination and identification, exclusion, domination, entitlement, and restriction. These epistemological foundations support the articulation of racial discourse. They inform the social cleavages and racial identities that arise in unique spatio-temporal conditions. While racial discourses may transform and renew over time and place with relative speed, the deep structures of modern espistemology are themselves much more difficult (impossible?) to uproot.

In the following chapter, I will examine more closely the contextual construction of racial categories - whiteness and Chineseness - in Vancouver. The strategic mobilization of such large-scale categories to support the agendas of discrete social groups in a 'turf-war' over Vancouver's elite neighbourhoods demonstrates how easily local conflicts can become embedded within lingering structures and relations of inequality. Examining constructions

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[1] Majury 13.
[2] Goldberg 48.
[3] Goldberg 48.

of whiteness and Chineseness within the rubric of multiculturalism, postmodernism, and European imperialism is critical to understanding racialized representations of urban change.

4

RACE and REPRESENTATION

WHITENESS

A detailed and integrated historical geography of whiteness has yet to be produced,[1] and this chapter does not attempt to address this absence. Instead, I am examining whiteness in order to uncover a broader discursive context which until now has not been used to interrogate representations of landscape change in Vancouver. Within the academic literature, establishing whiteness as an analytic object is proving to be a powerful means of critiquing the reproduction and maintenance of unequal racial relations in specific contexts.[2] This paper mainly focuses on how whiteness is represented. Thus, it is not directly about how white people really are, how they feel about themselves, or how others perceive them.[3] Nevertheless, how anything is represented structures the way we think and feel about that thing, and helps form the framework of intelligibility by which we apprehend the world. The study of representation is, in one sense, limited, yet it is one of the prime means by which we have knowledge of reality. This chapter looks at how whiteness is both constitutive of and constituted by the discourse on urban change in Vancouver. This is

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[1] Alastair Bonnet, "Geography, 'race' and Whiteness : invisible traditions and current challenges," *Area* 29:3 (1997) 197.

[2] J. Hartigan, "Establishing the fact of Whiteness," *American Anthropologist* 99:3 (1997) 496.

[3] This a reiteration of the caution offered by Dyer in his work.
Richard Dyer, *White* (New York : Routledge, 1997) xiii.

particularly important given that whites continue to have much more control over self-definition in Canada's mainstream media than any other racial group.

Whiteness, like other racial categories, is socially constructed and articulated in specific historical settings. Many authors have addressed the relational construction of whiteness in opposition to other racial categories, such as 'blackness' or 'Chineseness'.[1] However, whiteness may be viewed as distinct from other racial categories since it has been identified as "a core set of racial interests often obscured by seemingly race-neutral words, actions, and policies."[2] Put in another way, whiteness maintains itself as an unmarked and normative category by foregrounding race as a category of non-white difference. Thus, non-whites are raced, while whites are 'just people', standing in for the commonality of humanity. Examples abound of whites who are oblivious or unselfconscious of their racial subjectivity. One university professor related that every year at least three or four of her white students balk at writing a 'cultural biography' (informed by categories such as race, ethnicity, class, and religion) because they claim they have no culture.[3] bell hooks has written about students who, after listening for the first time to black students discuss perceptions of whiteness, react with shock, disbelief, and rage.[4] Finally, Judy Rebick, a prominent Canadian journalist and feminist, has conceded that

> [p]eople from the dominant group do not identify primarily with that group. For example, I rarely think of myself as a white person. I am not conscious of my affinity with other white people. I don't notice anyone treating me differently because I am white.[5]

Rebick's reference to group dominance is also important to the understanding of whiteness, since a myriad of seemingly neutral social arrangements and institutional operations allow whites to benefit from their whiteness regardless if they, as individuals, harbour beliefs in

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[1] For a historical account of the construction of 'Chineseness' in Vancouver, see Anderson.

[2] Hartigan 496.

[3] C. Hyde, "The meanings of whiteness," *Qualitative Sociology* 18:1 (1995) 87.

[4] hooks 339.

[5] Judy Rebick, "Bridging identity : a creative response to identity politics," *Clash of identities : essays on media, manipulation, and the politics of self*, ed. James Littleton (Toronto : Prentice-Hall, 1996) 32.

racial supremacy or racial difference, or are made uncomfortable in the presence of racialized others.[1] Again, the power of whiteness lies in its ability to appear as a set of race-neutral, unmarked cultural practices, or, as one author writes, its ability to "colonize the definition of normal" through representation.[2]

The 'fact' of whiteness can be established on its "historical duration and its ideological coherence and effective power."[3] Reifying whiteness, however, presents particular ethnographic and philosophical dilemmas. Some scholars have attempted to ground whiteness in certain material relations and social structures that reproduce white privilege (socio-economic status, religious affiliation, ideologies of individualism, citizenship, and nationalism, etc.), thereby positing 'white culture' as something that contains a discrete, positive content. Others have deployed whiteness to describe an "inherent motivational core" or "originary impulse" particular to whites.[4] Both these approaches, though likely conceived in the name of critiquing power, have the unintended potential of undermining the concept of race as constructed, and therefore undermining resistance to racial hegemonies. Noel Ignatiev, whose own work on whiteness helped spur interest in the subject, rejects the notion of a white ethnicity, fearing such a concept will lead to apolitical white narcissism, or worse, white nationalism.[5] Others have also weighed in with opinions on the 'emptiness' of the white category :

> It is not merely that whiteness is oppressive and false; it is that whiteness is *nothing but* oppressive and false... It is the terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't and on whom one can hold back.[6]

As someone who problematizes the notion of a stable and coherent Chineseness, I certainly agree that singular, unified definition of whiteness poses a potential threat to an understanding of race as constructed. But to establish whiteness as something that exists

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[1] Hartigan 496.
[2] Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29:4 (1988) 45.
[3] Hartigan 498.
[4] Hartigan (discussing Frankenberg) 498.
[5] from Ellen Barry, "White like me," (essay downloaded via e-mail, 1997).
[6] D. Roediger, *The wages of whiteness : race and the making of the American working class* (London : Verso, 1991) 13. My emphasis.

with certainty, consistency, and a degree of durability does not undermine its existence as something negotiated and arbitrary. Despite appearances, whiteness is not a special ideological case standing apart from race; it is a constituent category in the discursive production of racial geographies. It is this very paradox or duality that lies at the heart of white hegemony, since

> white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularizing quality, because it is everything... This property of whiteness, to be everything and nothing, is the source of its representational power.[1]

Whiteness, then, is 'not anything really' except the discursively produced privilege of race neutrality. Beyond the unifying interest in the reproduction of dominance, grounded in the privileges of normalcy, whiteness is not homogeneous. In fact, it is continually reinterpreted, renegotiated, and altered in a host of novel local contexts, each featuring nuanced conflations of race with place-specific discourses, ideologies, and interests. This is evidenced in the 'monster' house debate and its attendant rhetoric. My argument that whiteness is both constituted by and constitutive of textual representations of Vancouver's landscape debate recognizes the heterogeneity of whiteness and its ability to rearticulate itself in divergent contexts.

WHITENESS, MULTICULTURALISM, and the POLITICS of EXAMINATION

The fundamental privilege of whiteness is unexaminability. Represented by Western media as an unmarked and blank category, whiteness escapes objectification in looking relations.[2] Marked groups, on the other hand, defined in opposition to whiteness, belong to the field of examinable Others. Examples of this abound in textual representations, such as this TV listing : "Skinhead Johnny and his Asian Lover Omar set

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[1] Dyer (1988) 45.

[2] It should be noted that whiteness is only one of many 'unmarked' categories. Maleness, heterosexuality, and middle-classness are examples of others.

up a laundrette."[1] While Omar is marked by race, the author fails to race Johnny, whom we assume (and will eventually discover) is white. As marked categories, non-whites are pluralized as knowable, definable, and comparable categories that produce whiteness as singular and indivisible.

The privileging of difference awakened by state sponsored policies of multiculturalism has foregrounded non-white race and ethnicity as constituents of identity.[2] This has served to strengthen the dichotomy between whites as racial subjects and non-whites as racial objects. Foucault has identified examinability as the key practice of disciplinary knowledge,[3] and this is alluded to by Rey Chow when she argues that

> [t]he invisible interrogation behind the multiculturalist 'ethnicity' apparatus is : "How authentic are you?" - to which everyone voluntarily responds with self-conscious reflections, descriptions, and appellations. Once we respond, however, we are helpless to complete the circuit set off by the panopticist interrogation process. The more detailed and earnest our research into our ethnic histories as such, the more successful the panopticist interrogation is in accomplishing its task.[4]

The assumed objectivity and neutrality of the examiner, however, is based on the false belief in the separability of the subjects and objects of examination. As I argued earlier in my critique of mimesis, there are no neutral sites from which to observe, only positions cross-cut by systems of representation that bind subjects and objects of examination in

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[1] In reference to the film *My Beautiful Laundrette* by Hanif Kureshi. Anonymous TV guide author quoted from Dyer (1997) 2.

[2] Despite the fact that multiculturalism in Canada was initially lobbied for by Jewish and Ukrainian peoples, multiculturalism 'races' non-whites. This is because Jewish, Ukrainian, and other non-Nordic Europeans were 'whitened' after World War II, evidencing that changing notions of whiteness are part of Canada's historical racial discourse. Karen Brodkin Sacks suggests that similar patterns of education, occupation, and suburbanization between various Nordic and non-Nordic Europeans broadened the category of whiteness. Brodkin Sacks frames the change as a "chicken and egg problem." She writes, "Did Jews and other Euroethnics become white because they became middle-class? That is, did money whiten? Or did being incorporated in an expanded version of whiteness open up the economic doors to a middle-class status? Clearly, both tendencies were at work." The inclusion of Jews and other Euroethnics in the category of whiteness has allowed them the same privileges of unexaminability in looking relations.
Karen Brodkin Sacks, "How did Jews become white folks?," *Race*, eds. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (New Brunswick, New Jersey : Rutgers University Press, 1994) 86.

[3] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison* (New York : Vintage Books, 1979) 184.

[4] Rey Chow, "Women in the Holocene : ethnicity, fantasy, and the film *The Joy Luck Club*," 210. (bibliographic information incomplete).

existing relationships of power. Throughout history, the examination of marked categories has not been easily distinguished from the prejudiced attention paid to socially marked others, so illusionary is the alleged neutrality of examination as a practice.[1]

The ability of whiteness to elude examination, however, does not depend solely on the pluralization of the Other. A further dichotomy is necessary between whites and non-whites that, ironically, inverts the relation of white singularity and non-white diversity. Although the other is pluralized in order to construct whiteness as singular and indivisible, the distinct groups that actually comprise this plurality are themselves homogenized through stereotyping.[2] In other words, any examination of an individual within a non-white group produces knowledge that is representative of all other individuals sharing the same classificatory status. Oppositely, as Chambers explains,

> whites are perceived as *individual historical agents* whose unclassifiable difference from one another is their most prominent trait. Whiteness is thus atomized into invisibility through the individualization of white subjects. Whereas non-whites are perceived first and foremost as a function of their group belongingness, that is, as black or Asian (and then as individuals), whites are perceived first as individual people (and only secondarily, if at all, as whites).3

The unit of the individual is critical to white hegemony, since the investment and dispersal of whiteness within individual historical agents allows whiteness as a category to escape examination. Whites, then, are imaged as individual and/or endlessly diverse, complex and changing.[4] As Richard Dyer argues,

> the privilege of being white in white culture is not to be subjected to stereotyping in relation to one's whiteness. White people are stereotyped in terms of gender, nation, class, sexuality, and so on, but the overt point of such typification is gender, nation, etc. Whiteness generally colonises the stereotypical definition of all social categories other than race.5

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1 Ross Chambers, "The unexamined,"*Whiteness : a critical reader*, ed. Mike Hill. (New York : New York University Press, 1997) 194.

2 Chambers 192.

3 Chambers 192. My emphasis.

4 Dyer (1997) 12.

5 Dyer (1997) 12.

Multiculturalist policies resonate neatly with white privilege by exoticizing non-white difference, which in turn, produces whiteness as something relatively unworthy of note, furtively carried among individual agents whose representation escapes categorization. Oppositely, the construction of non-white groups as having authentic and knowable practices, histories, and material culture has limited the range of non-white representation. This has given ideas or arguments grounded within the realm of the 'cultural' tremendous legitimacy and explanatory power. In other words, 'cultural' explanations simply seem to 'make sense', and can often override other sources of explanation for social phenomana which disfigure and problematize racial or ethnic divisions.

It is true that in the context of global colonial history, the recognition of the inherent worth of cultural diversity has been tremendously important. The struggles of the margins to come into representation may have genuinely opened up a space for the voices of the Other, challenging the authority of the white West. Unfortunately, "it may simultaneously function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them."[1] As I argued in Chapter 2, the reappropritation of voice by oppressed groups is a slippery slope towards essentialism. Postmodern multiculturalism's attempt to formalize the responsibility to respect cultural diversity has naturalized representations of difference, possibly making our well meaning endeavors to recognize diversity a taken for granted exercise in pigeon-holing. As Katherine Fierlbeck argues,

> [t]o assert that one simply knows that another person is defined predominantly by their culture or specific group traits rather than other factors seems as "oppressive" as refusing to believe that the cultural characteristics are important at all.[2]

Non-white racial and cultural identity, then, has an ambivalent potential. It can constrain as easily as it can liberate, and, as Vancouver's racial narratives show, it can be villified as easily as it can be celebrated.

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[1] Dyer (1997) 4.

[2] Katherine Fierlbeck, "The ambivalent potential of cultural identity," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 24:1 (1996) 15.

MEDIA and the REPRODUCTION of LOOKING RELATIONS

> The colourless multicolouredness of whiteness secures white power by making it hard, especially for white people and their media, to 'see' whiteness.
>
> Richard Dyer, *White*

The media are critical sources of cultural pedagogy. They are "vertiable teaching machine[s] in the shaping of the social imagination,"[1] influencing how individuals see themselves, others, and society as a whole. Television, newspapers, magazines and other forms of media provide the symbols and codes (enunciative texts) with which we forge our world views.[2] In particular, it is a site of Bhabha's cultural differentiation, where differences between groups are made knowledge*able* and authoritative through the process of signification. These arguments perhaps have been taken for granted, since media representations of urban change in Vancouver have not been explicitly interrogated. This is a particularly glaring absence for two reasons : (1) because the media are critical sites in the production and transformation of ideologies[3] (meanings in the service of power),[4] and (2) because racial groups have differing degrees of control over self-representation and the representation of others.[5] While "it would be wrong and misleading to see the media as uniformly and conspiratorially harnessed to a single racist conception of the world,"[6] I will argue that privileged narratives of whiteness are unselfconsciously employed and reproduced in media coverage of landscape change in Vancouver.

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[1] Henry A. Giroux, "Racial politics and the pedagogy of whiteness," *Whiteness : a critical reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York : New York University Press, 1997) 295.

[2] I am sympathetic to the work of reception theorists who argue that individuals are not simply 'passive dupes' who accept every media message. There is always a measure of reinterpretation, resistance to, or rejection of dominant messages. Nevertheless, texts create the discourses within which people react, and thus overarching 'frameworks of intelligibility' can to some degree be treated as 'real'.

[3] Stuart Hall, "The whites of their eyes : racist ideologies and the media," *Gender, Race and Class in Media : a Text Reader*, eds. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks : Sage, 1995) 18.

[4] Definition by Thompson from Katheryne Mitchell, "Visions of Vancouver : ideology, democracy, and the future of urban development," *Urban Geography* 17:6 (1996) 487.

[5] When I worked briefly for CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Company) Television News, my producer acknowledged that the publicly-funded institution lacked non-white staff by joking that lighting tricks should be used to "make me look more white."

[6] Hall, "The whites of their eyes" 20.

The racialization of the 'monster' house and the overarching narrative of Asian-propelled change have been constructed in a myriad of ways, from subtle textual elisions to explicitly demonological representations. From a wealth of textual evidence, I will draw out several specific examples. The first is the *Vancouver Magazine* article "Asia Town," in which author Sam North almost seems to be fomenting moral panic as he speculates on the dystopic possibilities of Asian immigration :

> **Ecology : Dystopia**
> Greater Vancouver's overpopulation and extreme pollution, as well as its incendiary race relations and one of North America's highest crime rates, can all be traced to the influx of hundreds of thousands of newcomers from Asia.[1]
>
> **Culture : Dystopia**
> In hindsight, a fight over vegetation started the gulf between the Chinese and other ethnic communities in Greater Vancouver. Wealthy Chinese immigrants who had bought property in the 1990s objected to 1996 bylaws restricting the right to cut down trees. Within a year there were rallies at which Chinese property owners clashed violently with suburban environmentalists, who threw themselves in front of chain-saw wielding arborists to save individual trees... Over time the communities became permanently separated by the walled communities built by wealthy ethnic Chinese and patrolled by armed police officers to guard against roving bands of forest-dwelling environmentalists.[2]

The representations are certainly hyperbolic, but the article is not a parody. It is a predictive narrative of urban change firmly grounded in the idiom of race : Asians precipitate environmental disaster (and even create policed ethnic enclaves), while "suburban," "forest dwelling" (read : white) environmentalists champion preservation. Whiteness maintains itself as racially unmarked since explicit references to 'whites' or 'Caucasians' are not made in the article. Nevertheless, the racially unmarked categories employed by the author are understood to reference whiteness, especially since they are

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[1] North 52.
[2] North 50.

opposed to the category of Chineseness. North not only uses "suburban environmentalists" and "forest-dwelling environmentalists" to euphemistically reference whites, but in various utopic scenarios of Vancouver that the author describes, 'government' is credited with mitigating the negative effects of Asian immigration.[1] 'Government' is, of course, a race-neutral category, but more importantly it is well understood to be a predominantly white institution, historically and presently. Therefore, the oppositional construction of racial categories takes place despite the fact that whiteness is never explicitly named. Some authors argue that whiteness itself has no content, yet whiteness manages to embody certain qualities in specific contexts through association with the race-neutral categories it colonizes. Thus, terms such as "environmentalists," "government," and in the most egregious cases "Canadians," come to stand in for whites, giving whiteness particularizing qualities by proxy while allowing the racial category to remain invisible. As this example shows, and as Dyer has so eloquently put it, the "colourless multicolouredness of whiteness" makes it difficult to 'see' in media representations of race.

In a less alarmist tone, Douglas Todd, The Vancouver Sun's religion and ethics reporter, also blames environmental degradation on Other cultures. His 'objective' and 'scholarly' tone, however, more effectively obfuscates the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies of race. Todd writes :

> [There has been an] unprecedented flow of Asian immigrants and others to Greater Vancouver, many of whom arrive with no tradition of keeping cities green... [M]uch of the controversy stems from groups within Canada's multi-cultural mosaic holding different attitudes to the urban forest... [T]housands of wealthy Chinese immigrants who can afford to tear down an old greater Vancouver house and build a larger replacement hold to *feng shui*, a system of geomancy which says, for example, an improperly placed tree could bring bad luck.[2]

Again, while non-white groups such as 'Chinese', 'Asians', and (in other portions of the text) 'Sikhs' are identified by Todd, 'whites' and 'Caucasians' remain unnamed. Instead,

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[1] North 48, 52.

[2] Douglas Todd, "The tree debate is about far more than esthetics," *Vancouver Sun* 31 August, 1996 : D20.

the race-neutral term *Canadians* is used in opposition to marked groups and easily conflates with white people ("Canadians who want to stop the insensitive cutting of grand trees are colliding with equally zealous people who are determined to protect their freedom to do whatever they want with their land.").[1] Todd's framing of the issue as a "challenge in a multicultural city"[2] locates environmental differences in the realm of the 'cultural' (i.e. non-white). This gives his arguments explanatory power by mobilizing current hegemonies of racial-ethnic difference. Different environmental attitudes are not the product of a range of factors, but are 'cultural', and therefore unambiguous and reified. According to Sharon Zukin, culture has become a much more explicit site of conflict over social differences and urban fears in recent years.[3] As social class, political affiliation, and other traditional institutions of identity slowly lose currency as categories for understanding social phenomena, cultural explanations increasingly 'make sense'. The ubiquitous media references to the traditional Chinese metaphysic of *feng shui* as a reason for tree-cutting and house design is an example of a cultural explanation that has gained widespread legitimacy. The incredible irony of Todd's article (which identifies *feng shui* as an anti-environmental aesthetic) is that the accompanying photograph shows a clear-cut suburban development of upscale homes, the kind most strongly associated with white residency. There is, however, no shorthand 'cultural' explanation such as *feng shui* to interpret this particular landscape pattern. White-dominated suburbia, conceptualized outside the categories of culture and race, is therefore not seen as part of the 'multicultural' problem in Vancouver.

The failure to connect the morphology of 'monster' houses with that of new suburban homes built prior to and during the 'monster-izing' of Vancouver's elite neighbourhoods has been the most persistent oversight in media (and academic) treatments of residential urban change in Vancouver. In fact, initial criticisms of 'monster' houses

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[1] Todd D20. Italics mine.
[2] Todd D21.
[3] Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : Blackwell, 1995) 2.

charged that they looked too similar to suburban fringe development.[1] A survey of the "New Homes" section in the *Vancouver Sun* from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s reveals countless advertisements and plans for suburban homes that display a morphology almost indistinguishable from 'monster' houses (figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). Some may argue that 'monster' houses are so named because they have a fundamentally different relationship to the urban fabric than new suburban housing. While 'monster' houses impinge on existing neighbourhoods with long-established symbolic investments, new suburban homes do not alter pre-existing built landscapes. Yet the stigma attached to 'mega-homes' belonging to Indo-Canadians in municipalities such as Surrey suggests that *de novo* built landscapes are not beyond racialization.[2] It is therefore reasonable to query why whites who live in oversized suburban homes on clear-cut lots have not unravelled the conflation of whiteness with landscape romanticism.

One reason for this can be found in an article by Pete McMartin in the *Vancouver Sun.* The article discusses Mary Hill, a suburban neighbourhood in the municipality of Port Coquitlam notorious for its clear-cut sub-divisions and large homes. It has been called "an alien cluster of homes growing like a boil," "unthinkable," and "a sea of stucco and vinyl" by various critics.[3] McMartin describes one white woman's reason for moving into Mary Hill :

> I used to live over on that hill... and when I saw them clearcutting Mary Hill, I thought, 'How could they do that? It's so disgusting!' Reluctantly, when we were looking to move, we came over here. And then I got up here. It was wonderful! The view![4]

Here is a clear example of 'love of nature' that is highly negotiable : views are more important than nature. The 'common-sense' treatment of this woman, however, as an

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[1] Read 60.

[2] In September, 1996, Surrey councillor Jerry Huot characterized the houses of one subdivision as "goddamn East Indian, goddamn megahouses," stirring up a local controversy over his remark. Harold Munro, "Indo-Canadians plan meeting over 'racial' remark in Surrey," *Vancouver Sun* 3 October, 1996 : B1.

[3] Pete McMartin, "The view from Mary Hill, where once only eagles and developers dared," *Vancouver Sun* 16 September, 1996 : B1.

[4] Ivana Maschi quoted in McMartin B1.

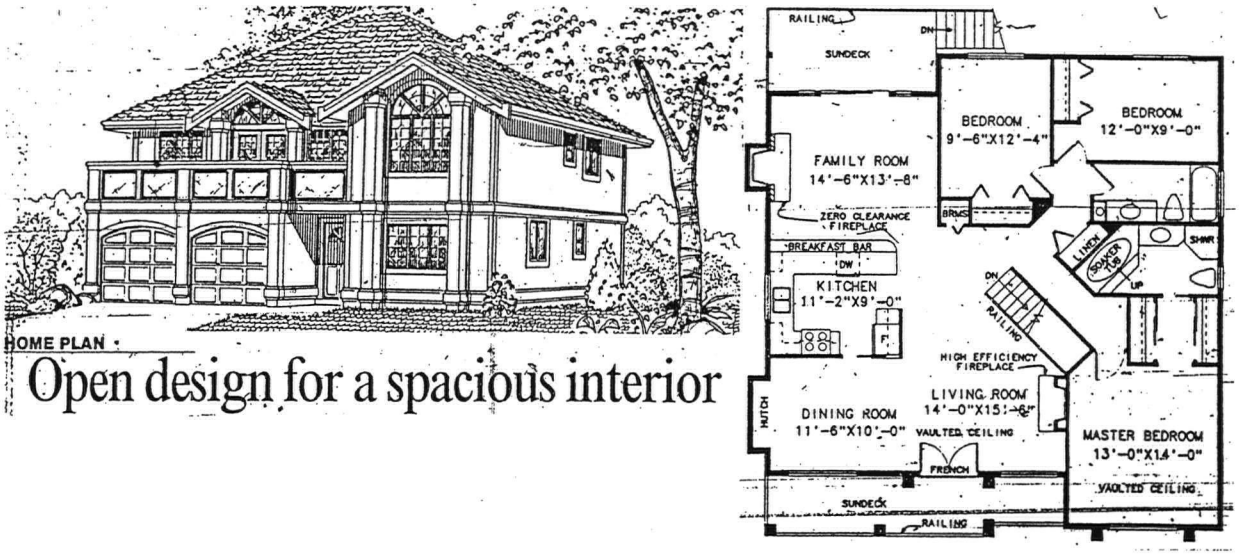


Figure 3 *- Open design for a spacious interior*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 4 January, 1992 : C6.

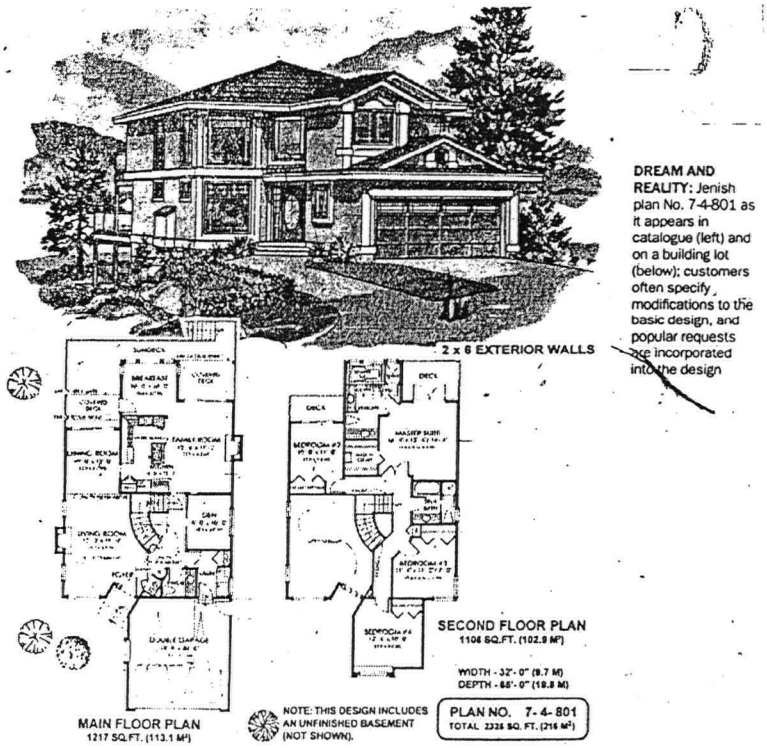


Figure 4 *- Dream and reality*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 10 November, 1995 : E2.

Traditional house a reminder of the past

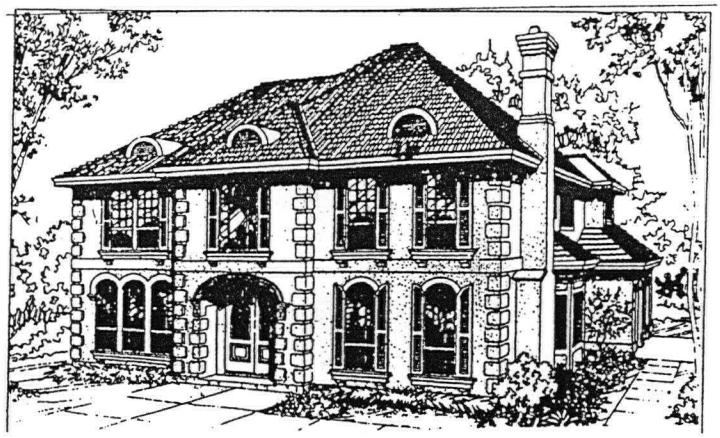
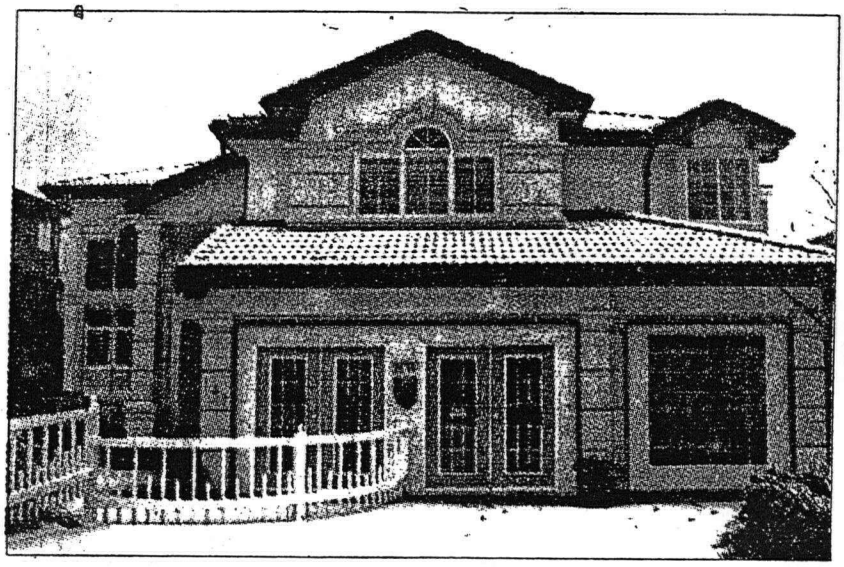


Figure 5 *- Traditional house a reminder of the past*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 13 April, 1996 : E5.



LARGE: a house at the Heritage Woods development in Port Moody

Figure 6 *- Large*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 2 March, 1996 : E1.

individual historical agent prevents her attitude from representing other whites in her neighbourhood, let alone whiteness as a whole. Not only are the woman's actions left unscrutinized as a function of her racial belongingness, but the author even defends Mary Hill by accusing "the intelligentsia" of being "finger-wagging town planners, and urban snobs who believe good taste can reside only in turn of the century heritage homes."[1] The woman's escape from a racialized public examination is thus doubly assured.

It is, of course, untenable to suggest that the woman's landscape views are solely a product of her whiteness. Her race is relevant only insofar as it can be used to dismantle racial categories. My argument that the woman should be scrutinized based on her racial belongingness is not an attempt to homogenize whiteness through a negative figuration (i.e. suburban whites are all unenvironmental). Instead, it is an attempt to reveal the heterogeneity of whiteness (it cannot always be correlated with preservation and environmentalism) by inverting looking relations. The actual heterogeneity of white landscape practice has not weakened the popular link between whiteness and landscape romanticism because whiteness is less a set of challengeable stereotypes than a set of narrative structural positions, rhetorical tropes, and habits of perception.[2] It is a pattern of looking and cognitive ordering that allows whites to pursue their own brand of special-interest politics without it being identified as such. Therefore, whites can define normality and co-opt the meanings of race-neutral categories without much concern that these meanings will be challenged through an examinination of 'real-life' white bodies (since they represent humanity as a whole and cannot be reduced to race). Whiteness, in other words, can be embodied yet white bodies cannot be objectified in looking relations. This paradox lies at the heart of white representational hegemony. It is hardly surprising, then, that the discourse on urban change in Vancouver became sedimented within these pre-existing, ideological ways of looking.

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[1] McMartin B1.
[2] Dyer (1997) 12.

Unlike the woman from Mary Hill, non-white bodies are explicitly raced and visible in media and academic literature. For example, the attention paid to the felling of two large sequoia trees in Vancouver by a Chinese homeowner in 1990 allowed the incident to 'stand in' for Chinese landscape views.[1] As one person charged, "The two giant sequoia trees on Marguerite Street that were chopped down at the instigation of the new property owner, Jack Eng, are the latest sacrifices on the altar of multiculturalism."[2] The letter suggests that non-white actions are strict functions of culture and race, and can be critiqued as such. Not only are Jack Eng's actions an indictment of Chinese people, they are an indictment of any privileging of diversity at all. This double-standard for looking at white and non-white bodies continues as normative journalistic practice. Such a double-standard, especially as exercised by a predominantly white media, reduces the non-white object to being a function of the white subject, structuring representations of non-white others as a means of knowing the white self without having to explicitly define the qualities of whiteness.

Taken for granted looking relations are evidenced elsewhere. Elizabeth Aird of *The Vancouver Sun* wrote about a dispute between three film producers and an absentee landlord :

> They don't mince words. "Rich Asian Land Owners Threaten to Kill Outdoor Film Festival..." said the headline in the news release. Three fledgling film festival producers are protesting against their treatment at the hands of - well, rich *Asians*.[3]

The final noun is clearly the operative term, which identifies and 'races' the landlord. One of the producers defended the release saying, "We're not attacking them for their race, we're just giving the facts."[4] However, as I have argued, such 'facts' are only relevant

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[1] see Majury and Ley, "Between Europe and Asia." For media coverage, see *The Vancouver Sun*, 1990, 9 March B1, B2; 3 April A1; 5 April A1; 5 April A19; 6 April A12; 7 April B4, B8; 16 April A9; 4 May B1.
While the articles specifically allowed the incident to 'stand-in' for *wealthy immigrant* Chinese landscape views, the common conflation between race and ethnicity has given the incident a broader, racially charged significance, spilling beyond the confines of a particular ethnic subset of Chinese people.

[2] H. Warn, letter to the editor, *Vancouver Sun* 23 April, 1990 : A15.

[3] Elizabeth Aird, "No matter how you view it, $1,000 a night is quite a lot," *Vancouver Sun* 13 July, 1996 : D6. Italics mine.

[4] Aird, "No matter" D7.

when pertaining to non-white groups. Indeed, this is demonstrated in another column by Aird. She writes :

> They should have seen it coming when Starbucks moved into the neighbourhood 18 months ago. The end of Robson... is being colonized by big money. A company called Tiger Capital *of Hong Kong* has bought most of the block between Bidwell and Cardero.[1]

One company is identified by name only, while the other is identified by name and country of origin (which in this case has a strong racial association). One might argue it is common knowledge, and thus redundant information, that *Starbucks'* owners are white Americans. I contend, however, that this strategic absence of information is symptomatic of the rhetorical apparatus that maintains the white privilege of unexaminability. Oppositely, identifying the *Tiger Company* as a Hong Kong firm is a clear attempt to foreground non-white ethnicity and race as objects of looking. 'Facts', then, are not simply neutral carriers of information, but can be interrogated to reveal the ideological agendas which they serve. As a white person, Elizabeth Aird reproduces the systemic privilege of white unexaminability because she cannot identify her own position of advantage and power. As Richard Dyer reminds us,

> Most of this [reproduction of looking relations] is not done deliberately or maliciously; there are enormous variations of power amongst white people, to do with class, gender, and other factors; goodwill is not unheard of in white people's engagement with others. White power none the less reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, and overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal. White people need to learn to see themselves as white, to see their particularity. In other words, whiteness needs to be made strange.[2]

REPRESENTING BUILDERS

It may be argued that coherent racialized narratives are easily constructed in meta-discursive texts such as this thesis when enunciative (media) texts, particularly those pertaining to landscape debates, are selectively and strategically stitched together. It is

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[1] Elizabeth Aird, "Another neighbourhood bites the dust," *Vancouver Sun* 2 March, 1996 : D6. Italics mine.

[2] Dyer (1997) 9.

therefore instructive to look at a group of related articles that do not deal with controversy per se—builder profiles[1]—in order to uncover more consistent patterns of racialized representation. In Vancouver's local newspapers, individuals involved in shaping the city's built environment are often profiled for business, human interest, or promotional purposes. A close reading of these profiles reveals that, time and again, Eurocentric assumptions about race haunt the production of texts.

As I have argued, the effective power of whiteness resides in the invisible and the unseen. Although in our visual culture whites need to be seen to be white, registering corporeal whiteness is not a 'racializing act' since whiteness is embodied within normative, race-neutral categories. But whites do not escape critique in Vancouver's landscape debates simply through the passive privilege of unexaminability. Whiteness is also actively ennobled through the neutral categories it colonizes. As I have argued, it has generally been entwined with notions of environmentalism and landscape romanticism. However, in the case of builder profiles,[2] whiteness often takes on two other embodiments : (1) family, and (2) enterprise. Both embodiments are not incidental, but reflect the reproduction of historically important discourses of whiteness. These profiles, written in 'folksy' and avuncular tones, take on a home-spun quality that sanitizes and aestheticizes the changes to the built environment initiated by white builders. The themes are strikingly consistent, regardless of the scale of landscape development.

For example, a profile on Colin Bosa (son of developer Robert Bosa, who was himself profiled in 1992[3]), in charge of over $65 million worth of real estate projects in Vancouver, is titled, "The son also rises."[4] Colin, "third eldest in a family of five children,... still liv[es] at home with mom and dad."[5] The author writes, "After a busy day

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[1] My usage of the term 'builder' refers here to contractors, developers, and/or architects.

[2] All the profiles I discuss are accompanied by photographs of the developers.

[3] Steve Whysall, "Builder Nat Bosa sees a city on the brink of its destiny," *Vancouver Sun* 12 September, 1992 : C1.

[4] Steve Whysall, "The son also rises," *Vancouver Sun* 20 July, 1996 : E1.

[5] Whysall E1.

at work, Colin says he often finds himself going home where, over dinner, his dad invariably ends up asking him how the highrise projects are going...'My dad and I get along just great.'"[1] At the opposite end of the spectrum, a small-scale development is described in this headline : "Family business : Illahee project is an affair of the heart for these children of Norgate."[2] (figure 7) The article describes the Illahee development by the Cragg family (three brothers and a sister) in the neighbourhood of Norgate in North Vancouver. The author writes that the Craggs' "family history has been entwined with Norgate's since soon after the community of almost 500 houses was established."[3] Even though the development required a change in the local zoning from *single-family* to *multi-family*,[4] the Craggs suggested that their project was "family-inspired,"[5] and their goal was "to build a project that preserved their childhood memories of the area's flourishing gardens and community spirit."[6]

It is not surprising that familial images take a central place in representations of whiteness since white discourse (and racial discourse, in general) has often emphasized the importance of biological reproduction. Frequently, the emphasis on reproduction is expressed as an anxiety that the white race will 'fade away'. Even as early as 1751, Benjamin Franklin was already worrying in his *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind* (1751) that "the number of purely White People in the World is proportionately very small."[7] The theme of outnumbering has been a mainstay of white racial politics, and in the context of Vancouver, the language of 'waves' and 'flooding' to describe recent Chinese immigration is a play on such anxiety over numbers. In an infamous article by

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[1] Whysall E1.

[2] Nick Rebalski, "Family Business," *Vancouver Sun* 22 June, 1990 : H1.

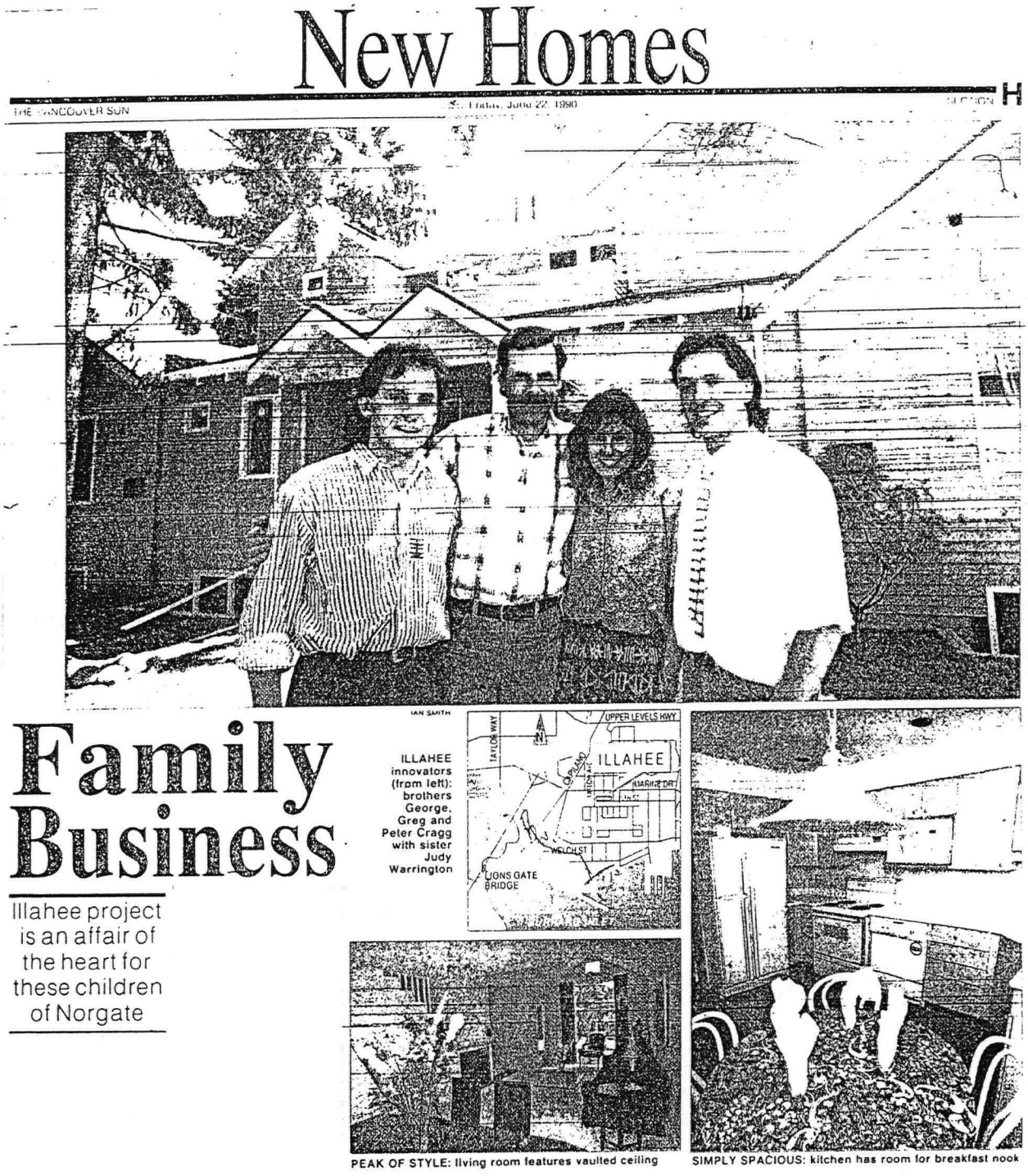
[3] Rebalski H1.

[4] The terms 'single-family' and 'multi-family' refer to zoning categories under Vancouver's Zoning and Development By-law. The different zoning districts regulate the kinds of activities and redevelopment that may take place within. 'Single-family' zones mandate a lower population density than 'multi-family' areas.

[5] Rebalski, "Family" H1.

[6] Rebalski, "Family" H1.

[7] from Dyer (1997) 27.



New Homes

THE VANCOUVER SUN Friday, June 22, 1990 SECTION H

Family Business

Illahee project is an affair of the heart for these children of Norgate

IAN SMITH

ILLAHEE innovators (from left): brothers George, Greg and Peter Cragg with sister Judy Warrington

PEAK OF STYLE: living room features vaulted ceiling

SIMPLY SPACIOUS: kitchen has room for breakfast nook

Figure 7 *- An affair of the heart*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 22 June, 1990 : H1.

Elizabeth Aird in the *Vancouver Sun* titled, "People are leaving town to find an English-speaking street for their kids,"[1] the author suggests that 'white flight' from Vancouver has been caused by large numbers of non-English speaking Asian families moving into west-side neighbourhoods. As one person suggested,

> You're describing the traditional dilemma of the minority. People [whites] are experiencing a cultural change in the city and that makes them feel uncomfortable. *It's like a reverse colonization. Suddenly we are someone else's natives.*[2]

Aird concures :

> Exactly. Whites are now the minority in a lot of Vancouver neighbourhoods and some of them just don't like it.[3]

White discomfort with being outnumbered has also been described in fictional texts. In *There Goes the Neighbourhood*, a novel for young adults dealing with urban change in Vancouver, a young girl named Carla and her family move away from Vancouver to Saltspring Island. The girl's best friend is upset and asks why. Carla replies,

> "Why do you think? My parents aren't exactly thrilled about the neighbourhood anymore. Are yours?"
> "I don't know."
> "Well, mine aren't. They say it's lost all its character because of the monster houses and that it's getting *overrun with Chinese.*"[4]

While the expressed fears are explicitly about the number of Asian immigrants moving into traditionally white enclaves, notions of breeding are never far removed. Given the context of 'anxiety over numbers', then, familial themes in profiles of white builders can be read as a reassurance of white (social, if not biological) fecundity. Since the racial and cultural identity of white builders is never mentioned in the profiles, the builders remain unmarked and are assumed to be 'of this place'. Familial themes trace a path of succession into the past, thereby establishing notions of origin and rootedness, which in

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[1] Elizabeth Aird, "People are leaving town to find an English-speaking street for their kids," *Vancouver Sun* 17 August, 1995 : B1.

[2] Aird, "People are leaving" B1. Italics mine.

[3] Aird, "People are leaving" B1.

[4] Valerie Lupini, *There goes the neighborhood* (Red Deer : Red Deer College Press, 1995) 11. Italics mine.

turn provide 'moral ground' to counter threats of displacement. Moreover, this path is projected into the future through the promise that children bring, who represent the reproduction of the hallowed bodies, values, and places of the past. The implicit themes of nativism and 'family-as-resistance', then, dignify the building practices of whites as legitimate acts within the larger, historically continuous processes of (white) community and nation-building.

Oppositely, familial themes, if used at all to describe Asian builders, take on a decidedly different tone. References to family often explicitly trace family lineage *outside* of Canada, thereby emphasizing cultural transplantation. A profile on Terry Hui and Victor Li, the two men in charge of the Pacific Place development on the former Expo lands, relates that, "[L]ike Li, the son of Li Ka-shing, Hui is heir to a Hong Kong fortune."[1] Another profile on architect Stanley Kwok, a 28-year resident of Canada, describes him as a "Guangzhou-born son of a cotton packer."[2] The stigma of the "endlessly extended Asian family"[3] has also been subtly mobilized against Chinese immigrants. 'Single-family' zoning, often zealously guarded by residents resistant to neighbourhood change, has been wielded to euphemistically suggest the 'incompatibility' of elite Vancouver neighbourhoods with 'multi-family' Asian households. Contemporary rhetoric resonates with historic stereotypes of the Chinese "propensity to sleep twelve to a room,"[4] used earlier in this century to establish popular perceptions of Chinese amorality. This threatening stereotype of family is played on in an advertisement for a new development. The ad features a Chinese family and the headline reads, "The Chongs looked for Value and Location—and found it!" (figure 8) Almost unbelievably, the subtitle reads, "Surprise! It's single family

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[1] Mulgrew, "Brainy" 48. Victor Li is a Canadian citizen. I am uncertain about Hui's citizenship.
[2] Rebecca Wigod, "The master builder," *Vancouver Sun* 7 September, 1996 : B1.
[3] Dyer (1997) 27.
[4] Anderson 104.

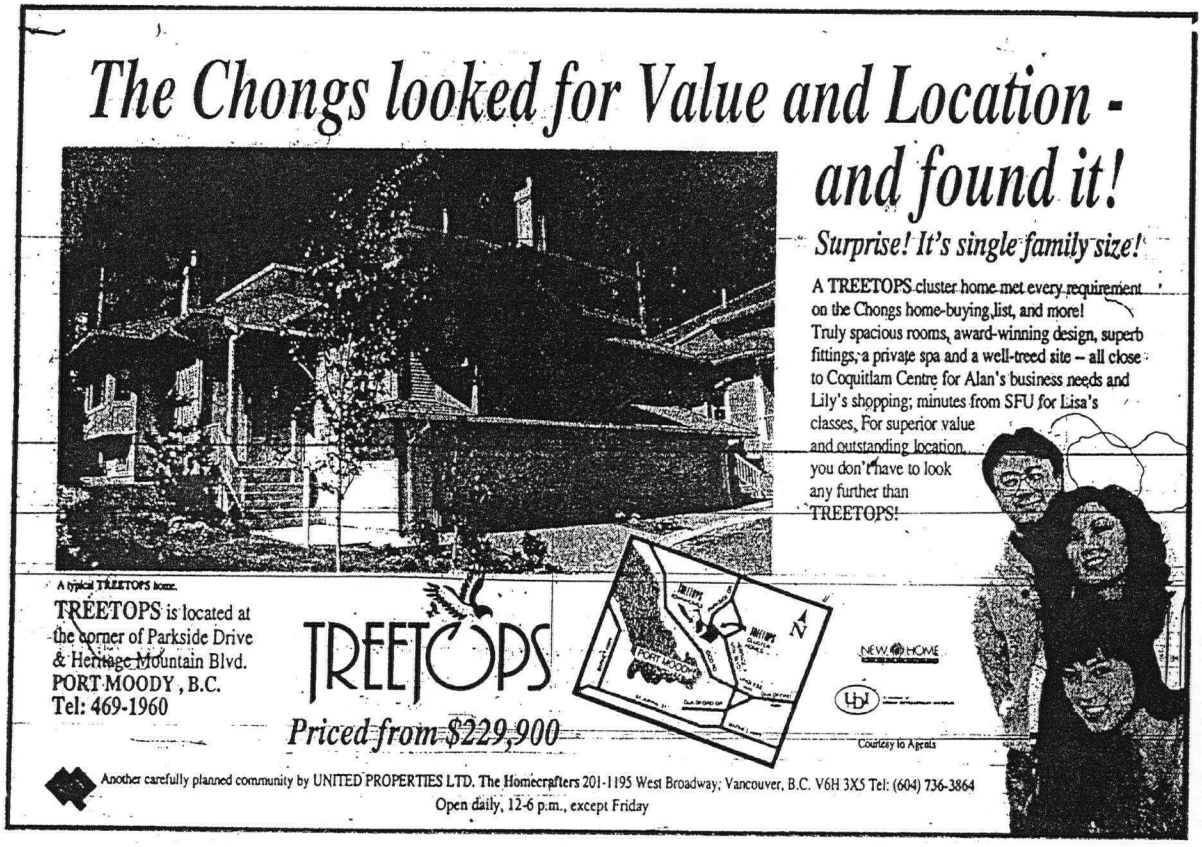

Figure 8 *- Surprise! It's single family size!*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 7 March, 1992 : H4.

size!"[1] Differing narratives of family, then, viewed as allegories of foreignness and nativity, are expressions of racially coded thought.

Though the familial embodiment of whiteness may stand on its own, its narrative power is buttressed by another embodiment—enterprise. Notions of whiteness are often carried within the ambiguous notion of a 'spirit', one which is able to manage, control, and alter the material world. As Harriet Beecher Stowe expresses very clearly and embarassedly in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it is the nature of white men to be 'enterprising'.[2] While enterprise may be thought of as a spirit—of energy, will, ambition, and vision, it has tangible effects—wealth creation, labour organization, landscape change, and nation building.[3] Historically, the most important vehicles for the exercise and display of white dynamism and confidence have been imperialism and colonialism. These projects have, of course, established systems of representation which continue to undergird and influence habits of perception. A detailed examination of these global apparatuses are beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, lingering narratives need to be scrutinized. When representations of urban change in Vancouver are closely examined, we find that the themes of white enterprise—the excitement of advance, the conquest and mastery of space—continue to resonate, even in these 'post-colonial' times.

The family-oriented profile on Colin Bosa refered to above is also a tribute to enterprise. It describes Bosa as "a young, upwardly mobile condo buyer" with "a very big job."[4] He aims to build condos for "his demographic"—"hipsters," "young professionals," and those who enjoy "an adrenaline-packed, go, go, go lifestyle"; Bosa confidently predicts his condos will become "a mecca for movers and shakers."[5] The homage to enterprise could not be more transparent. Another profile on developer Ian Gillespie also

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[1] *Vancouver Sun* 7 March, 1992 : H4. It is difficult to imagine how such a transparently prejudiced re-iteration of a cultural stereotype could possibly succeed as a marketing strategy. In my opinion, the ad can only be described as bizarre.

[2] from Dyer (1997) 31.

[3] Dyer (1997) 31.

[4] Whysall, "Son" E1.

[5] Whysall, "Son" E1

entwines both embodiments of whiteness. The succesful condo developer credits his family and "even his former track coach... for shaping his approach to life and success."[1] The author writes, "[Gillespie's] mother, Norma, says her second youngest of four sons has always been an optimist."[2] Although couched within a storyline of family, the article is ultimately a tale of enterprise. Under the headline, "Brash newcomer redefining skylines,"[3] the author writes that

> [d]eveloper Ian Gillespie exudes confidence. His resume—more than $850 million worth of projects undertaken since 1993—suggests that he can walk the walk... "Losers are motivated by methods, winners are motivated by results," Gillespie said in an interview. "I don't remember where I heard it, but I wrote it down. It encapsulted what we're all about."[4]

The accompanying photograph shows a smiling Gillespie with his arms folded in a gesture of confidence and satisfaction (figure 9. Compare with figure 10). Behind him towers a skyline of new condominiums. An accompanying graphic lists 14 of Gillespie's projects in descending scale, starting with the largest at $440 million. The essential storyline, then, tells of a 'native son', nurtured lovingly by family and friends alike into a powerful sculptor of the built environment. The tone is celebratory and disarming, dignifying the mission to transform the landscape. Another headline detailing a development by a husband and wife team is a similar effusion of graciousness : "The personal touch : Dedication to every detail pays off for first-time developers now that Cimarron shines in White Rock."[5] The captions above and below the accompanying photograph (figure 11) of the couple read : "The Blochs involved themselves with every aspect of the project," and "The Blochs : first *feat* as developers."[6] Again, the portrait is one of industriousness and noble urban transformation. Building becomes a heroic act—a feat—born from the uncanny spirit of enterprise.

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[1] Wyng Chow, "Brash newcomer redefining skylines," *Vancouver Sun* 30 May, 1998. E1.
[2] Chow E1.
[3] Chow E1.
[4] Chow E1.
[5] Nick Rebalski, "The personal touch," *Vancouver Sun* 3 August, 1990 : H1.
[6] Rebalski H1. Italics mine.

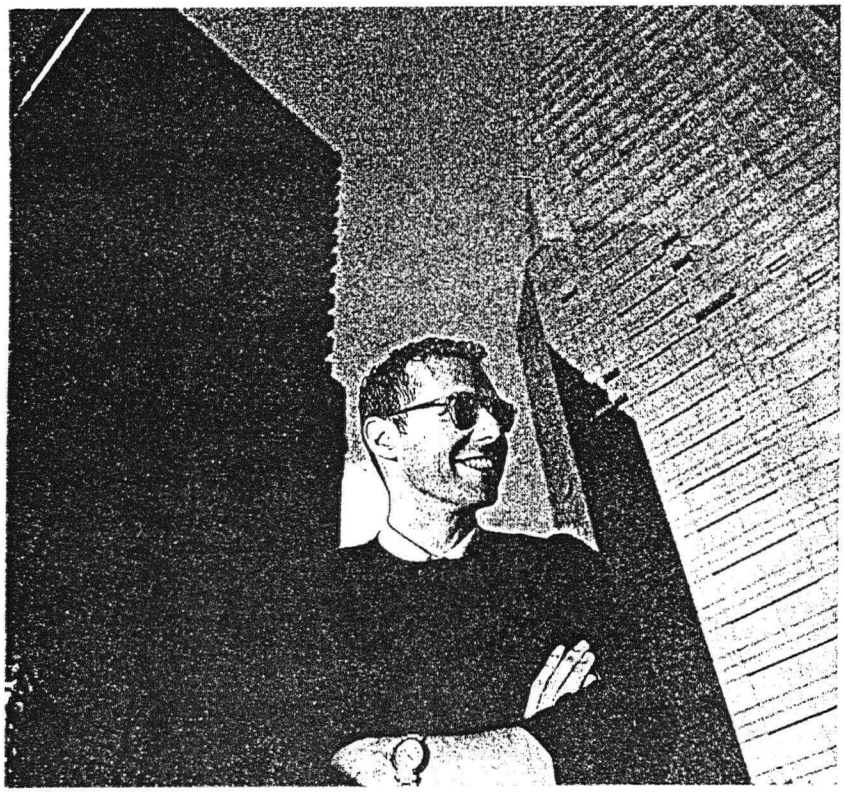
Brash newcomer redefining skylines

Developer credits family, business connections and former track coach for shaping his success.

STEVE BOSCH/Vancou

IAN GILLESPIE: "Losers are motivated by methods, winners are motivated by results."

Figure 9 *- Losers and winners : white enterprise*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 30 May, 1998 : E1.



Bob Rennie, 40, has all the reasons in the world to smile. As a top North American realtor, he now designs and develops projects of his own

Bob Rennie, 40 ans, a toutes les raisons du monde de sourire. Un des agents immobiliers les plus en vue d'Amérique du Nord, il conçoit et développe maintenant ses propres projets

Figure 10 *- All the reasons in the world to smile : Aestheticizing whiteness*
Source : Wood 51.

Figure 11 *- The Blochs : first feat as developers*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 3 August, 1990 : H1.

The metaphor of birth is not insignificant. Like actual biological reproduction, the reproduction of built forms is a marker of social fecundity. Thus, the "ambitious" development of (predominantly white-inhabited) Westwood Plateau, a 600-hectare low-density, single-family housing scheme in the suburb of Coquitlam, is described in a profile as "[t]he birth of a new community... [which] is really all about people and homes."[1] The author muses, "What sticks out in the mind most are the numbers. Millions of this, thousands of that, hundreds and hundreds of this and that."[2] He is clearly impressed by "the enormous scale of things, the vastness of the over-all development."[3] While the author does describe the expanionist development as "controversial," the controversy centers on the fact that the entire parcel of land was sold to one developer by the Crown in 1989. Issues concerning housing density and the environmental impact of clear-cutting are not raised by the author. Moreover, the scope of the controversy is strictly local. White-dominated suburbia, taken as a morphology of built forms, has simply not entered popular discourse as a racialized object of derision or contempt—"there are still many people who have not heard of about Westwood Plateau."[4] Oppositely, the popular currency of the Chinese 'monster' house allows Westwood's marketing manager to defend his development succinctly : "We don't want any monster houses at Westwood."[5]

THE UNBEARABLE WHITENESS of BEING

Although I am arguing that the projects of white builders are often aestheticized through strategic representational tropes, this is not to suggest that these narratives are completely authoritative. In other words, I am not suggesting, because ideological embodiments of whiteness circulate within the discursive field, that white builders are *never* the targets of public antipathy towards urban change. The relationship between texts

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1 Steve Whysall, "Changing the shape of Coquitlam," *Vancouver Sun* 18 January, 1992 : H1.
2 Whysall, "Changing" H1.
3 Whysall, "Changing" H1.
4 Whysall, "Changing" H1.
5 Tony Zappone quoted in Whysall, "Changing," H1.

and readers is simply not that direct. One white builder, in fact, suggested that the public sees developers in general as "greedy plunderers of the land."[1] Nevertheless, within the local economy of meaning structured by texts, white builders cannot be critiqued on the basis of their whiteness. This is so, not only because hegemonies of vision make it difficult to 'see whiteness,' but because whiteness is immersed within a narrative reservoir of family, community, and nation. It is therefore effortless for white builders who wish to answer their critics to simply tap into existing streams of romanticized rhetoric.

Michael Audain (president of Polygon group, arguably the largest developer in Vancouver), recognizing the pejorative connotations of the word 'developer', prefers to be called a 'home-builder'.[2] He describes Garry Santini (ParkLane Homes) and Andre Molnar (Molnar Group), other large Vancouver developers, as "gentlemen" (a clever self-reference), and says, "They care about what they are building, care about their reputations. They are people who in a quiet way do quite a bit for the community."[3] In another article explicitly on the topic of public perception of developers, the caption beneath a photograph (figure 12) of developer Wally Miller reads, "[T]he Tsawwassen *home builder* says he contributes to society by creating communities."[4] Couched in terms of community-building, these responses mask the developers' cynical or mercenary motives for building, such as profit. These are the very same motives that are so often assumed to underlie non-white development. Asian-lead projects are popularly seen as symptomatic of "the power that the Hong Kong money wields" or "unbridled greed."[5] One Vancouverite, refering to what he perceived as Asian-inspired urban change, argued, "We in this generation must make a stand in support of higher values, or we will leave to the future a city raped by the interests of profit."[6] While controversial megaprojects such as Westwood Plateau are

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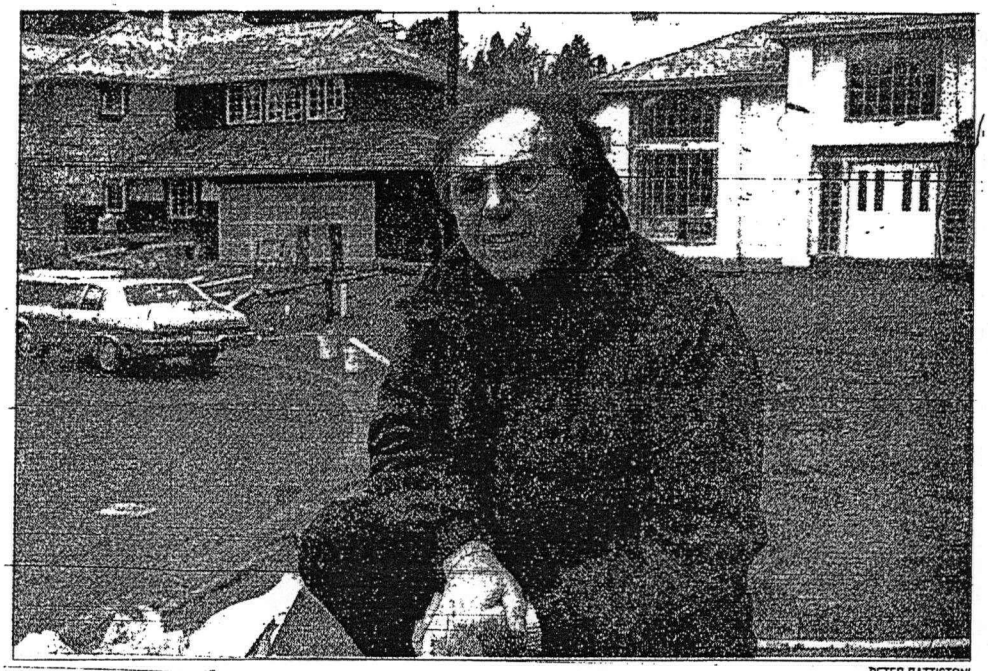
[1] Nick Rebalski, "Housing under siege by urban growth issues," *Vancouver Sun*, 9 February, 1990 : F1.
[2] Anonymous, "Column one," *Vancouver Sun*, 5 September, 1992 : C1.
[3] Anonymous C1.
[4] Rebalski, "Housing" F1. Italics mine.
[5] Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 197.
[6] Ley, "Between Europe and Asia" 197.



PETER BATTISTONI

WALLY MILLER: the Tsawwassen home builder says he contributes to society by creating communities

Figure 12 *- Creating communities (note the large boxy houses in the background)*

Source : *Vancouver Sun* 9 February, 1990 : F1.

nevertheless described as "the birth of a community," non-white developments such as Concorde Pacific Place by Chinese developer Li Ka-Shing are not inherently *about community*. Instead, they are inherently dubious and subject to question. One writer queries,

> But what do we know of the character of this new development? [Concorde Pacific Place] *Will it feel like a community?* Will its parks be green and safe? Will its sidewalks be shared in the daytime by baby-strollers and senior citizens, by shoppers and bon vivants after dark?[1]

White building practice, then, is seen to inscribe both a physical and a moral order into the landscape, codified within the language of values and community. The vision is one of reciprocal responsibilities and shared benefits. Thus, white development is represented as an "affair of the heart"[2] which secures profit but *is not pursued as profit.* On the other hand, the motives of non-white builders are assumed to be inherently suspect. Non-white building practice, if not described antithetically as a direct assault on community values, is nevertheless somehow outside the boundaries of an idealized commonwealth. These partisan narratives are given disturbingly open forum in the white-dominated media. The rhetoric of community used by white developers justifying their practices is freely parroted and rarely critically challenged in the mainstream press. At the same time, non-white developers are rarely if ever given voice to respond to critics, let alone invoke the imagery of community.[3]

Despite these 'post-colonial' times, I do not think it is irresponsible to suggest that contemporary media texts on landscape use can be seen as an eerie mirror of colonial literature, both of which are

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[1] Elizabeth Aird, "Huge real-estate project going almost unnoticed in heart of city," *Vancouver Sun* 26 October, 1995. Italics mine.

[2] Rebalski, "Family" H1.

[3] One architect told me about a dinner which he attended where awards for 'heritage' design in Vancouver were being presented to home-builders. The winners were predomiantly Asian, and the architect noticed in the following days that the story was largely ignored by the mainstream press. Personal correspondence with Sandy Hirschen.

> an exploration and representation of a world at the boundaries of 'civilization'... That world is therefore perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil. Motivated by this desire to conquer and dominate, the imperialist configures the colonial realm as a confrontation based on the differences of race, language, social customs, cultural values, and modes of production.[1]

Racialized imagery, albeit with a considerable degree of nuance and elaboration, continues to be wielded today in historically recognizable ways. As Edward Said insightfully remarks, revealing this kind of historical continuity is bound to stir up controversy since we, as a culture, have invested heavily in the idea that learning and scholarship move forward and get better as time passes.[2] But as I have tried to demonstrate, representation today is no more enlightened, and signs and texts no less ideological, than they have been in the past. The persistence of certain habits of seeing is certainly not the product of some "nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot to hold down the "Oriental' world."[3] It is rather the product of a

> *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philologic texts;... it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, or even incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power.[4]

The privileged place of whiteness in discourse is one such uneven exchange that produces disciplinary forms of knowledge. The term 'disciplinary' refers here to the modernist practice of establishing a certain 'objective' distance between the knower and the known. In the context of race, the narrative trope of whiteness "postures as if it were the unmarked frame of the visible field, laying claim to the authority of 'direct perception.'"[5] In

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[1] Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The economy of Manichean allegory," *The post-colonial studies reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London : Routledge, 1995) 18.

[2] Edward Said, "from Orientalism," *A critical and cultural theory reader*, eds. Antony Easthope and Kate McGowan (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1993) 59.

[3] Edward Said, "Orientalism,"*The post-colonial studies reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London : Routledge, 1995) 90.

[4] Said, "Orientalism" 90.

[5] Judith Butler quoted in Mike Hill, "Can Whiteness speak?" *White trash : race and class in America*, eds. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York : Routledge, 1997) 159.

other words, white privilege is the unseen omniscient force which does the 'framing' without accountably taking its turn at being 'framed'. The fact that whiteness can typify seemingly opposite tendencies—preservationism on the one hand and enterprise on the other—is in no way a contradiction. Whiteness is by definition a slippery creature. As I have argued, whiteness is less a set of challengeable stereotypes than a set of shifting narrative positions and rhetorical tropes. The fact that whiteness can be portrayed magnanimously yet go almost unnoticed as a category is also not a contradiction. This is because whiteness privileges white poeple to "both lay claim to the spirit that aspires to the heights of humanity and yet supposedly speak and act disinterestedly as humanity's most average and unremarkable representatives."[1]

What the debate on urban change in Vancouver clearly demonstrates is the continued reproduction of racialized looking relations. Emphasis should shift away from the trite question, "Why were non-whites stigmatized for negative landscape change?" to the more profound question, "Could our current systems of knowledge production have concluded otherwise?" Any move towards de-disciplinary knowledge—the realization that all knowledge is mediated, relative, and an effect of power—is hindered because the white privilege of unexaminability places the whole burden on those excluded from this privilege to demonstrate their admissibility, as individuals, into the world of the unexamined. Given the negative political climate for social critique which I described in chapter two, it is hardly surprising that attempts to turn the lens of examination around, to look at whites and 'make whiteness strange', have been keenly resisted. Non-whites who refuse to 'be framed' are charged with overzealous political correctness or a desire to hide other agendas (which is true in some cases, but not all). What seems to be politically acceptable to a majority of Canadians (whites and non-whites), then, is the political status quo : while whites remain the subjects of looking, non-whites remain its objects. This is neither a result of hatred nor conspiracy. The ideological signification of cultural difference is an inevitable product of

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[1] Dyer (1997) 223.

the naturalized, historically continuous, and taken for granted ways of looking that form the minutiae of everyday life in postmodern Vancouver.

5

RESPONSE from the CENTER RESPONSE from the MARGIN

Media, academic, and literary treatments of urban change in Vancouver have created an architectural semiotic of Chineseness, most clearly expressed in the notion of the 'monster' house. Beyond this tangible embodiment, Chineseness has also come to stand for a set of 'dubious intentions' in regards to landscape change. These popularly understood constructions of Chineseness, however, have not been based on a real and substantive correlation between race, motives, and morphologies of built form over a wide geographical stage, but have instead been largely based on ideological narratives of racial difference disseminated through media pedagogy. The 'monster' house, therefore, is less a case of authentic material culture than an exemplar of a rhetorical strategy mobilized by conservative interests against any change or 'postmodern messiness' in particular areas of Vancouver. Nevertheless, the reification of Chineseness in the 'monster' house has evoked a strong response from dominant society (the center) : a heightened enthusiasm for 'heritage' styles of architecture. While preferences for heritage-style architecture are nothing new, I will argue that the current vogue of neo-traditionalism cannot be read innocently as simply a matter of 'personal taste'. Oppositely, Vancouver's urban change debate has not elicited a sophisticated or nuanced response from the margins—that is, from Chinese or other non-white groups—challenging the current hegemonies of racial representation. This chapter will examine the response to racial narratives from the center and attempt to address the inadequate response from the margins.

RESPONSE from the CENTER : 'HERITAGE' ARCHITECTURE

As I have argued, little attention has been paid to the ways in which contemporary landscape debates in Vancouver have aligned themselves with existing power relations. The current trend towards new 'heritage' architecture is yet another facet of the debate that has not been interrogated as a possible expression of local racial hegemonies. A general return to neotraditional architecture is a phenomenon evidenced in many cities in North America over the last few decades. It is, of course, part of the larger cultural revolution against the dictates of high modernism in all its forms, including the built environment. Postmodern architecture, playing on the themes of contextuality, inclusivity, and diversity, has sought to correct the sense of placenessness engendered by modern urbanism's appeals to functionalism and abstract universalism. Postmodern architecture has been argued to be an architecture of democratization, and therefore an architecture of resistance.[1] While this argument may certainly be legitimate in particular instances, neotraditional residential design in Vancouver contains another layer of meaning which does not express a 'postmodernism of resistance', but a 'postmodernism of reaction'.[2]

The discursive production of the 'monster' house as 'foreign', 'ostentatious', and 'unenvironmental' has relied on a reading of the old Tudor-styled homes of Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale as 'native', 'tasteful', and 'environmental'. The romantic landscape reading has emerged as dominant, and it is this discourse of conservationism and 'Canadian-ness' that has significantly impacted landscape tastes. Landscape romanticism has not only been privileged in general media coverage of urban change, it has also been explicitly and didactically supported in one of Vancouver's few popular sources of public architectural education : Robin Ward's architecture column in the *Vancouver Sun*. Over the last decade, Ward has editorialized zealously in favour of heritage architecture (figures 13 to 18),

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[1] David Ley and Caroline Mills, "Can there be a postmodernism of resistance in the urban landscape?" *The restless urban landscape*, ed. Paul Knox (Prentice-Hall, 1993) 271.

[2] Foster from K. Falconer Al-Hindi and C. Staddon, "The hidden histories and geographies of neotraditional town planning : the case of Seaside, Florida" *Environment and Planning D : Society and Space* 15 (1997) 350.

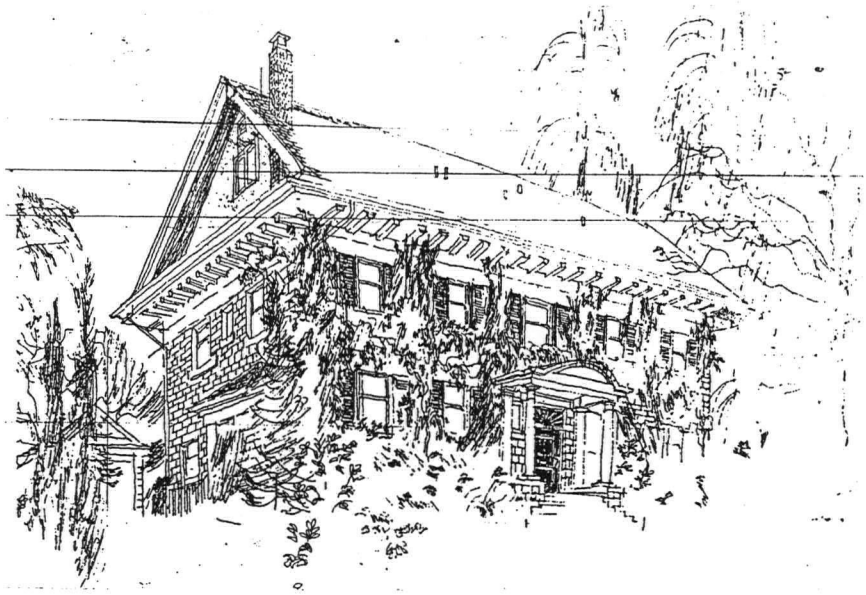

Figure 13 *- Ward's heritage : 1550 Laurier*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 27 June, 1992 : D14.

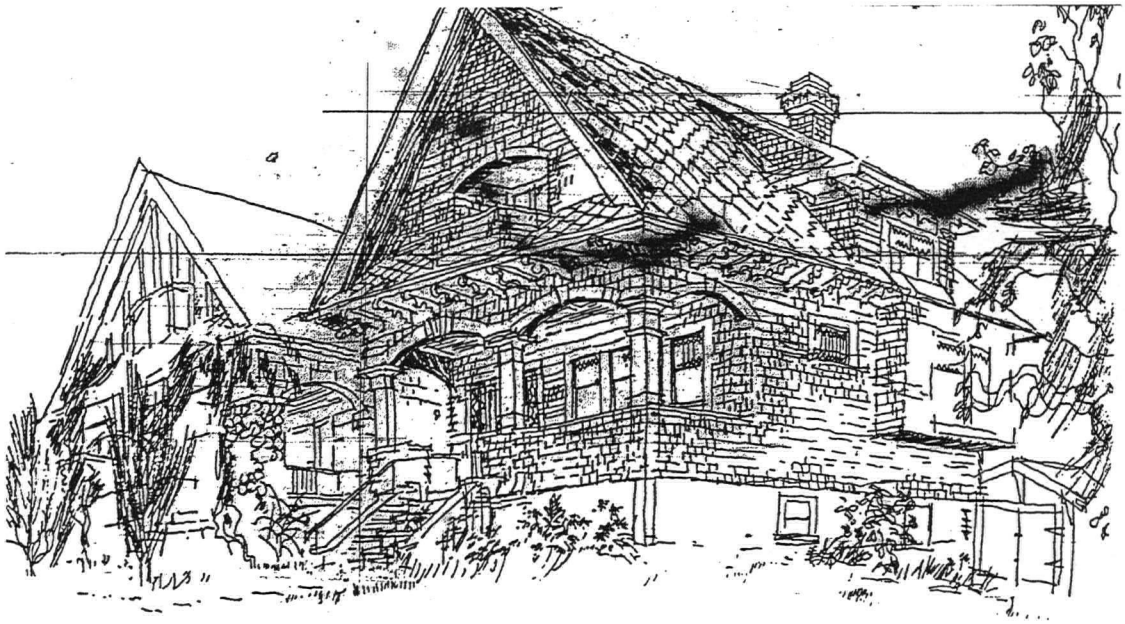

Figure 14 *- Ward's heritage : Grandview*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 1 August, 1992 : D14.

Figure 15 **- *Ward's heritage : Brock House***
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 10 October, 1992 : D14.

Figure 16 **- *Ward's heritage : 1200 West 57th***
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 18 November, 1995 : D7.

Figure 17 **- *Ward's heritage : Oakhurst***
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 13 July, 1996 : D7.

Figure 18 **- *Ward's heritage : 1050 Nicola***
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 3 August, 1996 : D7.

largely at the expense of any critical examination of contemporary built form (one gets the sense when reading Ward's columns that heritage *is* architecture). He has often dedicated entire columns to the defense of particular structures under threat of demolition, and has been particularly critical of what he sees as Vancouver City Council's indifference to preservation. For a public that can only be described as less than architecturally savvy, an unabashedly pro-heritage voice such as Ward's has proven to be highly influential. In Ward's defense, there are legitimate merits to preserving historically significant structures. However, despite superficial similarities, preserving existing structures from the past and ressurrecting 'past-ness' through new structures in the present are not one and the same. Yet the latter movement has appropriated the very same romanticized landscape reading that heritage preservationists champion. The resulting confusion has obscured that fact that heritage preservation and neotraditionalism often serve distinctly different sets of interests.

The new 'heritage' movement is not simply a curious anachronism, nor is it merely a product of crude sentimentality. The desire for tradition may be read as a reflection of a deeper dissatisfaction with the surroundings of contemporary life. Given the popular anxiety that Vancouver is becoming "Hongcouver," then, any impassioned defense of a return to 'heritage' cannot be easily separated from a critique of Chineseness. Though the romanticized landscape readings of heritage activists such as Ward are not explicitly racial, his arguments have gained leverage and a sense of immediacy by working within the racialized field of discourse. For example, Ward writes :

> Many of Vancouver's old homes, pleasantly set in large gardens, are underbuilt by the ruthless standards of today's real estate market. This is why a garden-eating builder's special seems vulgar and out of place when it appears next door.[1]

> Vancouver planners propose new design guildlines that will require new homes to be more sensitive to traditional neighbourhoods. If adopted by city council, these guidelines will tame the so-called "monster homes" that have rampaged across town in recent years.[2]

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[1] Robin Ward, Untitled, *Vancouver Sun*, 22 July 1995 : D12.

[2] Robin Ward, "Architecture," *Vancouver Sun*, 18 November 1995 : D7.

> Some of the farms now boast incongruous, sprawling monster homes next to the tumbledown, traditional barns, strawberry fields and vegetable patches.[1]

In each of the statements above, Ward's appeals for heritage are clearly structured as reactions to what he perceives as negative urbanism. His fondness for traditional built form is not merely an expression of idiosyncratic cultural or stylistic preferences, but an overt retort to change. I am not arguing that Ward consciously played off racial themes, rather that the popularity of his views, evidenced by the current acute awareness of tradition in Vancouver, owes something to society's immersion within raced-based discourses of change. Thus, the meanings of heritage preservation must be examined within the context of a public consciousness saturated with mythologies of difference, and this is particularly critical when such meanings are hi-jacked to serve reactionary urban and cultural agendas.

The appeal of the neo-heritage movement does not lie in the desire to faithfully reproduce the authentic appearance of a historical period. Instead, its appeal lies in the desire to evoke an atmosphere of traditional hominess, solid domesticity, and cultural homogeneity associated with the past (figure 19).[2] In other words, neotraditionalism does not commodify physical landscapes so much it commodifies their attendant ways of life. With the 'monster' house effectively branded as a 'price paid' for the privileging of difference, dominant culture has attempted to restage the social worlds of the past through neotraditional architecture. As one writer has insightfully remarked, "[A] feeling of social insecurity seems to breed a love of simulation."[3] Stuart Hall has similarly cautioned that when minority cultures begin to make their presence strongly felt, the dominant culture often "goes into an even deeper trough of defensive exclusivism... [O]ne can see a regression to a very defensive and highly dangerous form of national identity."[4] This

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[1] Robin Ward, Untitled, *Vancouver Sun*, 8 August 1992 : D14.

[2] Witold Rybczybski, *Home : A short history of an idea* (New York : Penguin, 1986) 9.

[3] M.C. Boyer, "Cities for sale : merchandising history at south street seaport" *Variations of a theme park : The new American city and the end of public space*, ed. M. Sorkin (New York : Noonday Press, 1992) 187.

[4] Stuart Hall, "The local and the global : globalization and ethnicity" *Culture, globalization, and the world-system*, ed. Anthony D. King (Binghamton : State University of New York, 1991) 25.

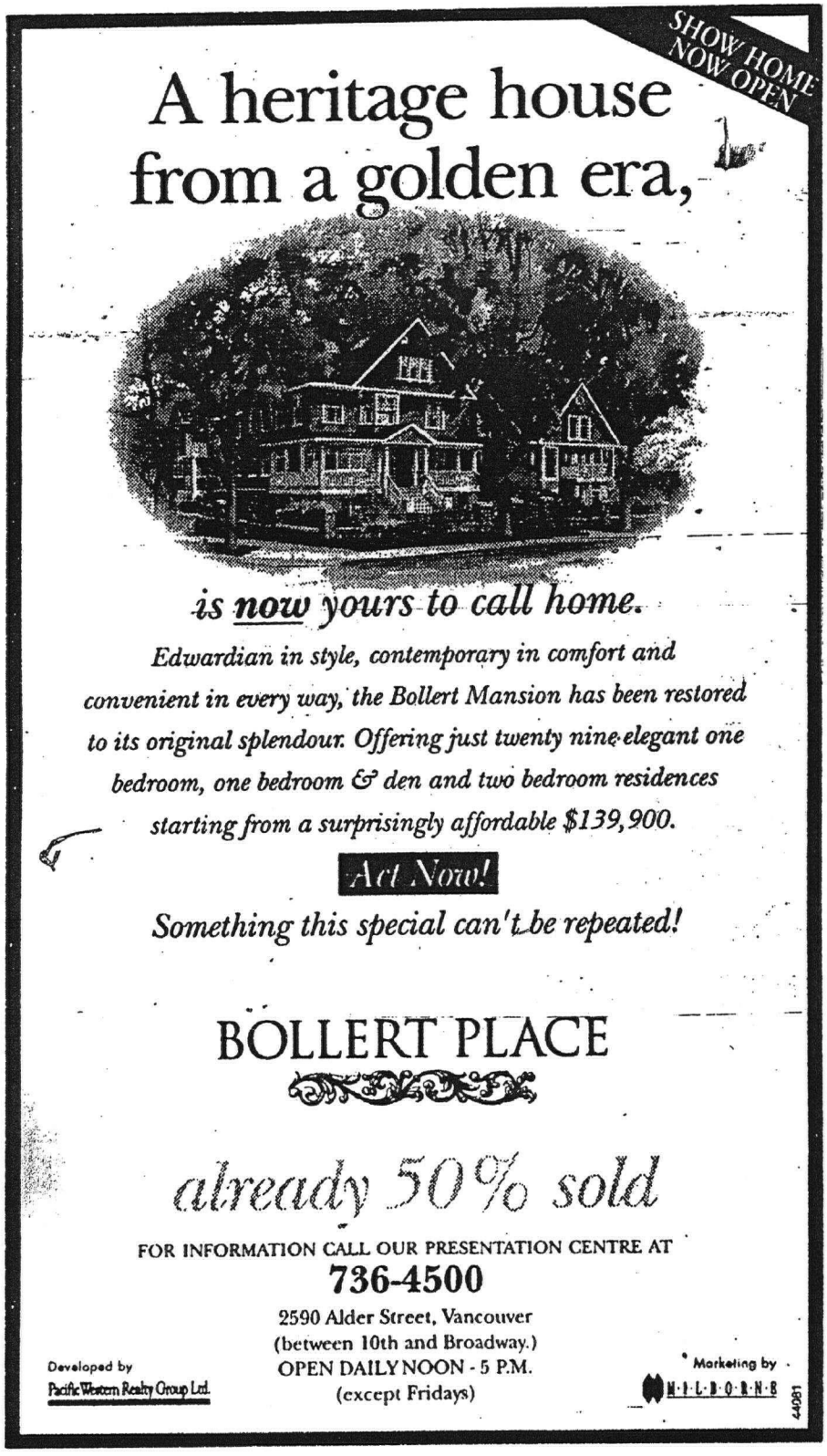

Figure 19 **- *Re-staging the past***
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 24 August, 1996 : C2.

defensive response has now layered itself atop any purely benign, personal preferences for traditional styles, and complicates readings of particular landscapes. I contend that

> under the guise of creating an emancipatory urban landscape, neotraditionalism functions as an expression of new and complex articulations between currently hegemonic class fractions and a rather chiliastic habitus of urban social practices. Postmodern arguments about affirmation of social diversity, the revaluation of a "politics of difference," and reemphasis on community-based local planning are mobilised in neotraditional development to bolster the opposite : existing structures of class, gender, and racial domination.[1]

In other words, neotraditionalism can be read as an attempt by dominant society to reassert its presence through a reactionary identity politics of seclusion and security. Within new 'heritage' communities, the messy realities of contemporary urban life give way to a sense of social and cultural neatness. Neotraditionalism designates anything outside the realm of its syntactic and semantic codes as Other.[2] Thus, this culturally conservative milieu returns to dominant society a sense of control over the landscape that was felt to be temporarily lost to 'Other influences'. Individuals who prefer heritage styles are not necessarily motivated by any overt racism. Nevertheless, the appeal of 'heritage' architecture is critically dependent on the mobilization and manipulation of historical and contemporary social polarities.

Neotraditional architecture may be thought of as a material embodiment of whiteness, and like actual white bodies, it is also characterized by an ability to elude examination. The language of home-building, community, and nostalgia used to promote new 'heritage' subtly references popular accounts of difference without directly confronting issues of race and nationality. An advertisement for bank mortgages demonstrates this (figure 20). The slogan "Can we get you into a home instead of a debate?" written over a quaint, heritage-style cottage is a direct reference to local landscape conflict. More importantly, however, the ad frames heritage architecture as an unmarked and normative

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[1] Falconer Al-Hindi and Staddon 350.
[2] Falconer Al-Hindi and Staddon 356.

CAN WE GET YOU INTO A HOME INSTEAD OF A DEBATE?

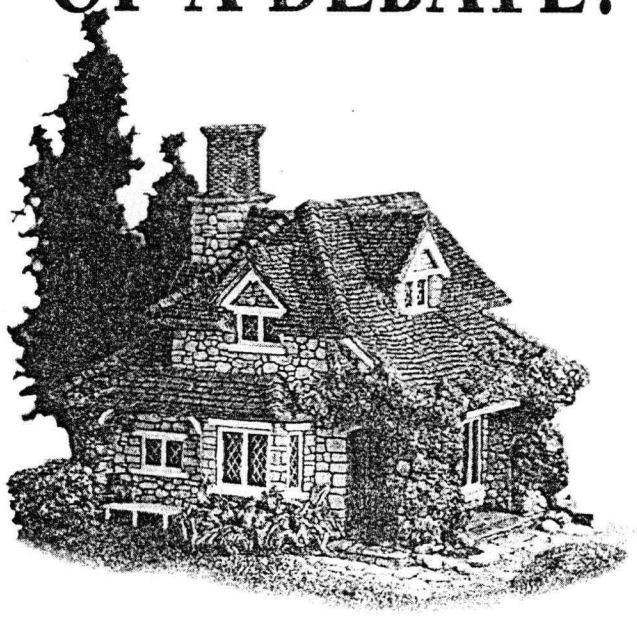

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Figure 20* - *Heritage and unexaminability
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 3 December, 1997 : A4.

category of built form. Though invisible, this category is nevertheless conflated with notions of nationalism, preservationism, and good citizenship. It is at once high-minded yet completely ordinary, claiming to speak for and embody the commonalities of nation. It therefore cannot be the object of looking relations—a role reserved for non-whiteness, which is by definition peculiar, unordinary, controversial, and debatable. The bank's mobilization of landscape readings to fuel consumer desire capitalizes on the fervor of reactionary politics, and demonstrates a sophisticated cognizance of local identity discourse. It also demonstrates that the production of national identity is not merely a cultural endeavor, but one that involves the exercise of power and often the desire for material gain.[1] The production of categories and meanings around notions of nativity and nation are never static nor innocent. In fact, neotraditionalism, despite appearances, is deeply entwined with the enterprising agendas of late 20th-century capital accumulation.

Though romantic landscape ideologues have successfully revived the "neo-Kantian notion that the beautiful necessarily engenders the good,"[2] neotraditional architecture in no way enjoys a direct and corresponding relationship with real practices of conservation and sustainability. In fact, the facadism of new 'heritage' design allows home purchasers to align themselves with the narratives of 'Canadian' identity that have emerged from Vancouver's elite neighbourhoods (figure 21) and elide the anti-environmental or excessive consumption that may actually be happening. An example of this is the 'Street of Dreams', an annual promotion of new suburban homes that, "as the name implies, we all presumably lust after."[3] The setting for the third promotion (1996) was Morgan Creek in Surrey, a suburb of Vancouver. The 'Street of Dreams' was heavily promoted in the mainstream media, and the showcase of heritage-styled homes drew thousands. But beneath the guise of sensitive placemaking, one critic found "mind-numbingly useless clichés" and "many of

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[1] Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 271.
[2] Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 356.
[3] Sandra McKenzie, "Street of Dreams homes fail sustainability test" *Vancouver Courier* 9 October, 1996 : 9.

Figure 21 **- *Mobilizing landscape romanticism***
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 29 June, 1990 : H5.

the features disdained by the good people of South Shaughnessy in the 17 pages of exterior design controls developed for the RS6 zoning. Two storey entrances, multiple materials, stained glass windows - must be a 'Surrey thing'."[1] The critic draws on the work of urban-issues specialist Philip Langdon, who wrote on development in America :

> Whenever I visit expensive new tract houses, I end up thinking about Cadillacs... the 4700 pound behemoths of 1959, the apex of late fifties Detroit baroque. Aesthetically, the vintage Caddy and today's upper priced production house share the same bombastic yearning for super-deluxe effect.[2]

Given that the homes on the 'Street of Dreams' ranged from 4000 to 7000 square feet and each sold for well over $1 million, the critic rightfully questions whether this yearning for super-deluxe effect is "affordable socially, environmentally, or financially."[3]

These unflattering appraisals are not unlike those launched against the 'monster' house, yet these racially-unspecific concerns have done little to broaden the scope of landscape critique. Again, the uncritical mainstream media, reproducing the privileges of whiteness, are largely to blame. For example, a new suburban development in Port Moody by ParkLane Ventures,[4] artfully named Heritage Woods, was advertised as "a unique series of forest villages" that "project a strong sense of quality and traditional values"[5] (figure 22). The ad quotes the developer's photographers, who enthuse, "[T]hose small town values we often dream about still exist, right here in Port Moody."[6] Ironically, however, a *Vancouver Sun* photograph of the development several years later shows a denuded, clear-cut tract of land with large, boxy houses (figure 23). Instead of offering a critical assessment of the development, the author of the accompanying review (entitled

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[1] Bonnie Maples, "Integrity is missing on the "Street of Dreams"" *Architectural Institute of British Columbia Newsletter* September, 1996 : 1.

[2] Langdon from Maples 1.

[3] Maples 5.

[4] ParkLane Ventures is run by Garry Santini, one of the "gentlemen" referred to by Polygon president Micheal Audain (see chapter 4).

[5] Advertisement for Heritage Woods, *Vancouver Sun* 14 September, 1990 : E5.

[6] Advertisement for Heritage Woods E5.

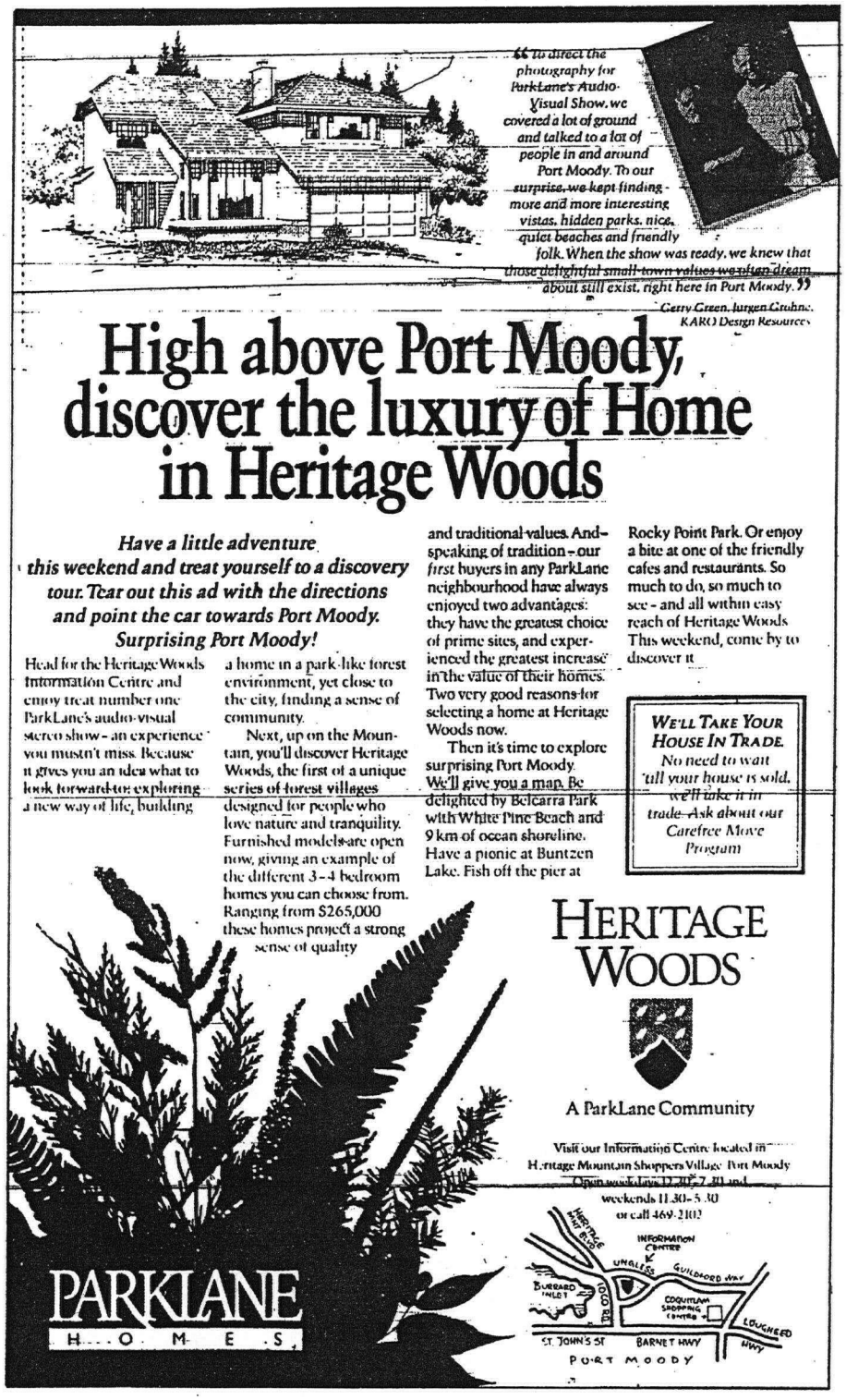
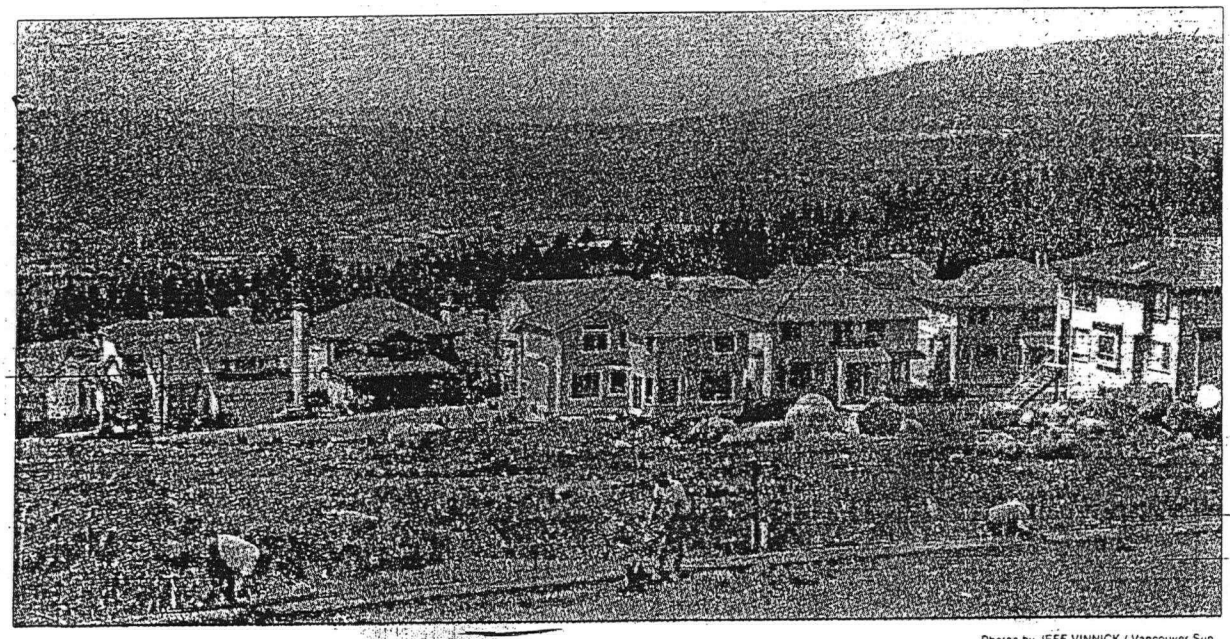


Figure 22 *- Heritage Woods : 'forest villages'*
Source : *Vancouver Sun* 14 September, 1990 : E5.



Photos by JEFF VINNICK / Vancouver Sun

SPECTACULAR DEVELOPMENT: work takes place on Heritage Woods site that will provide homes to 4,000 people in a seven-year project that includes town plaza

BUILDING A NEW

HERITAGE

Figure 23 *- **Heritage Woods : denuded hillsides and boxy houses***

Source : *Vancouver Sun* 14 September, 1990 : E5.

"Building a new heritage"[1]) describes it as "spectacular."[2] While an effusion of praise from an advertisement is hardly unexpected, such an injudicious standard of journalism is troubling, particularly given the rigorous coverage of the 'monster' houses issue in the same publication. Thus, Heritage Woods, despite its enterprising modernism and 'creative destruction', nevertheless remained cloaked in the vocabulary of anti-modernism.

Neo-heritage architecture, then, is not simply a matter of 'taste' or 'placemaking'. It certainly does not reflect a genuine tenor of environmental responsibility. It is instead a reaction to "preexisting fields of prejudices, preconceptions, and expectations,"[3] and as such can be wielded ideologically to serve particular agendas. Within the context of a perceived tide of cultural change, then, 'heritage' architecture has provided a tangible symbol around which dominant society has rallied in order to re-create its own sense of social and cultural selfhood, and to define an alterity to what is native and national. More egregiously, however, it has also been appropriated to disguise dominant society's complicity in negative landscape change, anti-environmentalism, and the feverish drive towards capital accumulation.

RESPONSE from the MARGINS : LOOKING BACK

Representation and resistance are very broad spheres within which the drama of racial relations and racialized examination have taken place. Texts and textuality have long been entwined with the history of European imperialism, which has employed texts—histories, anthropologies, fiction, and today, journalism—to capture the non-European subject within Eurocentric frameworks. The non-European alterity has been portrayed as *terror* or *lack*,[4] and these representations have then been re-projected onto the non-

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[1] David Smith, "Building a new heritage" *Vancouver Sun* 22 July, 1995 : E1

[2] Smith E1.

[3] Falconer Al-Hindi and Staddon 357.

[4] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, "Introduction : Representation and resistance,"*The post-colonial studies reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London : Routledge, 1995) 85.

European as authoritative pictures of themselves. At the same time, representations of Europeans have been given as unexceptional, ordinary, and normative. I have argued in this thesis that these historic, racialized ways of seeing continue to be reproduced today in the context of landscape change in Vancouver. A teacher once told me that a grade 3 class discussion (these are 8 year-olds!) on multiculturalism prompted several white children to say, "We don't like the monster houses that the Chinese build." The Chinese students in the class could only look down silently at the floor, powerless to resist the authoritative picture of themselves that they had internalized. I have personally felt, as a Chinese person, the mental burden that comes with believing that 'my race' should take special responsibility for unwanted urban change. But I have since come to realize that textual representations of Chineseness are as much a projection of dominant culture's fears and desires as they are reliable accounts of groups of people. I know now that so much of what masquerades as objective or impartial knowledge is in fact ideological.

The disciplinary nature of examination in Vancouver's landscape debate has not gone unnoticed to some observers. Charges of racism have been leveled at those who blame Chinese immigrants exclusively for the city's aesthetic 'demise'. Given the arguments which I have made, these charges should not be easily dismissed as overzealous political correctness. Unfortunately, however, legitimate anti-racist voices have found themselves with strange bedfellows : free market advocates who have appropriated the politics of anti-racism to facilitate international investment and capitalist development in Vancouver.[1] Their tactic is to extend the privileges of unexaminability to like-minded, affluent Chinese immigrants. Conservative-leaning think-tanks such as the Laurier Institute have been established precisely to produce documents intended to shift the lens of examination away from immigrants and to assign blame for negative urban change to race-neutral targets such as 'building fees'.[2] Their underlying agenda, of course, is not to shift

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[1] This point has been eloquently argued by Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 265.

[2] Mitchell, "Multiculturalism" 293. The Laurier Institute was founded in 1989 by private, notably real-estate, interests.

examination away from racialized bodies, but away from capitalist activity. This ideological employment of anti-racism must be strongly resisted since it threatens the ability of communities to monitor and contest local changes to the built environment. More importantly, it must be resisted since disingenuous accusations of racism adulterate and weaken the true cause of anti-racism. Unfortunately, much of the damage has already been done : accusing people of racism today, even legitimately, has become a politically suspect manoeuver. Although I argued in chapter 2 that allegations of racism are far too casually brushed off, I have to concede that 'crying racism' is something of a tired and ineffectual political strategy. Its main shortcoming is that it only challenges the final, palpable manifestations of racism without ever attacking the unseen systems of power which continue to generate and perpetuate racialized knowledge.

One of these unseen systems of power is, of course, the field of texts and textuality. It continues to be tainted by the colonialist fantasy that representation offers a transparent window on an objective reality. In actuality, representation is an instrument of power that has historically, and in the context of Vancouver's landscape debates, made the attributes of non-whiteness both stereotypical and symptomatic through a kind of textual 'surveillance'. The political agenda must therefore be to evolve strategies which attack the hegemonies of textual representation. This is the response that has yet to be forcefully given from the margins. The strategy to achieve these ends, however, is not simply to put more non-white bodies into newsrooms. This approach naively assumes that individuals from a particular group are more willing or able to speak for the interests of their 'collectivity', and perpetuates the false belief that racial and cultural affinity overrides all other forms of social allegiance. This understanding of race and culture is dependent on Bhabha's notion of 'cultural diversity', that cultural contents are pre-given and held in a time-frame of relativism.[1] But as Fanon has argued, the time of liberation is a time of cultural uncertainty, and, most crucially, a time of significatory or representational

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[1] Bhabha, *Location* 34.

undecidability.[1] Therefore, what must be problematized is cultural representation itself and its authoritative address. A focus on 'cultural difference'—the very enunciation of culture as an adequate system of identification—serves to remedy

> the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated, and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic. That iteration negates our sense of the origins of the struggle. It undermines our sense of the homogenizing effects of cultural symbols and icons, by questioning our sense of the authority of cultural synthesis in general. This demands that we rethink our perspective on the identity of culture.[2]

Bhabha is suggesting, then, that we rethink the positive aesthetic and political values we ascribe to the unity or wholeness of cultures. In the context of local landscape discourse, the totalizing constructions of both whiteness and Chineseness must be problematized.

In challenging hegemonies of representation, there will inevitably be a desire to find a "wholly recovered 'reality', free of all colonial taint."[3] However, this recovery seems unlikely. This is because "decolonisation is process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them."[4] Since the subversion of dominant discourse is not static, it does not demand the creation of new, authoritative, non-Eurocentric descriptions of culture. It is enough to engage in a process of dynamic counter-discursivity, which seeks to subvert the dominant without a view to taking its place.[5] This means exposing and eroding the biases produced from positions of privilege, as well as one's own. It means dismantling culture at the level of representation and revealing the pre-existing structures of inequality that inform description. I have argued in this thesis that a significant bias that has not been interrogated in landscape representations of Vancouver is the privilege of whiteness. As Dyer explains,

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[1] Fanon from Bhabha, *Location* 35.

[2] Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity" 207.

[3] Helen Tiffin, "Post-colonial literatures and counter-discourse," *The post-colonial studies reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London : Routledge, 1995) 95.

[4] Tiffin 95.

[5] Tiffin 96.

> white people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image; white people set standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to fail... White people need to learn to see themselves as white, to see their particularity. In other words, whiteness needs to be made strange.[1]

One of the critical subversive strategies in 'making whiteness strange' is to try to 'see whiteness', to invert looking relations and make whiteness the object of examination. Whiteness, the unseen frame that produces authoritative pictures of the world, must also 'be framed'. Toni Morrison describes this aim eloquently :

> My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from racial object to racial subject; from described and imagined to describer and imaginer; from the server to the served.[2]

While this project is easily charted, it is considerably more difficult to fulfill. How exactly does one invert the disciplinary relationship between object and subject? How is the invisibility of whiteness made visible? Is it simply a matter of identifying authors, builders, and homeowners as 'white'? Can non-whites critique whiteness without incubating new forms of racism and race privilege? Clearly, altering and disrupting looking relations represents a vast and daunting body of social, political, and theoretical work.

Yet power concedes nothing without a demand. This thesis is one step towards making those demands.

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[1] Dyer (1997) 9.

[2] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the dark : Whiteness in the literary imagination* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1992) 67.

6

CONCLUSION

Despite vocal claims that contemporary urban centers such as Vancouver are utopias of 'colour-blindness', popular stories about people continue to be told through the idiom of visible difference. These stories have fostered uncritical assumptions about alterity and otherness, and this has lead to a cognitive leap from physical and cultural differences to something more fundamental which has been called "race."[1] Many Vancouverites believe that the recent transformation of local landscapes, exemplified by the appearance of the 'monster' house, is unique to their city. They believe that local urban change controversies are products of genuine differences between Asian and 'Canadian' values. The reality is that unwanted urban change and conflicts similar to Vancouver's have affected countless North American sites, from Beverly Hills, California to Bellaire, Texas to Park Ridge, Illinois,[2] regardless of whether or not there has been a parallel influx of new Asian immigrants. Yet the belief that clashing cultural aspirations are at the heart of Vancouver's landscape troubles has persisted. Rather than odd, the naturalization of this belief is a wholly fathomable and predictable result of racialized mass communication grounded in taken-for-granted looking relations. As I have shown, the ideological management of signifiers within popular textual representations of urban change has structured a local economy of meaning which makes racialized patterns of intelligibility very difficult to escape. With the discourses that permeate our daily lives constantly expounding the

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[1] Anderson 245

[2] Frances Bula, "Building a better big house," *Vancouver Sun* 10 November, 1995 : B1.

fundamental premiss of racial and cultural difference, it is little wonder that representations of landscape values and aesthetics have cleaved along well-worn social fault lines.

The concepts of race and culture, though often conflated and misrecognized, are nevertheless taken to be self-evident facts rather than made objects of explanation themselves in popular social discourse. In Vancouver, it is interesting to note that the drive towards economic expansion and 'social progress', so fundamental to the historic development of Western identity, is dismantled in particular contexts but not others to allow for nuanced re-workings of racial categories. In Vancouver's elite Anglo neighborhoods, residents have ironically shifted historic roles and are now the defenders of both 'nature' and 'tradition' against the new champions of economism and creative destruction, while in dense downtown areas and virgin suburban woodlands, notions of a white 'enterprising spirit' continue to hold currency and give licence to landscape transformation. In a further irony, suburban landscape development often draws on the newfound rhetoric of environmental guardianship emanating from elite Anglo neighborhoods in order to justify its own brand of creative destruction. These opposing constructions of whiteness, rather than being contradictory, evidence both the plasticity of whiteness as a 'race-neutral' category and the inherently unstable and open-ended nature of racialization. Though the cultural and political process of racialization draws arbitrary and shifting conclusions about groups of people, what is neither arbitrary nor shifting is racialization's relationship to power. To understand categories such as whiteness or Chineseness, they must be situated within the broader historical framework of European modernity and its global domination. Taken for granted subject-object relations (ways of seeing) and the fantasy of mimetic representation continue to nurture an uneven exchange within social discourse which produces ideological and disciplinary forms of racialized knowledge. Far from being natural or self-evident, I have shown in this thesis that popular imaginings of race and culture in Vancouver are historical inventions whose constructions can be interrogated to reveal the interests of power which they serve.

I have not suggested in this thesis that recent, affluent Chinese immigrants are beyond any blame for negative landscape change. I have argued instead that a racialized understanding of urban change in Vancouver is a selective perception of the external world nurtured through bias-laden textual representation. I have shown that the practices of overconsumption and environmental destruction are exhibited across the entire Greater Vancouver region in complex patterns that cross-cut and disfigure racial and cultural boundaries. Unfortunately, popular stories continue to maintain these capricious borders by employing the narrative shorthand of ethnic difference. What must be problematized, then, is cultural[1] representation itself and its authoritative address. The positive value ascribed to coherent and discrete cultural contents must be dismantled to reveal the particular interests which coherency and discreteness serve. Most importantly, theoretical and practical efforts must be made to disrupt naturalized subject-object relations by 'looking back', shifting the critical gaze back onto whiteness and its assumed frame of race neutrality. In doing so, fashioning a simple reversal of racial ascriptions (whiteness is figured negatively while non-whiteness is figured positively) is of little political value since the fundamental belief in cultural homogeneity remains unaltered. The challenge to cultural signification must instead interrogate the current understanding of culture as an adequate system of identification. Only by being revealed as something fluid, dynamic, and boundless can the concept of culture be useful in describing the multitude of ways in which lives are lived through difference. Only by removing the social blinkers of race and culture can criticisms of built form gain the broader scope necessary to address overconsumption and environmental degradation as a societal, not cultural, problem. And only by reconstructing the ideas of race and culture can identity politics move forward in creative and non-essentialist ways. It is this future time of cultural ambiguity, of significatory or representational undecidability, that will be the time of liberation.

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[1] A reminder that 'race' and 'culture' are used more or less synonymously in this last section since the concepts are often misrecognized and conflated.

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