

**VISIBILITY IN VANCOUVER: SCREEN STORIES AND
SURVEILLANCE OF THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE**

RACHEL WALLS, BA(Hons), MRes

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Abstract

This study offers a contribution to the fields of Canadian cultural studies, media studies and surveillance studies, introducing the concept of “screen stories” as a framework for thinking about representations of Vancouver’s contested inner city neighbourhood, the Downtown Eastside, in the contemporary era of heightened visibility as a result of media coverage and widespread state, corporate and self-surveillance. Analysing diverse media forms through the lens of screen stories enables a critique of the complexities of representation and its intersections with surveillance in a neighbourhood that might be regarded as overexposed. Through examination of a unique combination of novels, television drama, documentary and digital media, I show that representation is often complicit in facilitating the scrutiny of the Downtown Eastside and its residents: negative representations are frequently used to justify calls for increased surveillance and security rather than cultivating a better understanding of the neighbourhood. At the same time, I identify strategies of resistance and stories that encourage a multitude of perspectives on the Downtown Eastside, challenging stereotypes and limited assumptions. My development of the concept of “screen stories” emphasises the potential of storytelling through, and about, screen media as a means of balancing or countering surveillant, simulacral or voyeuristic images of the neighbourhood with meaningful, embodied narratives. Situated screen stories provide a means of starting conversations and fostering community, in contrast to the often-divisive effects of surveillance and scrutiny.

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Introduction

It is ever more difficult to tell a story of social space without also telling a story of media, and vice versa.

Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy

I don't think there's much distinction between surveillance and media in general. Better media means better surveillance.

Bruce Sterling¹

From February 12th to February 28th, 2010, Vancouver and Whistler hosted the Winter Olympic Games. During those seventeen days, there was a significant increase in the visibility of the city and its citizens. This was hardly unexpected: after all, those who welcomed the Olympic Games to Vancouver did so because of an express desire to increase the city's visibility. The Olympics provided an opportunity to share the spectacular landscapes and rich cultural diversity of Vancouver with viewers around the globe, leading to increased tourism, immigration and investment – a chance for British Columbia to “showcase and promote British Columbia's businesses, communities, culture and tourism” and “network with the world”.² The government of British Columbia continued to advertise the province as “Super Natural British Columbia”, adding the slogan “You Gotta Be Here” for their Olympic campaign. Tourism Vancouver estimated there would be 350,000 visitors to Vancouver over the Olympic period while the City of Vancouver

¹ Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy “Orientations: Mapping MediaSpace”, in Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy eds. *MediaSpace: Place, Space and Culture in a Media Age* (Oxford: Routledge, 2004), 1; Bruce Sterling, interviewed by Declan McCullagh, “Big Brother and the next 50 years”, CNet News, June 4, 2003, http://news.cnet.com/2008-1082_3-1010864.html (accessed July 25, 2011).

² “Networking with the World – B.C. on World Stage During 2010 and Beyond”, You Gotta Be Here: British Columbia, Canada's site for the XXI Olympic Games and the X Paralympic Games, under “Business and Media”, http://www.yougottabehere.com/business_%26_media_venues/ (accessed May 8, 2011).

predicted 250,000.³ Moreover, the official Olympic website claims that three billion people – almost half the world’s population – watched the 2010 Olympics Games on television and online platforms.⁴

The Vancouver Olympics were an opportunity to experiment with new forms of screen stories. In *With Glowing Hearts*, a documentary film about social media use in Vancouver just before and during the games, photographer Kris Krug suggests that the Olympic games is “a perfect lens” for taking stock of developments in representation and communication.⁵ The IOC dubbed the Vancouver Olympics “the social media games”, and for the first time used Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Flickr in official promotion.⁶ Individuals and community organisations also used social media, sharing their experiences of the Olympics and telling diverse stories. The IOC responded to the large volume of unofficial Olympic images appearing on websites such as Flickr by organising a Flickr/IOC party, a notable turn-around from the policy of sending “cease and desist letters” to people who uploaded Olympic images without permission after the Beijing Olympics. Realising it could not control social

³ “Media FAQ”, Canadian Tourism Commission Media, under “Site Map”, <http://mediacentre.canada.travel/media-faq> (accessed May 18, 2011).

⁴ “All Facts”, Olympic.org: Official Website of the Olympic Movement, under “Identity Card”, <http://www.olympic.org/vancouver-2010-winter-olympics> (accessed April 14, 2011); Rick Horrow and Karla Swatek, “We’ll watch the next Olympic Games mostly online”, Bloomberg Businessweek, under “Lifestyle”, March 2, 2010, http://www.businessweek.com/lifestyle/content/mar2010/bw2010032_802617.htm?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter (accessed April 14, 2011).

⁵ Kris Krug in Andrew Lavigne, dir. *With Glowing Hearts*, DVD, 1:56 (Canada: Animal Mother Films, 2011).

⁶ “Vancouver 2010: The First Social Media Games”, Olympic.org: Official Website of the Olympic Movement, under “Media”, <http://www.olympic.org/en/content/Media/?articleNewsGroup=-1&articleId=78187> (accessed September 19, 2011). Using social media is one of the Olympic Committee’s strategies for engaging young people, although, ironically, Jacques Rogge, President of the IOC, has been quoted as decrying “the screen tyranny” of digital media. Ashling O’Connor, “London 2012 and the video generation” *Times Online* May 22, 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/olympics/london_2012/article3980955.ece (accessed June 24, 2011).

media, the IOC sought to embrace and co-opt certain social media practices.⁷ Consequently, international audiences accessing coverage of the Vancouver Olympics and related events now had multiple choices of platform and content.⁸ Ironically, the British Columbia marketing slogan “You Gotta Be There” was contradicted by the unprecedented scale of media exposure: anyone with access to a television, radio or the Internet could have an Olympic experience from afar. Those who were able to “be there” in person found themselves surrounded by the machinery of visual media production and reception. Cameras and screens were almost everywhere one looked, from the smallest mobile phone camera to television camera crews and giant screens spanning the sides of buildings. The “media city” was extended for the Olympics, and public space was oriented around screens even more than usual, as crowds avidly produced and consumed images of the games and related festivities.⁹

The Vancouver Olympics motivated new forms of screen stories and also provided an opportunity for the authorities to practice new forms of surveillance, or adapt older strategies to the scale demanded by the Olympic mega-event. The hyper-concentration of people at the Olympics was justification for extensive security preparations to prevent and respond to

⁷ Linda Solomon and Megan Stewart, “International Olympic Committee Tries to Prohibit Olympic Photos on Flickr, Then Backs Off”, *Vancouver Observer*, under “Politics”, Oct 12th, 2009, <http://www.vancouverobserver.com/politics/news/2009/10/12/international-olympic-committee-tries-prohibit-olympic-photos-flickr-then> (accessed September 19, 2001).

⁸ It is important to note that this extensive coverage did not extend to the Paralympics, held in Vancouver and Whistler between the 12th and 20th March. Arguably, social media was even more important during the Paralympic games in the absence of comprehensive coverage by major media providers.

⁹ The phrase “media city” is taken from Scott McQuire’s monograph *The Media City: Media Architecture and Urban Space* (London: Sage, 2008), where McQuire argues that media is increasingly part of the architectural environment of our cities, impacting upon our experience of space. McQuire addresses how “pervasive media alters the dynamics of public space” in his sixth chapter, “Performing Public Space”, 131-158.

inevitable minor incidents as well as larger but low-probability events such as natural disaster, building collapse or terrorist attack. Vancouver's security budget ballooned, controversially, from a projected (and unrealistic) \$175 million (CDN) to nearly \$1 billion.¹⁰ Consequently, the visibility of Vancouver for purposes of promotion, documentation and multimedia storytelling was accompanied with the more insidious visibility of surveillance. As Kevin D. Haggerty and Phillip J. Boyle point out, "security costs cover many things, but in the current context one cannot separate security from surveillance. A raft of security measures aims to make people, places and processes visible using diverse tactics and technologies".¹¹ The tactics and technologies used during the Vancouver Olympics included: 900 CCTV cameras installed in Olympic venues and 50-70 CCTV cameras positioned in the public space surrounding venues; helicopters and aircraft carrying surveillance patrols; bag checks and x-ray machines at Olympic venues; and the physical presence of 6000 Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and municipal police officers.¹² Moreover, it is likely that these more open uses of surveillance were supplemented with even more intrusive and unpublicised methods. For instance, Haggerty and Boyle suggest that Olympic officials planned to photograph Vancouver neighbourhoods using high-resolution satellite mounted cameras.¹³ Also, anti-

¹⁰ Christopher A. Shaw, *Five Ring Circus: Myths and Realities of the Olympic Games*. (Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers, 2008), 220-222. Shaw suggests that this figure was an anomaly in comparison with previous Games' security costs and thus unrealistic.

¹¹ Kevin D. Haggerty and Phillip J. Boyle, "Privacy Games: The Vancouver Olympics, Privacy and Surveillance: A Report to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada Under the Contributions Program", *The New Transparency: Surveillance and Social Sorting*, March 2009, under "Resources", "Online Reports", <http://www.sscqueens.org/sites/default/files/Privacy%20Games.pdf> (accessed June 3, 2011): 3.

¹² "Security Resources", Vancouver 2010 Integrated Security Unit, under "Frequently Asked Questions", <http://v2010isu.com/ViewPage.action?siteNodeId=516> (accessed September 19 2010); Rear Admiral Tyrone Pile, "Supporting RCMP-led Security for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics" *Gazette* 72, no.2 (2010) <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/gazette/vol72n2/sub-rep2-eng.htm> (accessed September 19, 2010).

¹³ Haggerty and Boyle, 13.

Olympic protesters were allegedly placed under RCMP surveillance in the months prior to the Games, with a dozen activists and their family members complaining of intimidation tactics.¹⁴

Although the bulk of surveillance devices and international media representatives were concentrated in and around Olympic sporting venues and celebration sites, the Downtown Eastside (DTES) neighbourhood was a notable nexus of surveillance and media representation during the Games. The Downtown Eastside is one of Vancouver's oldest neighbourhoods and was once the commercial heart of Vancouver. It is home to dynamic community organisations and a thriving arts scene. However, it is also Vancouver's poorest neighbourhood, and this poverty is particularly visible on Hastings Street between Gore and Abbott Streets.¹⁵ Boarded-up and barricaded businesses and open-air drug use and transactions are further symptoms of the economic deprivation concentrated in (although certainly not limited to) this part of Vancouver. For those trying to sell the city to tourists and investors, the neighbourhood tarnishes Vancouver's sparkling image of liveability and is a place they hoped would remain out of sight during the Games. For many residents of the Downtown Eastside, however, the Olympics Games were an opportunity to make the most of media visibility, to tell the Olympic audience stories about their community and to build a local infrastructure for multimedia storytelling. For others it was time to capitalise on international attention and protest the injustice of spending so much on the Olympics while poverty and homelessness persist. Simultaneously, it was a time for many residents to avoid

¹⁴ "RCMP using intimidation to silence Olympic protest, group says", CBC, under "News", June 24, 2009, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2009/06/24/bc-olympic-protest-lawsuit.html#ixzz0w8nZWBSi> (accessed September 19 2010).

¹⁵ Larry Campbell, Neil Boyd and Lori Culbert, *A Thousand Dreams: Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and the fight for its future* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2009), 2.

the unwanted attention of media crews looking for a sensational story and police looking to reduce the appearance of poverty in the neighbourhood.

I begin my discussion with the Olympics because they highlight the coexistence of different types of visibility that I wish to explore in this thesis. Although new forms of visibility emerged during the Olympics that are not explicitly addressed in my chosen texts, summarising Vancouver Olympic visibility reveals how surveillance and representation coalesce and impact upon the contemporary city. It might be said that the tendency towards hyper-visibility demonstrated during mega-events is increasingly a part of everyday life. Paul Virilio has suggested that cities today are “overexposed” and Scott McQuire posits that urban space has been reconstructed “along the twin axes of surveillance and spectacle”.¹⁶ Drawing on these authors, I posit that visibility is increasingly a defining operational mode of contemporary Western society and that mega-events are opportunities to stage elaborate city-wide spectacles and try out new technologies of visibility for control or coercion.

Interwoven with Olympic visibility were restrictions on public space and public speech. Vancouver agreed to enforce the IOC’s bans on anti-Olympic expression and advertising by anyone other than the official Olympic brands in the “field of play”.¹⁷ The city created “free speech zones” in an implied effort to contain dissent, setting a precedent for submitting the city to powerful private interests.¹⁸ The IOC justifies the dominance of its brand with

¹⁶ Paul Virilio, “The Overexposed City”, trans. Daniel Moshenberg, in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 2009); McQuire, 11.

¹⁷ “IOC Media Guide”, Olympic.org: Official Website of the Olympic Movement, under “Documents”, “Marketing and Broadcasting”, www.olympic.org/Documents/.../IOC-MEDIAGUIDE-2010-EN.pdf 40-41 (accessed May 17, 2011).

¹⁸ “2010 Olympic Security Plans: Some homeless to be moved out of security zones”, CBC News, July 8, 2009, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2009/07/08/bc-olympic-security-plans-free-speech-areas.html> (accessed May 17, 2011); “Activists Challenge

the remarkably simple claim that “the Olympic Games are special as they happen only once in a while”, yet the massively disproportionate amount of time (seven years) and money spent preparing for the six week Olympic and Paralympic period arguably produces a legacy of increased visibility and commercial control in the city.¹⁹

My intention is not to suggest that the entire population of Vancouver acquiesced to the market logic of the International Olympic Committee. Indeed, the Vancouver Olympics crucially demonstrate the multi-dimensional response to the increased visibility of surveillance and media representation, and resistance to restrictions on public space and the public sphere: one might, as Jeff Derksen suggests, “build up a marvellous catalogue of events prising possibility from sleepy hegemony”.²⁰ Furthermore, awareness of, and resistance to, increasingly asymmetrical visibility predates the Olympics. My readings of diverse multimedia texts, which I collectively term screen stories, demonstrate multimodal and multivocal creative and critical engagement with issues of visibility in the twelve years prior to the Olympics. My texts, dating from 1998 up to and including the 2010 Olympic Games, reveal the Downtown Eastside as a crucial location for understanding the intersections of surveillance and representation in Vancouver and potentially in other cities.

This study brings together a unique combination of popular and niche-interest texts that, individually and in combination, illuminate the intersection between screen stories and surveillance. I begin my analysis of screen stories

Olympic Bylaw on Free Speech”, CBC News, October 7, 2009, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2009/10/07/bc-olympic-bylaw-challenge.html> (accessed May 17, 2011).

¹⁹ “IOC Media Guide”.

²⁰ Jeff Derksen, “Art and Cities During Mega-Events. On the Intersection of Culture, Everyday Life, and the Olympics in Vancouver and Beyond. Part III”. *Camera Austria*, 110 (2010): 60.

with two novels, Timothy Taylor's *Story House* and Eden Robinson's *Blood Sports*, both published in 2006. My second chapter focuses upon the television drama *Da Vinci's Inquest*. This is the earliest of my primary texts, broadcast by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) from 1998 until 2005. My third chapter addresses two of the many documentary projects about the Downtown Eastside in recent years: Nettie Wild's independent documentary film, *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* (2002) and a pair of National Film Board (NFB) documentary shorts, *Follow the Eagle* and *Slo-pitch* (2005). My final chapter brings us back to Olympic-era Vancouver through an analysis of digital screen stories made by Downtown Eastside community media arts organisations W2, Fearless City Mobile and AHA Media between 2008 and 2010. Bringing these texts together allows a greater understanding of how stories about the Downtown Eastside are told through different forms and genres of screen media. This includes nonfiction television, home video and video games that are explored in the first chapter through the novels *Story House* and *Blood Sports*, and television, documentary film and digital media in the following chapters. Moreover, I ask: how do screen stories contribute to the visibility of the Downtown Eastside? How are they complicit in the surveillance of the neighbourhood, and/or how do they challenge surveillance?

My analysis of screen stories in the Downtown Eastside responds to Jean Baudrillard's suggestion that electronic media has contributed to the replacement of meaningful, direct and reciprocal communication (or "symbolic exchange") with simulation, the domination of commoditised semiotics.²¹

²¹ This notion of modern communication being based on signs and mediated, distanced participation in contrast to the direct and reciprocal symbolic exchange of primitive society develops throughout his career but is clearly evident even in his earliest volumes. See, for instance: Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* trans. Chris Turner,

Within a framework of theory about media, communication and surveillance, I use close textual analysis of my primary resources contextualised by knowledge of the Downtown Eastside gathered from existing research, two field trips, e-mail correspondence, and information drawn from social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and the blogs and online communities of Downtown Eastside organisations. I demonstrate that electronic media, while sometimes complicit in a repressive, market-oriented order of surveillance and media visibility, might also facilitate communication that complicates our understanding of surveillance and representation and operates independently of, and often in resistance to, the increasingly dominant neoliberal system. While Baudrillard associates symbolic exchange with primitive cultures and believes it is largely lost to Western populations, I suggest that old and new modes of storytelling are forms of symbolic exchange that persist across cultures and have the potential to reinvigorate communication, rescuing it from consumerism and grounding it in human relationships and social concerns. I argue that although screen media operate primarily on a transmission-reception model, rather than the direct reciprocal communication favoured by Baudrillard, they might nonetheless be used to share diverse stories and prompt conversation within and across communities.²²

In contrast to Baudrillard, who tends simply to refer to “the masses”, I am interested in looking closely at the function of particular forms of media for particular audiences. I am concerned with increasing economic polarisation in Western cities, particularly Vancouver, and how various representations

(London: Sage, 1998) 103-104. See also William Merrin, *Baudrillard and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 10-19.

²² Jean Baudrillard, “Requiem for the Media” (1972) in *The New Media Reader* Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, eds. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 280.

exacerbate or bridge this economic (and increasingly social, political and cultural) divide. In “Space Replaced (Over Time)”, a poem dedicated to Vancouver, Jeff Derksen writes of “the class- / partitioned streets of the city / split east west”.²³ This alleged split influences my thesis, as I have chosen to study representations of the city’s deprived but somewhat overexposed eastern downtown area in order to find new insight into the roles and intersections of representation and surveillance in contemporary Vancouver and society at large. However, I do not look to the Downtown Eastside as a site of the city’s problems, but rather for solutions in its diverse creative and political practices, which I contrast with outsiders’ perceptions and representations of the neighbourhood. Following Donna Haraway and subsequent standpoint theorists Lynette Hunter and Danielle Fuller, I value the view from the margins and hope that in analysing a variety of representations, articulating knowledges from subjugated as well as more dominant positions, I will demonstrate a comprehensive picture of the connections between surveillance, representation, class and the city in the contemporary era.

Surveillance and Media Representation

Surveillance – recently defined as “the collection and analysis of information about populations in order to govern their activities”²⁴ – and media representation increase visibility in the city, as the augmented collection of data and images create new and indirect modes for citizens and organisations to see one another. However, these lines of sight are not democratic: some

²³ Jeff Derksen, “Space Replaced (Over Time)”, *Transnational Muscle Cars* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003), 114.

²⁴ Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, “The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility” in *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility* eds. Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard D. Ericson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 3.

individuals and organisations find themselves frequently in the media and under surveillance while others manage to evade or strategically limit visibility – for instance, “[c]orporations routinely appeal to legal privacy and secrecy protections”.²⁵ I suggest that increased visibility is a central strategy in the neoliberal reorganisation of urban space to favour free market enterprise, where the well-being of the city’s financial institutions is prioritised over the welfare of its populations, and the city becomes divided into “micro-states of rich and poor”.²⁶ The city is converted into a brand to sell rather than a place to live²⁷ and the result is often a restricted public sphere – limited space for free expression in the spaces of the material city and in the media – as commercial interests dominate and dissent is marginalised.²⁸ These strategies are particularly evident during mega-events such as the Olympics but are palpable urban trends throughout the Western world, as city space is increasingly privatised or managed by Business Improvement Districts²⁹, monitored by security agents or camera surveillance, and as media monopolies grow, putting newspapers, radio, TV and Internet in the hands of a few powerful companies

²⁵ Haggerty and Ericson, 10.

²⁶ David Harvey, “The Neoliberal City” *Studies in Social Justice* 1, no.1 (Winter 2007): 8, <http://www.phaenex.uwindsor.ca/ojs/leddy/index.php/SSJ/article/viewPDFInterstitial/191/183> (accessed May 19, 2011).

²⁷ Harvey notes the use of this strategy in 1980s New York, 9. More recently Jeff Derksen has written on the “global-local boosterism and city-to-city competition that neoliberalism breeds”. Jeff Derksen “Art and Cities During Mega-Events. On the Intersection of Culture, Everyday Life, and the Olympics in Vancouver and Beyond. Part I”. *Camera Austria* 108 (2009): 66.

²⁸ I am influenced by Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model, which suggests that certain information is privileged by the media according to the interests of the ruling power. They suggest that the media is on the whole geared to preserve the status quo. Dissenting voices are marginalised. Edward S Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Kindle ed. (London: The Bodley Head, 2008).

²⁹ Sharon Zukin, *The Culture of Cities* (Malden: Blackwell, 1995), 34. Zukin analyses the Business Improvement District (BID) model as it emerged in New York in the 1990s; Dennis Cooley, *Reimagining Policing in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 151. Cooley includes case studies of two of Vancouver’s BIDs.

while public service television and publicly funded arts face further cuts.³⁰

These parallel threats to public space and the public sphere are crucial contexts for my examination of screen stories and surveillance.

I turn first to surveillance, its connection to visibility and my interest in comparing this with the visibility created by media representations.

Surveillance does not necessarily refer to the collection and analysis of *visual* information; biometrics, dataveillance and audio surveillance are alternatives to direct human observation and CCTV, X-ray, and infrared camera recordings.³¹

Nonetheless, surveillance is commonly talked about in terms of visibility because visibility is figuratively if not literally the objective of any surveillance process. This thesis is primarily concerned with visual surveillance: how individuals, communities, and locations are watched, either directly or through moving images created by cameras. I explore the fine line between visual representation and surveillance, the shared technologies of cameras and screens, and the complicity of both in categorising place and populations and reaffirming stereotypes. However, I also argue that storytelling in screen media is an embodied form of knowledge that can challenge these negative consequences of surveillance, develop a more multi-faceted understanding of contemporary surveillance and representation, and help reconnect citizens by encouraging empathy between those who are represented in screen media and those who consume, or interact with, screen media.

³⁰ In Vancouver, CanWest owned the major print and television outlets until 2010, when, facing bankruptcy, it rebranded its print assets as Postmedia and sold its television channels to Shaw. Postmedia is the “largest publisher of English-language daily newspapers in Canada” and Shaw is a “cable giant”. “Media convergence, Acquisitions and Sales in Canada”, *CBC News*, April 30, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/story/2010/04/29/f-media-ownership-canada.html> (accessed May 16, 2011).

³¹ Dataveillance is a neologism commonly used as a contraction of data surveillance. See, for instance, Sheryl N. Hamilton, “Identity Theft and the Construction of Creditable Subjects” *Surveillance: Power, Problems, and Politics* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 117.

This study is the first in-depth analysis of how multimedia representations of one location demonstrate the intersection of surveillance and screen stories, with attention to complicity *and* modes of resistance. It is, however, informed by a substantial volume of work that explores visibility and power. Foucault's theorisation of Bentham's Panopticon remains influential, particularly the notion of how invisible observers invoke self-discipline, thus creating an automatic functioning of power.³² Contemporary scholars turn time and time again to the notion of Panoptic surveillance as a starting point for their own observations. Cited less commonly is Foucault's writing on the role of media in the disciplinary society: he refers to the proliferation of "crime stories" in the form of novels and *fait divers* (brief, sensational news stories). These forms contribute in different ways to the structuring of societal attitudes towards criminals, or delinquents, by spatially locating delinquency: "the surfeit of discourse surrounding it, a line is traced round it which, while exalting it, sets it apart".³³ Although Foucault does not explore the impact of crime stories in much depth, his observation is prescient given the diverse media representations of crime in the contemporary era. This discourse potentially increases emotional reactions to crime and may encourage calls for increased policing or vigilante justice as the media exposes people suspected of, or associated with, criminal behaviour as well as convicted criminals.³⁴

³² "Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers". Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (Westminster, MD: Vintage Books, 1995), 201.

³³ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 286.

³⁴ See Aaron Doyle, *Arresting Images: Crime and Policing in Front of the Television Camera* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

Contemporary crime stories, like Foucault's *fait divers*, exacerbate antagonism between and within classes as populations seek to distinguish and distance themselves from those associated with deviance. Downtown Eastside residents, often criminalised in the media by association with the open drug market that operates there, experience this excess of discourse, as I will subsequently explore.

Ignoring Foucault's attention to crime stories, Thomas Mathiesen's central thesis is a revision of Foucault's Panoptic society with an emphasis on how mass media and Panoptic surveillance combine to manage and induce self-management in individuals. This is a "viewer society" where "news about prisoners, escapes, robberies, murder" are the basis "for more resources to be given not only to the expansion of prisons, but also to the concealed panoptical surveillance systems".³⁵ Moreover, the "the modern mass media in general and television in particular, first of all directs and controls or disciplines our *consciousness*", inducing in the audience self-control that limits dissent against popular opinion.³⁶ While one might argue that diverse opinions are represented in the free press of Western democratic nations, Mathiesen highlights the increasing prevalence of monopoly control of all forms of the media, including the Internet, and the increasing professionalisation of journalist's sources.³⁷ In other words, as Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky have also illuminated,

³⁵ Thomas Mathiesen, "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' Revisited", *Theoretical Criminology*, 1, no. 2 (1997): 231.

³⁶ Mathiesen, 230.

³⁷ Mathiesen, 227. Vancouver's online newspaper *The Tyee* recently reported on new Internet usage restrictions put in place according to the wishes of large telecommunications corporation, Bell Canada: David Beers, "Canadians just became the world's biggest Internet losers" *The Tyee*, under "Mediacheck", January 26, 2011, <http://thetyee.ca/Mediacheck/2011/01/26/InternetLosers/> (accessed May 19, 2011). Such developments confirm Mathiesen's predictions that "even in the most modern interactive media, the basic conditions are being set from above rather than below, from the level of capital rather than from the level of the participants, though they may still contain *an illusion* of two parties on an equal footing". Mathiesen, 225.

public relations personnel work to favourably shape the media representations of their organisations.³⁸

Whereas Mathiesen uses the notions of “discipline” and “control” interchangeably, Gilles Deleuze bases his argument on the difference between them, arguing that a crucial shift in society has taken place: control has replaced discipline as the defining quality of contemporary (Western) society as populations no longer move from one disciplinary institution to another, surveilled within confined environs, but are monitored and controlled continually. This control is facilitated by new technologies such as access cards and computerised passwords and “new ways of handling money, profits and humans” which Deleuze attributes to the increasing influence of corporations on society.³⁹ This influence is discernible in the media: he writes of how television game shows “express the corporate situation with great precision”, encouraging “brash rivalry” and priming populations for a career of continuous training and competition for salaries. Perhaps Deleuze’s most important point is that surveillance strategy and the media “oppose individuals one against the other and run through each, dividing each within”.⁴⁰ The control society is not only individualistic, but “dividualistic”: not only our communities, but also our identities, are divided into different categories for databases and markets.⁴¹

In the societies of control, we are subject to surveillance from multiple agents – different branches of government, employers, peers, and commercial organisations – in contrast to Foucault’s disciplinary society where the state was the principal agent of surveillance. Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V.

³⁸ “20 000 more public relations agents working to doctor the news than there are journalists writing it”. Chomsky and Herman, location 245.

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control”, *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 7.

⁴⁰ Deleuze, 5.

⁴¹ Deleuze, 5.

Ericson propose the term “surveillance assemblage” to describe this contemporary “disconnected and semi-coordinated character of surveillance”. Crucially, these multiple parts of the surveillance assemblage can be integrated: “while powerful institutions do not control the entire spectrum of surveillance, they are nonetheless relatively hegemonic in the surveillant assemblage to the extent that they can harness the surveillance efforts of otherwise disparate technologies and organisations”.⁴² Haggerty and Ericson suggest that the surveillant assemblage has grown to the extent that “hierarchies of visibility are being levelled” as people from all social backgrounds are subject to routine monitoring.⁴³ However, Sean P. Hier and Josh Greenburg are concerned that the concept of a surveillance assemblage “threatens to underextend and underdetermine scholarly inquiry by liberalizing surveillance theory and relativizing asymmetrical surveillance applications”.⁴⁴ They advocate attention to these asymmetries and to the conceptualization of “the dialectics of surveillance practices as processes of social control”. It is along these lines that I wish to consider surveillance. The Downtown Eastside might be considered as case study in how “[s]urveillance practices can exacerbate or reinforce existing problems with excessive or minimal levels of scrutiny, respectively, and they sometimes play an important role in bringing about the conditions of exclusion, denial, inequality, or deprivation”.⁴⁵ It might be said that the Downtown Eastside experiences excessive scrutiny in some respects, as residents are put under a microscope by authorities concerned

⁴² Haggerty and Ericson, 4-5.

⁴³ Haggerty and Ericson, 6.

⁴⁴ Sean P. Hier and Joshua Greenberg, “The Politics of Surveillance: Power, Paradigms, and the Field of Visibility” in *Surveillance: Power, Problems and Politics*, eds. Sean P. Hier and Joshua Greenburg (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 20.

⁴⁵ Hier and Greenberg, 26.

about crime, public health or activism, and minimal scrutiny on other occasions, when residents are made homeless, go missing or suffer abuse.

Locally-organised surveillance initiatives can supplement insufficient institutional attention to certain behaviours afflicting or affecting the neighbourhood, as residents pay attention to one another's whereabouts and circulate records of violent individuals (as in the case of the euphemistically named 'bad date' sheets.)⁴⁶ Moreover, the effects of excessive scrutiny might be exposed or mitigated with forms of counter-surveillance. I use the term counter-surveillance as a broad description of surveillance activities that hold powerful interests to account. However, I note some resistance to this term, as suggested by Laura Huey, whose research reveals that some groups doing such work prefer to identify as "anti-surveillance".⁴⁷ For these groups, the term counter-surveillance connotes an equal power relationship where it does not exist: state or large corporations carrying out surveillance have access to resources and technologies the ordinary person or small organisation does not.⁴⁸ The term counter-surveillance connotes not only an equally covert act, but also parity between the two parties. Anti-surveillance groups believe they

⁴⁶ A number of organisations hold and circulate reports by sex workers who experience upsetting, threatening and/or violent behaviour, including WISH (Women's Information and Safe House). See "Bad Date Reporting", WISH, <http://www.wish-vancouver.net/index.cfm> (accessed June 20, 2011).

⁴⁷ Laura Huey, "Subverting Surveillance Systems: Access to Information Mechanisms as Tools of Counter-Surveillance" in *Surveillance, Power, Problems, and Politics* eds. Sean Hier and Joshua Greenburg (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 230. Huey has carried out related research on counter-surveillance in the Downtown Eastside: Laura Huey, Kevin Walby, and Aaron Doyle, "Cop Watching in the Downtown Eastside: Exploring the Use of (Counter) Surveillance as a Tool of Resistance" in *Surveillance and Security: Technological Politics and Power in Everyday Life* ed. Torin Monahan (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁸ Steve Mann has coined the term "sousveillance" to more clearly indicate the difference between surveillance by large organisations or institutions and that of smaller organisations or individuals who watch from under or below, "sous-", rather than above, "sur-". Steve Mann, Jason Nolan, and Barry Wellman, "Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments" *Surveillance & Society* 1, no. 3 (2003): 348, <http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/journalv1i3.htm> (accessed May 30, 2011).

are acting in the spirit of transparency and education rather than surveillance. However, anti-surveillance groups seem to work on the assumption that all surveillance is negative, whereas I posit that surveillance is in some instances benevolent. I use the term counter-surveillance in accordance with common usage of “counter-narrative” to describe narratives that respond to, disturb or oppose narratives that have been deemed official or mainstream. Counter-surveillance and counter-narratives problematise the assumed legitimacy of dominant practices and discourses.

Screen Stories, Situated Knowledges and Standpoint

This thesis explores the suggestion that oppositional content is not enough to resist hegemonic practices and discourses, but that forms and technologies of surveillance and representation must be redeployed, reworked or recoded to disrupt neoliberal trajectories of control more effectively. Donna Haraway suggests that feminists have the task of “recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control”.⁴⁹ Baudrillard demands a more radical change: one must respond “beyond the code” and “smash the code”.⁵⁰ This thesis focuses on the potential of screen stories, and the notion of storytelling more generally, as a means of conceptualising the work that representation does: whether it reinforces dominant codes or offers and/or inspires alternative content and forms of communication. Storytelling emphasises the role of the human in the representation, in contrast to coding’s connotation of automatic creation. Situated storytelling in particular is a crucial

⁴⁹ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 175.

⁵⁰ Baudrillard, “Requiem for the Media”, 285 and 287.

means of generating, sharing, translating and interpreting knowledge about a place, where a focus on the act of storytelling illuminates the role of the storyteller and her inevitable partial perspective. It encourages those claiming knowledge to reveal their embodied perspective and those interpreting knowledge to evaluate the situation of the claimant. I have chosen to study “screen stories” in different media by diverse authors, using theorists from a variety of disciplines, in an attempt to weave connections but also reveal the spaces between media, perspectives and disciplines.

My understanding of situated knowledges comes largely from Donna Haraway, who suggests that “we do need an earth-wide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among the very different – and power differentiated – communities”.⁵¹ She emphasises vision as an important sensory system, and suggests that the vantage points of the subjugated might be more trustworthy than “the brilliant space platforms of the powerful”.⁵² This is a useful concept for my study of visual media, written narratives that engage with visual media, and the representation of a neighbourhood colloquially known as “down here”. As I move to consider self-representation in the Downtown Eastside in my third chapter, the importance of subjugated knowledges (also talked about in terms of standpoint theory by subsequent theorists such as Lynette Hunter) comes particularly into play. Moreover, these works of self-representation are collaborative, and I follow Margot Leigh Butler and her employment of Haraway’s metaphor of diffraction in arguing that non-commercial collective works have the potential

⁵¹ Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 187.

⁵² Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”, 190-191,

to “encourage felt discussion and social, personal responsibility [...] They make a difference. They make waves”.⁵³ In earlier chapters that deal with authors in more powerful positions, it remains important to reveal the situation of these authors in order to understand their motivations and representational strategies. Haraway emphasises that her essay “is an argument for situated and embodied knowledges and an argument against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims”.⁵⁴ Consequently, my study of representations of the Downtown Eastside is concerned with situating those who are creating and distributing these representations and their relationship with those represented.

I acknowledge that, in John Law’s phrase, I am “mixed up in what I am describing”, and will endeavour to locate my knowledge claims as advised by Haraway. I also take from Law the idea that “telling stories about the world also helps to perform that world” – writing is a performance and thus a staging of reality. In writing (or performing through other means and media) we make what we choose to perform “more solid, more real than it might otherwise have been. It becomes an element of the present that may be carried into the future”.⁵⁵ I understand this as a call for responsibility in storytelling of all kinds, including screen stories and academic writing. For Law, it is a move away from representation, a term he sees as separating the text from the reality it represents: representation artificially distances one from the other and denies

⁵³ Margot Leigh Butler, “Making Waves”, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol. 24, Issue 3-4, May-Aug 2001, 388. Explaining the metaphor of diffraction as “an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world”, Butler quotes Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan ©_Meets_OncoMouse*TM (New York: Routledge, 1997), 26.

⁵⁴ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”, 191.

⁵⁵ John Law, *Aircraft Stories: Decentering the Object in Technoscience* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 6.

the mutual impact of one upon the other.⁵⁶ Similarly, Scott McQuire suggests that the manner in which media increasingly defines our experience of space and place, publicness and privacy, “demands our departure from the theoretical paradigm of representation”. McQuire emphasises that media and representation cannot be considered separate from “the real world” and follows McLuhan in his assertion that media constitute an environment.⁵⁷ I concur with these scholars: this thesis uses the term screen stories, and analyses the relation of screen stories to the material space of the Downtown Eastside, as a means of emphasising the interrelatedness of media and reality. However, I still retain the term representation rather than opting for a different term, preferring to push for changing the connotation of the word “representation” so that its implication in, and responsibility to, the material world is not underestimated.

Another reason for retaining the term “representation” is that abandoning it makes it difficult to discuss the degree of power differentiation between the person representing and the person being represented. Law suggests that the “luxury of standing outside, criticizing and correcting, is no longer available. Partly inside, partly outside, we are at least partly connected with our objects of study”.⁵⁸ While I agree that there is always a connection, the degree of connection to the object of study varies and impacts upon that link. I am conscious of my own relationship with the object of study, as I write about Vancouver primarily from afar. As a member of a Canadian Studies department at a British university, the thesis might thus be seen as a cultural outsider’s exploration of a complex community carried out predominantly through the analysis of multimedia texts. Furthermore, I am connected to my

⁵⁶ Law, 6.

⁵⁷ McQuire, 7.

⁵⁸ Law, 7.

object of study in a more complex manner, through actions taken and relationships formed during roughly six weeks spent in Vancouver, in February-March 2009 and February 2010. During these short periods I sought to contextualise my textual analysis by spending time in the Downtown Eastside and amongst various Vancouver academic and cultural communities. These temporary physical connections and communities persist across space virtually, as I keep in touch via e-mail and social media.

In order to help theorise my position as a researcher from afar, I look to other scholars who have researched Canadian topics from institutions in Britain and foregrounded that situation in their writing. Lynette Hunter and Danielle Fuller use a reflexive approach informed by feminist theorists including Haraway. These authors are primarily concerned with written and often literary texts but are informed by interdisciplinary theory. Hunter's *Outsider Notes: Feminist Approaches to Nation State Ideology, Writers/Readers and Publishing* focuses on the writing, publishing and reading of Canadian literature. She argues in favour of trying out "common grounds for reading across cultural, social and historical boundaries".⁵⁹ Given the contemporary focus of this thesis, there are fewer historical boundaries to be crossed, but I certainly experiment with reading and *watching* across cultural and social boundaries.

Fuller's book *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* similarly searches for common grounds, while negotiating the differences between Fuller's experience as an academic trained in a European

⁵⁹ Lynette Hunter, *Outsider Notes: Feminist Approaches to Nation State Ideology, Writers/Readers and Publishing* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1996), 7.

academy and women writers from diverse backgrounds in Atlantic Canada.⁶⁰

Like Fuller's, my study focuses upon a Canadian geography associated with poverty. While my thesis is complicated by inclusion of texts that are about the Downtown Eastside but not necessarily from the Downtown Eastside, and by the inclusion of texts by male and female authors, I follow Fuller in advocating a feminist standpoint approach:

Standpoint theorists are involved in assessing knowledge claims, and they have identified methods of doing this [...] standpoint epistemology is not only about elucidating the knowledge of non-ruling groups but also about asking to what extent that knowledge participates in, or challenges, the relations of ruling. Does it shore up existing power relations, or does it subvert or resist them?⁶¹

My texts come from authors in differing positions of power, moving towards more clear-cut concern with "elucidating the knowledge of non-ruling groups" in the latter stages of the thesis. However, I ask questions throughout about how my chosen texts "shore up" or "subvert and resist" existing power relations. As Fuller bears in mind the publishing contexts, I bear in mind the production contexts for each medium I examine. Since some of my texts are created in conjunction with national institutions (the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board) I also consider the role of the state in perpetuating or resisting existing power relations.

The Downtown Eastside

The project focuses on the Downtown Eastside because a) the neighbourhood is a striking example of unequal and paradoxical visibility as a result of media attention and surveillance and b) awareness of and resistance to this complex

⁶⁰ Danielle Fuller, *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 22.

⁶¹ Fuller, 22.

visibility is discernible within the neighbourhood and in its representations in recent years. In 1997 reports suggested that the Downtown Eastside had the highest HIV infection rate of anywhere in the developed world. In response, the City of Vancouver's Health Department declared a public health emergency. As Dara Culhane notes,

Predictably, national and international media as well as a surfeit of both well-intentioned and/or brashly self-promoting artists, writers, and researchers have been drawn as moths to flames to document, analyze, represent, treat, and market the dramatic and photogenic spectacle of social suffering in this neighborhood.⁶²

My research looks at media representations created after the public health announcement and the resultant scrutiny of the neighbourhood by researchers, journalists and writers/filmmakers/television producers.⁶³ I suggest that this scrutiny constitutes a form of surveillance, where the intention is often to control place and populations through visibility.

My thesis thus occupies a conflicted position, in that it contributes to the scrutiny/surveillance of the Downtown Eastside even as it critiques it. I am,

⁶² Dara Culhane, "Their Spirits Live Within Us: Aboriginal Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver Emerging into Visibility" *American Indian Quarterly* 27, no. 3 and 4 (Summer and Fall 2003): 594.

⁶³ It was also at this time that Vancouver journalists began to pay attention to the alarming increase in the number of women going missing from the Downtown Eastside. In this instance media visibility and benevolent police surveillance was desirable: the lack of attention signalled a societal disregard for these women and their lives. Although a group of aboriginal women in the neighbourhood had started a memorial march for the city's missing women as early as 1992, hoping that this would put pressure on the police to investigate, it was only after a flurry of disappearances in the late nineties – fourteen in 1997 and nine in 1998 – that the story hit the headlines and the Vancouver Police Department (VDP) "formed a 'working group' to review the missing women cases". The remains of many of the missing women were found after police searched the Port Coquitlam farm of Robert Pickton in February 2002. Pickton was subsequently charged with the murder of twenty-six women. De Vries speculates that earlier "public awareness of the possibility of a serial predator" might have put pressure on the police to invest more in the case, preventing further deaths. See Campbell, Boyd and Culbert, 142 and Maggie de Vries, *Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Vanished Sister* (Toronto: Penguin, 2003), 196. While media visibility was desirable when women first started to go missing, subsequent representations of the women, including the VPD poster, have been seen as erasing their diverse identities. See, for instance, Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young "Missing and Murdered Women: Reproducing Marginality in News Discourse". *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31 (2006), 895-917 and Beverley Pitman, "Re-mediating the spaces of reality television: *America's Most Wanted* and the case of Vancouver's missing women" *Environment and Planning A* 34, no. 1 (2002): 167-184.

perhaps, one of the researchers that Culhane suggests has been drawn “as moths to the flames” to the Downtown Eastside, although my objective is not to document social suffering so much as to document the documenters, surveil the surveillers and tell stories of the storytellers who create narratives that go beyond social suffering. My focus upon the Downtown Eastside builds upon the foundations of existing scholarship about representation of the neighbourhood and adds a new and valuable dimension of considering surveillance and comparing its intersection with representation in different media. I follow carefully in the footsteps of a number of scholars, including Culhane and Butler, who are explicit about the potential implications of research and representation of the Downtown Eastside, and I aim for sensitivity and respect towards residents in my work.⁶⁴

I am also aware of, and influenced by, various long-running projects organised by Downtown Eastside residents and organisations to facilitate self-representation amongst residents. Notable are the Carnegie Newsletter (1986-present) and the Hope in Shadows photography competition (2003-present).⁶⁵ Poets Bud Osborn and Sandy Cameron have also played an important role in

⁶⁴ Butler has written various scholarly articles about artistic and photographic representations of the Downtown Eastside and encourages critical engagement with representation in her work as Director of Humanities 101, “a community programme which offers free university-level education to people living on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and surrounding areas”. About Us, Humanities 101, <http://humanities101.arts.ubc.ca/humanities/about-us.html> (accessed June 27, 2011). See also Margot Leigh Butler, “The Hero of Heroines” *Mosaic* 37, no. 4 (December 2004) 275-296; Margot Leigh Butler, “I’m in there! I’m one of the women in that picture!” in *Killing Women: The Visual Culture of Gender and Violence*. Susan Lord & Annette Burfoot, eds. (Waterloo: University of Wilfred Laurier Press, 2006) 155-176; and Butler, “Making Waves”.

⁶⁵ The Carnegie Newsletter is available in print from the Carnegie Centre in Vancouver or online at <http://carnegie.vcn.bc.ca/index.pl/newsletter> (accessed June 27, 2011) and selections are collated in Paul Taylor, ed. *The Heart of the Community: The Best of the Carnegie Newsletter* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2003). Hope in Shadows is a photography contest for Downtown Eastside residents, run by a charitable organisation that arranges for the winning photographs to be published in a calendar and sold to the public. For more information see <http://www.hopeinshadows.com> (accessed June 27, 2011) and Brad Cran and Gillian Jerome, *Hope in Shadows: Stories and Photographs of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2008).

articulating the concerns of their community.⁶⁶ These texts do not feature largely in my analysis of screen stories but indicate the existence of discourse about, and actions to reinvent, media visibility and representation in the Downtown Eastside community. As noted, much of this thesis focuses on those who represent, rather than on those who are represented, although the boundaries become blurred in the second half of the third chapter and my final chapter, both of which look at self-representation of residents in documentary video and digital representations respectively. In my conclusion, I turn the gaze back on myself and address the implications of my academic engagement with the neighbourhood and my own complicity with surveillance.

The Downtown Eastside is notable for the sheer volume of representations of the neighbourhood produced in recent years, particularly in screen media. If the view corridors zoned into Vancouver's built environment converge on the mountains, the view corridors created by multimedia converge on the Downtown Eastside.⁶⁷ Yet these media view corridors are largely unidirectional. Not only do many Downtown Eastside residents lack the opportunities to turn the camera eye back on the rest of the city, the nation or the world, but a significant number of low-income residents also lack the television and Internet access that would enable them to view themselves on screen. When in 1998 the Vancouver Police Department proposed the installation of surveillance cameras in the neighbourhood, a further inequality of visibility seemed likely. This would be the first open-street surveillance

⁶⁶ See Bud Osborn, *Hundred Block Rock* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002) and Sandy Cameron, *Being True to Ourselves: Downtown Eastside Poems of Resistance* (Vancouver: Swancam, 2004).

⁶⁷ Lance Berelowitz, *Dream City: Vancouver in the Global Imagination* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005), 173.

camera system to be used in Vancouver.⁶⁸ The Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP), a Downtown Eastside organisation that supports low-income residents, and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) both protested against the implementation of this proposal. However, according to Kevin Walby, it was not until 2005, when researchers at the University of Leicester published evidence suggesting that surveillance cameras “do not deter crime or fear of crime”, that plans were officially abandoned.⁶⁹

Although the VDP’s surveillance cameras were never installed, a recent effort to map private surveillance cameras found a large number of private cameras in the Downtown Eastside, many directed at public space.⁷⁰ A representative from the Vancouver Public Space Network, who instigated the mapping project with academics from Simon Fraser University, makes the important point that surveillance cameras have a larger impact on Downtown Eastside residents because many of them spend a lot of time on the street. Public and private boundaries are blurred in locations with a high proportion of homeless and ill-housed people. The streets become living rooms for those in cramped accommodation, and the homeless are forced to conduct their most intimate business in public space. Surveillance cameras potentially restrict the already limited space available to low-income Downtown Eastside residents,

⁶⁸ Kevin Walby, “The Rise of Open Street CCTV Surveillance in Canada” (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2005), 106. Walby suggests Vancouver is a heavily surveilled space by Canadian standards, noting extensive use of surveillance cameras to monitor Skytrain users and traffic. Moreover, many privately owned cameras capture public space.

⁶⁹ Kevin Walby, “Little England: The Rise of Open Street Close Circuit Television Surveillance in Canada” *Surveillance and Society* 4, no.1/2 (2006): 39-40, <http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/Articles4%281%29/littleengland.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2009).

⁷⁰ Stefania Seccia, “Big Brother, Big Problem: Will CCTV cameras become an Olympic legacy?” *Megaphone Magazine*, September 29, 2009; “VSPN Surveillance Map” Vancouver Public Space Network (VSPN), under “About”, “Working Groups”, “Surveillance and Security”, “CCTV”, <http://vancouverpublicspace.ca/index.php?page=cctv> (accessed June 3, 2011).

pushing people into even more secluded or unpleasant locations in order to avoid the camera's gaze. It should be remembered, however, that cameras potentially reduce the street presence of police and security guards liable to harass individuals, and/or might even provide evidence of police/security harassment of vulnerable individuals. Sean Hier suggests that some Downtown Eastside organisations believe that streetscape surveillance could help protect those who need protecting most, and thus advocated for the cameras.⁷¹

It is clear that surveillance has the potential both to protect Downtown Eastside residents and to marginalise the neighbourhood and its population further. The same can be said of representation: indeed, the sheer volume of media representation in recent years might be regarded as tantamount to surveillance. Regular features in local and national news facilitate the visibility of the neighbourhood but often invade the privacy of residents and encourage spectators to believe that this neighbourhood and its residents need monitoring. Jeff Sommers suggests that although the social problems of the neighbourhood have long attracted media attention, in recent years, television, newspapers and magazines have found it hard to resist sensational images of “open drug use, exotic behaviour and a deteriorating landscape”. As a consequence the DTES is “not only the most notorious but, quite possibly, the most talked about and looked at place in the country”.⁷² The media's portrayal of Downtown Eastside suffering and/or “exotic behaviour” – by which, one assumes, Sommers means the actions of mentally ill or drug-using individuals that strike some viewers as strange or shocking – are liable to encourage voyeurism. Voyeurism, in this

⁷¹ Sean P. Hier, *Panoptic Dreams: Streetscape Video Surveillance in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 167.

⁷² Jeff Sommers, “The Place of the Poor: Poverty, Space and The Politics of Representation in Downtown Vancouver, 1950-1997” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2001), 288.

scenario, describes the satisfaction derived from looking at other people's lives, lives that in this case are lived predominantly in public due to the lack of accessible private space for the Downtown Eastside poor. Voyeurism is perpetuated by sensational media coverage, which allows people to look from a removed perspective.

Voyeurism and surveillance should not be confused, yet increasingly they intersect as society becomes more and more interested in viewing the intimate lives of others. Media trends have played a significant role in this shift: surveillance-style reality television and celebrity journalism have helped to normalise voyeurism and exhibitionism. In some instances, surveillance technologies facilitate voyeurism, as when male CCTV operators devote their attentions to women captured on camera.⁷³ In other instances, voyeurism begets surveillance: the desire to look motivates a call for increased surveillance technologies, justified by references to deviance and the necessity of security. In the case of the Downtown Eastside, I suggest that unilateral media representation encourages and caters to the demand of voyeurs by providing shocking images which homogenise and Other its residents. Images of addiction, illness and poverty become a source of fear as well as titillation for voyeurs, who demand increased security and surveillance to protect themselves from the perceived threat.

⁷³ Increasingly, exhibitionism intersects with surveillance and voyeurism, as individuals create and publish more and more images online. For more on the intersections between surveillance and voyeurism see David Bell, "Surveillance is Sexy", *Surveillance and Society* 6, no. 12 (2009): 203-212 <http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/ojs/index.php/journal/article/viewFile/sexy/sexy> (accessed July 10, 2011.) Bell refers to reports on the voyeurism of CCTV camera operators on page 207. His overall argument is that "opening up the spaces of voyeurism and exhibitionism serves to destabilize and denaturalize authorized modes of surveillance". He sees the active participation of individuals in producing their own images as a mode of resistance against surveillance whereby individuals become "surveillance savvy", 209.

Dara Culhane and Jennifer England have stressed that the visibility engendered by media representations emphasises certain facets of the Downtown Eastside while obscuring others. As Culhane notes, “media spectacles of sex, drugs, crime, violence, murder, and disease have brought Downtown Eastside Vancouver into living rooms around the world”. Yet this overexposure is at the same time constitutive of a “regime of disappearance”.⁷⁴ The interests of aboriginal women in particular, triply marginalised by race, gender and poverty, are hidden by the spectacle. England considers how representations both reveal and mask subjects. Through her fieldwork in the DTES, England finds that aboriginal women feel both invisible and hyper-visible to the police. England’s work is an important precursor to my own in that she emphasizes the manner in which visual representations exacerbate this (in)visibility and consequently impact upon material place in the Downtown Eastside. She argues that “if visual representations, such as photography or documentary film, are used by disciplinary institutions like police departments, then they too play a significant role in the marking of territoriality”.⁷⁵ My thesis builds upon these ideas about the disciplinary, or controlling, effect of representation upon the space of the Downtown Eastside but takes the alternative approach of analysing visual representations by individuals and organisations that have the potential to counter the control of space at the same time as they might be complicit in this control. My objective is to examine how screen stories in different media, from diverse perspectives, might reiterate dominant or official narratives and/or disrupt the control of space by surveillance and mainstream media representations.

⁷⁴ Culhane, 595.

⁷⁵ Jennifer England, “Disciplining Subjectivity and Space: Representation, Film and its Material Effects” *Antipode* 36, no.5 (2004): 299.

Chapter Summary

My thesis looks at literary fictions, fictional television, documentary film and community media arts. The thesis is structured so that I examine representations in ascending order of their connection to the lived experiences of Downtown Eastside residents. My chosen texts include both single-author and collaboratively-produced representations, with earlier chapters dominated by representations linked to a single authorial name, latterly moving to address multiple-authored projects. I have chosen to look at such diverse media in order to trace the multiplicity of modes of, and motivations for, representing the Downtown Eastside. Different media tell stories in different ways, adding to or limiting our knowledge of place and revealing different intersections between screen stories and surveillance.

The first chapter of my thesis focuses on the novels *Story House* by Timothy Taylor and *Blood Sports* by Eden Robinson (both 2006). Whereas the successive chapters look at different stories told *through* screen media, these are stories *about* screen media. Residents of the neighbourhood were not involved in the production of these screen stories and events and characters described are entirely fictional. These novels offer insight into how and why the Downtown Eastside becomes a place of fascination for those living in other parts of the city, and the importance of class in understanding ways of looking at the neighbourhood is evident. *Story House* and *Blood Sports* gesture towards the historical, geographical and economic significance of the Downtown Eastside in the wider city, and, importantly, they challenge the boundedness of the DTES, exploring how the actions of external individuals and citywide, national and global processes impact upon the neighbourhood.

Story House and *Blood Sports* complement and prepare the reader for the screen media texts that I analyse thereafter. In these novels, the landscape of the Downtown Eastside is the backdrop for the extensive exploration of screen cultures and surveillance, with a particular focus on the psychological impacts of screen media and the implications of simulation in an age where cameras document so much of daily life. The thematic concerns of these novels can be compared with issues raised by the production and content of my other primary texts. Central concepts interrogated by Taylor's and Robinson's texts are authenticity and simulation. Their characters struggle to separate reality from fantasy, pretence from integrity. This difficulty is presented as part and parcel of living in an era where screen media forms such as reality television, home video, pornography and video games are increasingly pervasive. Robinson's and Taylor's concerns resonate with the work of theorists such as Baudrillard and Virilio and I analyse the novels with reference to these fields of thought.

The topic of my second chapter is the television series *Da Vinci's Inquest* (1998-2005), regularly set and filmed in the Downtown Eastside. Events and characters portrayed are fictional yet the programme has been celebrated for its gritty realism and its storylines echo real-life events and issues. Moreover, the filming of the series over a nine-year period often took place in the Downtown Eastside: some suggest this led to familiarity and camaraderie between residents, cast and crew; others imply production interrupted the daily lives of residents and invaded their privacy. I explore how fictional television might be implicated in surveillance of the neighbourhood. *Da Vinci's Inquest's* screen stories create a certain image of the neighbourhood

that potentially influences how it is governed, particularly since the programme's creators tend to echo and occasionally anticipate events occurring in the "real" city. Although television is necessarily a collaborative medium, I attribute an authorial voice to creator Chris Haddock and argue that the episodes Haddock directs demonstrate a particular interest in the Downtown Eastside and in issues of visibility.

I focus on the episode, "Pretend You Didn't See Me", which is directed by Haddock and explicitly addresses the use of surveillance in the Downtown Eastside as well as issues of voyeurism and the (in)visibility of marginalised populations. I propose that the episode in question engages self-consciously with the nature of its own representation and the intersections between reality and fiction. I situate my analysis of this episode within a wider consideration of *Da Vinci's Inquest's* representational strategies, Vancouver's television industry and the public service broadcasting traditions of the CBC, building on and responding to Kim Elliot's, Glen Lowry's and Serra Tinic's analyses of the programme. I suggest that, in its representations of the Downtown Eastside, *Da Vinci's Inquest* is particularly creative in form and political in content, raising questions about the potential of public service television to be critical, educational, and entertaining.

My third chapter focuses on the documentary feature *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* (Nettie Wild, 2002) and the pair of short documentaries *Follow the Eagle* and *Slo Pitch* (Lorraine Fox, David Moosetail, Vera Wabegijig, Louise Lagimodiere, Mary Suchell, 2004). The former is a production by accomplished filmmaker Wild, while the latter is part of an initiative called *Our Cities Our Voices*, for which NFB staff trained Downtown

Eastside residents in video and storytelling techniques. The chapter thus considers documentary approaches that move through representation to participation, collaboration and self-representation. The two texts demonstrate divergent ways of looking at the Downtown Eastside and negotiating the ethical difficulties of representing marginalised populations. In their own ways, both films revisit strategies pioneered by NFB Challenge for Change filmmakers in the 1960s and 70s and my analysis is informed by debates about the contemporary relevance of this movement and the earlier Griersonian documentary tradition.

Once the thesis shifts from a focus upon fiction to non-fiction screen stories, the theme of surveillance is less explicitly raised by the content of the texts but remains relevant in terms of production and reception. I examine how screen stories that expose real individuals and communities in the Downtown Eastside contribute to or resist the discrimination and exclusion that can result from surveillance. While the creative medium of documentary film clearly differs from surveillance, it potentially contributes to perceptions of the Downtown Eastside as a bounded and criminalised or pathologised location. This third chapter examines how *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* and *Our City Our Voices* tell alternative stories of the city and how these stories engage the audience and achieve political aims.

My fourth and final chapter moves from discussions about self-representation in film to the potential of digital media for articulating the voices of marginalised communities and creating new opportunities for the sharing of screen stories, building bridges between people within and beyond the neighbourhood. This chapter brings the concerns of the thesis into the

present moment as I engage with very recent advances in media infrastructure in the Downtown Eastside and media arts events occurring during the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Vancouver and Whistler.

I argue that Downtown Eastside media arts connect what Manuel Castells calls “the space of flows” with the “space of place”, by creating virtual opportunities integrated with material interaction. W2, Fearless City Mobile and AHA Media, the organisations I focus upon, face the challenge of remaining relevant and inclusive to the most marginalised members of the community. Increased security and visual surveillance – during the Olympic period and permanently in newly revitalised locations – threaten to exclude the visibly poor. There is a risk that community media might exacerbate surveillance and exclusion in some scenarios. However, the chapter explores how digital screen stories can also act as a form of *sousveillance*, watching from below and holding powerful interests to account. These stories begin to break down the digital divide and challenge the usually unilateral nature of surveillance and media scrutiny, contributing to collaborative audio-visual conversations about the Downtown Eastside.

My analysis of these diverse media forms contributes to the fields of Canadian cultural studies, media studies and surveillance studies. I develop the concept of “screen stories” as a framework for thinking about representation and surveillance of the Downtown Eastside, a neighbourhood that might be considered as particularly overexposed, in the contemporary era of heightened visibility as a result of media coverage and widespread state, corporate and self-surveillance.

Chapter 1

Looking Through Fiction: Timothy Taylor's *Story House* and Eden

Robinson's *Blood Sports*

Live your life in real time – live and suffer directly on screen. Think in real time – your thought is immediately encoded by the computer. Make your revolution in real time – not in the street, but in the recording studio. Live out your amorous passions in real time – endovideoscopy: your own bloodstream, your own viscera as if you were inside them.

Jean Baudrillard¹

Surveillance, screen stories and the Downtown Eastside come together in the imaginary worlds of Eden Robinson and Timothy Taylor, whose respective novels, *Blood Sports* and *Story House*, both published in 2006, form the focus of this chapter. These are stories about screen media and its role in contemporary culture, particularly in Vancouver, and in the city's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood where the novels are largely set. Given the striking amount of representation of the Downtown Eastside in recent years, I argue that Robinson's and Taylor's subject matter and setting are more than coincidence: they are a knowing comment on the proliferation of screen representations of the Downtown Eastside, diverse examples of which I analyse in my subsequent chapters. These novels offer viewpoints on the perspectives facilitated by non-fiction television, amateur film, home video and videogame, forms of screen media not otherwise examined in this study. I analyse what sort of perspective this is: how does the abstracted mediation of

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime* (London: Verso, 1996), 28.

fiction intersect with processes of looking and knowing through visual media?

Moreover, I ask: how do surveillance and visual media intersect? In both novels, there is a slippage between filming for entertainment and filming for purposes of control; one person's entertainment is another's surveillance.

Finally, both Robinson and Taylor demonstrate an interest in the impact of screen media and surveillance on our experience of reality. Their story-worlds provide vital space for authors and readers to explore their fears of, and desires for, surveillance and onscreen representation in general, and in the time-place of contemporary Vancouver in particular.

Robinson and Taylor have very different backgrounds and offer diverse perspectives on contemporary Vancouver. They are part of a new generation of west coast writers committed to depicting the landscapes most familiar to them. Robinson is an alumna of the University of British Columbia's MFA in Creative Writing, while Taylor became a writer later in life after a career in investment banking. Taylor was born to parents temporarily living in Venezuela. He spent his childhood in West Vancouver and returned to live there after completing his MBA and launching his career in Toronto.²

Robinson is of Haisla and Heiltsuk heritage, grew up in Kitimaat Village in Northern British Columbia, and spent several years living in Vancouver before returning to live in her childhood home.³ Taylor works from an office in the Dominion Building on the western edge of the Downtown Eastside (in common with his protagonist, Graham) and Robinson suggests East Vancouver is her "milieu"; she draws on places where she or her family live, or have lived,

² Linda Richards, "Timothy Taylor" *January Magazine*, April 2001, <http://januarymagazine.com/profiles/taylor.html> (accessed February 5, 2011).

³ Nicholas Dinka, "Playing Rough" *Quill and Quire*, December 2005, http://www.quillandquire.com/authors/profile.cfm?article_id=7046 (accessed February 5, 2011).

when choosing the locations for her novels.⁴ Their novels are very different in style and both combine elements of realism and postmodernism to divergent effect. In her genre novel with an experimental narrative style, Robinson demonstrates her identification with this neighbourhood and its working-class residents. Taylor, in contrast, combines psychological realism and irony to critique professional middle-class protagonists attracted to the neighbourhood but disconnected from the local community.

Both authors have repeatedly engaged with themes of surveillance and the Downtown Eastside in their work, although *Blood Sports* and *Story House* are their only works to unite the theme and location explicitly. Taylor's first novel, *Stanley Park* (2001), centres on a restaurant in Crosstown, Vancouver, a fictional reworking of a location usually known as part of the Downtown Eastside.⁵ In Robinson's novella "Queen of the North" (1996), the character Adelaide stays with her Aunt Erma in a "low-income Government housing unit" in East Vancouver.⁶ Both authors have written dystopian short stories depicting a segregated and highly surveilled society. Taylor's "Sunshine City" (2010) describes a world where resources are in short supply. Wealthy elites live permanently in surveilled and efficient golf club resorts while the rest live

⁴ Cheri Hanson, "Habits of a Highly Effective Writer" *Quill and Quire*, March 2006, http://www.quillandquire.com/authors/profile.cfm?article_id=7137 (accessed January 18, 2011); Rachel Geise, "Merchant of Menace: Eden Robinson explains her uncompromising new novel *Blood Sports*", CBC, under "Arts", January 26, 2006, <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/books/bloodsports.html> (accessed January 18, 2011).

⁵ Timothy Taylor, *Stanley Park* (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 2002). "Crosstown" is a brand used by real estate companies to assist high-end condominium marketing in the area "located between West Pender Street & Expo Blvd (North to South) & Cambie Street to Main Street (East to West). Being situated just South of Historic Gastown and East of Historic China Town, Crosstown Vancouver is located in the middle of the oldest and most cultural areas of Downtown Vancouver". Jay McInnes, "What is Crosstown, Vancouver?" Crosstown Condos blog, entry posted on October 19, 2009, <http://www.crosstowncondos.com/Blog.php/18/> (accessed April 12 2011).

⁶ Eden Robinson, "Queen of the North" in *Traplines* (London: Abacus, 1997), 201.

outside in “the rough”.⁷ Robinson’s “Terminal Avenue” (2004) represents an apartheid Vancouver, where First Nations are restricted to certain zones and subject to police brutality.⁸ The location of “Sunshine City” is unnamed, although the protagonist drives northwest to reach it, and Taylor’s story has an eerie resonance given recent suggestions that Vancouver is becoming a “resort city”.⁹ Similarly, reading Robinson’s story, one cannot but think of the quasi-segregation of First Nations in reserves, or, in the “urban rez” of the Downtown Eastside.¹⁰ Timothy Taylor’s latest novel, *The Blue Light Project* (2011), is also concerned with surveillance technologies and a divided, neoliberal city. Taylor cites Downtown Eastside locations as the influence for his imaginary “Stofon” neighbourhood, although the metropolitan setting is unnamed.¹¹

In *Story House* and *Blood Sports* the Downtown Eastside is an identified location, although Robinson writes “Downtown East Side” and Taylor “downtown eastside”.¹² Their fictional depictions of the neighbourhood are described from very different standpoints. In both novels, the Downtown

⁷ Timothy Taylor, “Sunshine City” in *Darwin’s Bastards* ed. Zsuzsi Gartner (Vancouver: Douglas and MacIntyre, 2010), 105-154.

⁸ Eden Robinson, “Terminal Avenue”, in *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy* eds. Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004).

⁹ Taylor, “Sunshine City”, 112; Melanie O’Brian, “Introduction” in *Vancouver Arts and Economies* ed. Melanie O’Brian (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press / Artspeak, 2007), 14 and 26n. O’Brian cites the notion of a resort city to a lecture by architecture critic Trevor Boddy and, following Lance Berelowitz in *Dream City: Vancouver and the Global Imagination* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2005), 107, suggests that elements of Vancouver’s recent developments were influenced by resort structures.

¹⁰ The Downtown Eastside has a large and diverse population of First Nations people and is often nicknamed the Urban Rez. Métis poet Gregory Scofield named his collection of poems inspired by living in the neighbourhood: Gregory Scofield, *Native Canadiana: Songs from the Urban Rez*, (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1997). See also: “National Aboriginal Day 2010 Oppenheimer Park”, Carnegie Community Centre, <http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/carnegiecentre/nationalAboriginal.htm> (accessed June 5, 2011).

¹¹ Timothy Taylor, *The Blue Light Project* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2011); Heather Clitheroe, “An Interview with Timothy Taylor”, Bookslut, under “Features Archive”, March 2010, http://www.bookslut.com/features/2011_03_017330.php (accessed May 13, 2011).

¹² For consistency’s sake I will use the Downtown Eastside throughout, apart from in quotations from the authors.

Eastside is shaped by global forces: in *Story House*, the U.S. television industry and the illegal trade of counterfeit goods; in *Blood Sports*, the decline of industry, increased overseas investment in real estate, and the drug trade.¹³ However, in Robinson's novel these larger forces are only mentioned briefly; they play a more integral role for Taylor as *Story House* has a global scope – his characters journey from their workplaces in the Downtown Eastside to Seoul, Los Angeles and the Queen Charlotte Islands. His protagonists are successful businessmen and have the freedom and capital to traverse the world by aeroplane. The journeys taken by Robinson's protagonist, in contrast, are on a much more local scale. As a child, Tom arrives in Vancouver on a Greyhound bus. As an adult he travels by local bus from his home near Commercial Drive to visit old friends and his mother in the Downtown Eastside, where he grew up. Essentially, the novels operate on different geographical scales and represent, respectively, the perspectives of the professional middle classes and the working class.

Surveillance and Screen Media

While Taylor and Robinson write fiction and their storylines “play with levels of likelihood”, to borrow a phrase from a review of *Story House*, the protagonists' experiences of surveillance and screen media nonetheless have a bearing on reality.¹⁴ Surveillance studies scholar Gary Marx suggests, “Cultural analysis can tell us something about the experience of being watched,

¹³ Eden Robinson, *Blood Sports* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2006), 21-23.

¹⁴ John Burns, “*Story House* Timothy Taylor”, *The Georgia Straight*, April 20, 2006, <http://www.straight.com/article/story-house-timothy-taylor> (accessed June 5, 2011).

or of being a watcher”.¹⁵ Fiction has long been a tool for exploring and anticipating the impacts of surveillance and particularly for examining the enhanced possibilities of what Paul Virilio calls “vision machines”.¹⁶ George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) anticipated the surveillance potential of television technology; more recently, Peter Weir’s fictional film *The Truman Show* (1998) imagined the lengths to which a reality TV programme might go.¹⁷ These fictions are important firstly, because they tell us something about the author’s understanding of the world, and secondly, because they may shape the comprehension of their readers. As Peter Marks suggests: “it remains true that the public is far more likely to gain its understanding of surveillance from fiction rather than from academic studies. Many more people read Orwell than read Foucault”.¹⁸ Moreover, there may be much work to be done in this field. As David Lyon writes,

Orwell's “Big Brother” and Foucault's understanding of the Panopticon should be in no sense be thought of as the only, let alone the best, images for yielding clues about surveillance. Powerful metaphors lie relatively unexamined in various films as well as in novels.¹⁹

Although Robinson’s and Taylor’s audiences no doubt pale in comparison to either Orwell or Foucault, they are vital contributions to new perspectives on surveillance and screen media in Vancouver. Taylor’s and Robinson’s decision to set their novels in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside implies authorial acknowledgment of real-world tensions related to screen media and

¹⁵ Gary Marx, “Surveillance and Popular Culture”, in *Surveillance, Computers and Privacy* ed. David Lyon and Elia Zureik, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 193.

¹⁶ Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* trans. Julia Rose (London: British Film Institute, 1994).

¹⁷ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four* (London: Penguin Books, 1987).

¹⁸ Peter Marks, “Imagining Surveillance: Utopian Visions and Surveillance Studies” *Surveillance & Society* 3, no. 2/3 (2005): 236. [www.surveillance-and-society.org/Articles3\(2\)/imagining.pdf](http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/Articles3(2)/imagining.pdf) (accessed April 12, 2011).

¹⁹ David Lyon, “From Big Brother to Electronic Panopticon”, in *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* ed. David Lyon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 80.

surveillance in the neighbourhood, and their fictions provide analogies to aid our understanding of the situation.

Taylor's novel, set in the 2000s, and Robinson's, set in the mid-nineties, capture Vancouver at different periods in media history, thus examining the implications of relatively new media forms for citizens. The present action of Taylor's novel is undated but apparently in the very recent past: it is an era of private Internet access, USB flash drives and television programmes *Survivor* (2000-) and *Extreme Makeover Home Edition* (2003-), widely known as "reality television", although Taylor never uses this term. Robinson's novel is dated in the mid-nineties: camcorders, VHS tapes, early first-person shooter computer games and – slightly anachronistically – Internet access at twenty-four hour cafés and convenience stores populate her media city.²⁰ Private Internet access is not yet the norm, although this might be a reflection of the low-income status of her protagonists as well a sign of the times. Televisions in *Blood Sports* show *Oprah* (1986-) and a fictional home improvements programme, *DIY Live*. Both novels capture a city permeated by private security camera systems protecting legitimate and criminal business interests. There are also suggestions of police surveillance by wiretap and infiltration.

Despite references to police surveillance, neither Taylor nor Robinson emphasise state or disciplinary surveillance. Rather, they depict what Haggerty and Ericson call the "surveillance assemblage", a society where a multitude of

²⁰ Robinson is slightly anachronistic here: Tom visits East Vancouver Internet café "The Raging Insomniac" as early as 1994, when the first Canadian Internet café only opened that year in Toronto. Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 235. K.K. Campbell, "The 'Alternative' Computer Scene: Upstairs at Binary Cafe's Computer Underground" *Eye Weekly*, November 16, 1994, <http://w2.eff.org/Misc/Publications/E-journals/Eye/940915.eye> (accessed February 5, 2011).

variously powerful agents use surveillance to protect their interests.²¹

Nonetheless, Taylor invokes Orwellian notions of pervasive surveillance, and descriptions of literal and figurative prisons and forms of self-surveillance by both authors are usefully explored with reference to Foucault's theorisation of Bentham's Panopticon, or more recent considerations of an "Electronic Panopticon".²² However, as suggested, the novels also demonstrate the limitations of these models. They offer new images of how screen media and surveillance intersect and how characters experience, both positively and negatively, these forms of visibility.

Simulation, Realism and Stories

In both novels, the creation of screen stories is taken to extremes and has a surveillance-like effect. An additional outcome is that screen media begin to shape the characters' lives, the representation blurring with the original event. Their experiences echo Baudrillard's warning of hyperreality, "the dissolution of TV in life, the dissolution of life in TV", and Taylor, in particular, seems to gesture towards *Simulacra and Simulation* as an intertext.²³ In Baudrillard's model, it is simulation, rather than surveillance, that keeps everyone under control, and market relations, rather than the state, that govern us. Neither novel follows Baudrillard in suggesting the complete replacement of reality with simulation, yet each demonstrates an interest in what constitutes the real. The novels can be read as two very different responses to conditions associated

²¹ Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, "The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility" in *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility* eds. Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard D. Ericson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 4.

²² Lyon, "From Big Brother".

²³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 30.

with simulation or, more generally, postmodernity. Taylor's characters are preoccupied with naming what is real, original and authentic and recognise it in the Downtown Eastside and the structure known as Story House. Robinson's protagonist Tom is less preoccupied with identifying the real, but meditates on the idea that a certain sense of unreality is part and parcel of everyday life, connected to illness and the excessive consumption of drugs and screen media.

The thematic focus on surveillance, screen media and simulation prompts reflection on how the form of *Story House* and *Blood Sports* contribute to the logic of these phenomena. Do we learn about the real by reading fiction, and if so, how? Furthermore, how do we interpret fictions and non-fictions within fiction? Psychological realism and social realism are central to Taylor's and Robinson's respective narrations. Do these reinscribe a modernist logic of representation as revelatory? Or does realism contribute to simulation by creating an abstracted but verisimilar model of the Downtown Eastside? To read these novels as simulation in the Baudrillardian sense would imply that they are based on other simulacra of the Downtown Eastside. Whilst we might reflect on the idea that many people's perceptions of the Downtown Eastside are, as a Vancouver photographer has recently suggested, based on "information from the media, or from preconceived ideas, misguided values, misinformation and romantic notions", I am reluctant to talk about these novels as simulacra in the Baudrillardian sense because this would suggest that there was no real world to which the authors or readers could relate.²⁴ Following

²⁴ "The Concept" Disposable Landscapes, under "About", http://www.disposablelandscapes.com/about_disposable_landscapes.html (accessed February 5, 2011).

Donna Haraway, I believe it is necessary to posit some notion of the real.²⁵

Nonetheless, the notion of simulation is useful for questioning direct correspondence between reality and representations.

I argue that neither novel is entirely realist in form: the thematic content and playful references gesture towards the fictionality of the novels, their position as stories *about* screen stories amongst many other stories. Also, neither novel has an omniscient narrator: in each case most of the narration is focalised through a character, thus situating each represented perspective as partial and embodied, avoiding suggestions of objective vision. Whilst accepting these novels as embedded stories, I acknowledge that those of us who read them and know Vancouver will make connections between the two. We create our own narratives of the city by assimilating diverse strands of mediated information and our own experiences. In writing about these novels, then, I offer my own story of how Taylor and Robinson represent screen media, surveillance and the Downtown Eastside.

Story House

The plot of Timothy Taylor's *Story House* is built around four screen stories: three past and one present, three intended for limited private use, and one intended for public broadcast on a U.S. cable channel. Packer Gordon's amateur films are two of the past screen stories, and the inability of Taylor's characters to consign them to the past results in a non-fiction television programme. The opening of the novel describes how one of these films came to be made, from the perspective of Downtown Eastside boxing coach Pogey

²⁵ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Private Perspective" in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), 185.

Nealon. Packer Gordon, a famous architect, sets up his Bolex Paillard 16mm camera in the basement of Pogeys gym. Here, his quarrelling sons Elliot and Graham, born within six months of one another to, respectively, Packer's mistress in South Korea and his wife, have been learning the sport of boxing under Nealon's tutelage. Packer is present to film a boxing match that Pogeys has warned against, fearing the illegitimate Elliot will overwhelm Graham, but Packer is not discouraged. Indeed, he is engrossed by his sons' conflict, and continues to film even when Nealon has called time and, against Pogeys' predictions, Graham has dealt Elliot a violent blow to the head, rendering Elliot unconscious.

The second of Packer's amateur movies is not described, but we know that is a film depicting the erection of Stone Canyon, Los Angeles, designed and built by Packer for Avi Zweigler, a television producer, and his wife. Since Zweigler's wife left soon after the house was completed, allegedly having had an affair with Packer, Zweigler lives alone in Packer's modernist construction, regarding it as a prison of painful memories from which he cannot escape. He seems compelled to revisit Packer's betrayal, collecting the belongings of the famous architect and seeking out Packer's son, Graham, to collaborate with him in a final project: to create "a film to erase the one that looped endlessly in memory, the one showing the slow erection of his own prison".²⁶ It is the coming together of Zweigler, Elliot and Graham long after Packer's death, all three men seemingly irrevocably damaged by the architect's amateur films, that leads to the creation of a final film using Packer's camera, also captured by a professional television crew for a special edition of Zweigler's non-fiction

²⁶ Taylor, *Story House*, 274.

television series *Unexpected Architecture*. The one-off programme becomes known as “*Story House*”.

While researching for his television programme, Elliot’s wife Deirdre lets Zweigler watch the third screen story of the past, made a year before Deirdre and Elliot met, when Deirdre was studying architecture. The camera operator is Riley, a fellow student and Deirdre’s partner for a research assignment. Their topic is 55 East Mary Street, the structure in which Pogey lives and runs his gym, and Deirdre attempts to interview a reluctant Pogey about its history. Struggling to answer her architectural and personal questions, Pogey shows Riley and Deirdre a film of two boys boxing, before ceremoniously destroying the film. It emerges that Pogey has been as obsessed with Packer’s images as Zweigler, Elliot and Graham, as he tried to understand the outcome of the boxing match that was contrary to all his years of experience. Deirdre and Riley inadvertently replicate the screen story that holds so much fascination for its subjects. Days after, inspired by Deirdre to do some work on 55 East Mary Street, Pogey falls to his death through its glass roof in a freak accident.

The transition from public to private screen stories is significant. Packer creates the initial screen stories for his own records: as Elliot explains to Zweigler, “he didn’t shoot for publicity either. He shot for the record”.²⁷ He does not share them in his lifetime, but Zweigler, Elliot and Graham seek them out after his death. They decide to seek publicity. Part of this is the economic imperative: to complete the expensive renovation of 55 East Mary Street, the dilapidated Downtown Eastside house Elliot and Graham believe is one of

²⁷ Taylor, *Story House*, 277.

Packer's earliest constructions, television sponsorship is necessary. Television must make this an event worthy of spectatorship and financial backing.

Moreover, Graham and Elliot feel that renovating Story House is "something good", and they want to be seen doing it.²⁸ As Elliot tells Esther, "I've wanted to do something different for awhile. Something more...substantial. More concrete. More a thing people can see".²⁹ They want to be recognised; an audience is required for their self-affirmation.

The documentation of their architectural project must also function as entertainment for the general public by incorporating elements

that people were endlessly interested in [...] at that moment in the history of non-fiction television: renovations, old things discovered to be beautiful and/or valuable... 'and real,' Elliot said. Beautiful and valuable and real. And third, Zweigler went on: 'Struggles by pairs or teams of people to co-operate despite what might not be entire accord between them.'³⁰

Zweigler pays lip service to Elliot's conviction that people are interested in what is real, yet the project highlights the discrepancy between the different agendas of those involved with the screen story. If the television programme is, for Elliot and Graham, a means of recognising what their father's legacy means and what is original about his (and their) vision, for the audience it is about a good narrative, and for the cable company it is about making money.

Readers of *Story House* might deduce that the "moment in the history of non-fiction television" depicted by Taylor resembles the phenomenon of reality television. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette cite MTV's *The Real World* (1991) as one of the earliest programmes to incorporate many of the

²⁸ The characters repeatedly refer to the renovation of Mary Street as "something good", "someplace good" etc., for instance: Taylor, *Story House*, 233, 279, and 345.

²⁹ Taylor, *Story House*, 345.

³⁰ Taylor, *Story House*, 280.

“textual characteristics that would come to define the genre’s current form”.

These include,

casting young adults in a manner intended to ignite conflict and dramatic narrative development, placing the cast in a house filled with cameras and microphones, and employing rapid editing techniques, in an overall serial structure.³¹

Although clearly a different subgenre than *The Real World*, “the language of reality TV” is evident in Taylor’s non-fiction television programme. The programme does not follow a surveillance model like *The Real World*, but Packer’s Bolex approximates this function, by accumulating hours of footage and capturing action even when no one is operating it. The focus on a quasi-famous architectural family, however, and the suggestion that the renovation is historically important sets this programme apart from the focus on so-called “ordinary people” often associated with reality TV. This perhaps explains Taylor’s decision to choose the older, more neutral term “non-fiction television”, a term associated with programmes such as *The Antiques Roadshow* (Britain, 1979 and Canada, 2004), with which Elliot draws a comparison. Taylor sits on the fence, neither restricting his reader’s interpretation to the sensationalism that reality TV connotes, nor ruling out the educational or social value that we might more commonly associate with another alternative term, documentary.³²

Additionally, with his fictional non-fiction television programme Taylor draws attention to the very notion of fictionality, hinting at the self-

³¹ Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray, “Introduction” in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* eds. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 4-5.

³² Susan Murray alludes to these connotations of reality TV and documentary in Susan Murray “‘I Think We Need a New Name for It’ The Meeting of Documentary and Reality TV” in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* eds. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: New York University Press, 2009) 65-81. Murray suggests the broadcast of *An American Family* in 1972 prompted debates about what this new hybrid genre of television should be called.

reflexivity of postmodern literature, although *Story House*'s narration depends largely on psychological realism and his fictional frame is unbroken. The confusing multiplicity of Story Houses gestures towards the constructed nature of the novel without explicitly admitting it. 55 East Mary Street becomes known as Story House, a three-stor(e)y structure in form and inspiration, with Elliot's, Graham's and Packer's ideas in combination. The television programme takes the name "*Story House*", mirroring the novel that contains it. Graham and Elliot's eventual decision to split Story House is partly inspired by a Haida Story House in Kiusta (and partly by the deconstructive work of Gordon Matta-Clarke, a real-world figure cited as Elliot's favourite architect). This Haida Story House is a fictional construct of Taylor's, yet based on a real-world structure of that name. The idea of the Story House crosses the boundaries of fiction and slips from one meaning to another; we might even consider the title an analogy for the novel: a structure that contains stories.

Consequently, I am inclined to read *Story House* as an example of literary *mise en abyme*, as the structure within the television programme within the novel suggests infinite regression, a story house within a story house within a story house, and so on.³³ For Baudrillard, this leads to an inherent instability of meaning, as each reflects the other, making it difficult to make out the original from the likeness.³⁴ However, we might also consider it a trope that emphasises the constructed nature of *Story House* and enables us to reflect on its different levels of fictionality: a fictional house, based on a non-fiction

³³ *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* defines *mise en abyme* as "A literary recursion: André Gide's coinage for the literary effect of infinite regression". J.A. Cuddon, ed. *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin, 1999), 513.

³⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, 143.

house in a fictional non-fiction television programme.³⁵ Incidentally, Taylor's use of the term "non-fiction television" has a similar effect: it describes what sort of television it is not – fiction – rather than what it is. If fiction is also defined negatively, by its opposition to fact or as what is feigned, fashioned or even counterfeited (in other words, not-real), we are left with what might be described as a *mise en abyme* of terms.³⁶ This potentially leads to complete loss of meaning, or for Baudrillard, complete simulation. More usefully, this *mise en abyme* might prompt a postmodern consideration of how representations are framed as non-fiction or fiction, and what assumptions we make about the correspondence between non-fiction and reality. In the era of so-called reality TV, Taylor's decision to use the term non-fiction prompts an important reconsideration of both these terms.

Elsewhere in the novel, this deconstructive logic is contrasted with the belief that some things are intrinsically real or authentic. Taylor initially emphasises Elliot's insistence on defining the real by its opposite: Elliot and his friend Kirov are inspired to create fake-fakes: ironic, intentionally and obviously misspelled fakes such as "Swach" watches that become fashionable in their own right. Elliot describes fake-fakes as he and Kirov's "real ideas" in contrast to the regular fakes they usually produce.³⁷ Furthermore, "the prevalence of fakes on television made the whole medium more real".³⁸

However, Elliot subsequently declares to Zweigler "Mary Street is real". He

³⁵ Brian McHale suggests a notion of TV-en-abyme: "TV in these texts thus functions at two very different levels, at one level serving to *represent figuratively* that very ontological plurality to which, at another level, TV itself contributes. Here TV functions as a *figure of itself*, a kind of strange loop" Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 131.

³⁶ "fiction, n". OED Online, March 2011, Oxford University Press
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/69828?rkey=fDRsUm&result=1&isAdvanced=false>
 (accessed June 05, 2011).

³⁷ Taylor, *Story House*, 257.

³⁸ Taylor, *Story House*, 278.

believes it is an authentic Packer Gordon structure, and in this respect resembles his brother. Graham does not subscribe to the deconstructive logic of the real residing in the fake, and has a modernist belief in the possibility of original and unique ideas, such as the Haida Story House, which he interprets as purely inspired by the landscape.³⁹ Graham's notion of the real is linked to the notion of the autochthonous; he finds authenticity in indigeneity.

However, the brothers' obsession with Mary Street seems to stem from another *mise en abyme*: the endless struggle to define themselves against one another and the image of their father. This three-pointed struggle is evident in their adolescent boxing match, with the three opposed figures of Elliot, Graham and Packer, behind the camera. Taylor describes Zweigler's moment of realisation that the struggle involves three parties as he watches the film of the boxing match:

Zweigler breathing through his fingers now, conscious all at once of the larger, framing presence. The eyes on this side of glass. His own, yes. But those original eyes too. The architect behind the camera.

However, despite the symbolism of the equilateral triangle inscribed into the foundations of 55 East Mary Street, the triumvirate of Packer, Gordon and Elliot is not a balance of power. Packer, framing the images, is in control of Elliot and Graham. Zweigler implies that he is assuming Packer's role.

As an experienced film and television producer, Zweigler understands the significance of framing. Taylor emphasises the manipulation that occurs in the telling of a screen story. Rather than describing what the television viewers see, he narrates how Zweigler engineers the overall image, composing a shot

³⁹ "Graham's quest had been for proof that truth in structure, in materials, the very soul of his schooling as intoned by professors with near Presbyterian resolve, was a matter dictated by landscape. And if that were true, well then Aboriginal architecture would reveal the truth more purely than any other form. Insulated as they had been from outside influence, these builders would have had only a landscape from which to draw". Taylor, *Story House*, 116.

where Graham appears as “a mad prophet”, and later, demanding a wider shot when Graham’s facial expression is a little too mad: “Face red, breath coming in gasps, eyes streaming with tears. Nose running too”.⁴⁰ The camera can be used to scrutinize the body, but a distanced perspective can eliminate the more unpleasant details. Moreover, different cameras capture divergent images. Only moments before Camera one’s unattractive close up of Graham, Camera two “reveal[s] him in princely calm”.⁴¹ Taylor emphasises the importance of perspective and that non-fiction is made, if not made up.⁴² His fictional analysis of the television-making process emphasises the storytelling involved in screen media, rather than the simulation of reality or *mise en abyme* of images where one is not distinguishable from the other. In Taylor’s novel the imagery of simulation and screen stories exist alongside one another.

Similarly, Taylor reveals a fascination with surveillance and simulation and their coexistence in the contemporary era. According to Baudrillard, surveillance and the perspective of television cameras are subsumed by simulation, yet Taylor’s novel demonstrates that the camera gaze is still experienced in our everyday lives.⁴³ *Story House* explores what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate surveillance and visual documentation, where the fine line between surveillance and documentation lies, and whether the combination of the two can lead to a *mise en abyme* of images. Taylor references Orwellian and Panoptic surveillance, by police, amongst criminals and between family members, and by the middle class over a working-class neighbourhood. A small plane and a tall building, a personal 16mm camera and

⁴⁰ Taylor, *Story House*, 391 and 398.

⁴¹ Taylor, *Story House*, 397.

⁴² I take this phrase from Donna Haraway, via N. Katherine Hayles, “Unfinished Work: From Cyborg to Cognisphere” *Theory Culture Society* 23 (2006): 161.

⁴³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 76.

commercial television cameras, security cameras and glass architecture facilitate surveillance. Taylor's references to DNA additionally gesture towards biological surveillance, the control and categorisation of society on the basis of genetic data.

Taylor's story begins with filial conflict and paternal documentation: a father filming his sons on his Bolex Paillard camera. Since Packer's films subsequently control his subjects they might be seen as a form of surveillance, or more precisely, they have induced self-surveillance in his sons whose lives seem to be governed by the memory of the architect's camera. This might be compared to the effects of Bentham's Panopticon as described by Foucault: when the gaze is internalised, it does not matter whether the watcher is in his tower, as the inmate believes in the possibility of being watched.⁴⁴ Baudrillard subsequently suggests the Panopticon is replaced by simulation, where the distance between the watcher and the watched collapses and "the virtual camera is in our heads".⁴⁵ The Baudrillardian metaphor is perhaps more appropriate, as Elliot and Graham are not so much disciplined by Packer's gaze as they are compelled to perform for his camera. The surveillance and entertainment functions of the camera blur as Elliot and Graham perform the roles of illegitimate and legitimate son, and the roles assigned by Pogey: boxer and puncher.⁴⁶ As the television programme comes to its climax, the brothers resume their boxing performances.

⁴⁴ Foucault, 214 and Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, 26.

⁴⁵ Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, 26.

⁴⁶ Pogey bases his prediction of the boxing match on an understanding that there are three styles of boxing: boxers, punchers and swarmers. Elliot is a typical boxer and Graham a puncher. Usually boxers beat punchers yet Graham champions Elliot in their adolescent match, confounding Pogey's expectations.

At times, Taylor's novel seems to be a satire of dystopian concerns about surveillance and he playfully weaves references to *Nineteen-Eighty Four* into his depiction of Elliot's counterfeiting business and its connections to organised crime. Elliot meets his former boss, Rico, in 1984. They work from the Orwell Hotel and deal with "the uncles", the nickname reminiscent of that other observant older relative, Big Brother.⁴⁷ Rico is paranoid about being followed, and installs security cameras and microphones throughout and around the Orwell, hoping to anticipate an intrusion.⁴⁸ Telescreen technology performs a very different role to the one Orwell imagined and is used by small-time criminals to pre-empt surveillance by the police, business rivals and business partners, rather than operating merely as a tool of the state.⁴⁹ Moreover, Elliot's use of Rico's surveillance scheme further disrupts the Orwellian model. Big Brother's telescreens did not permit dialogue, facilitating only broadcast, but when Kirov correctly suspects that Elliot is watching him on the monitors, Kirov addresses Elliot through the screen. This motivates Elliot to come and talk to Kirov directly. The power imbalance of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, or indeed the Panopticon, is absent as surveillance technologies are used casually between friends.

Although Elliot does not take surveillance seriously throughout most of his illicit employment, he later reconsiders Rico's advice to get out of the organised crime before the illegal trade of people replaces the illegal trade of goods. Elliot is at a remand centre, waiting for Graham, who has been arrested for breaking into 55 East Mary Street:

⁴⁷ Taylor, *Story House*, 187.

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Story House*, 255.

⁴⁹ Lyon, "From Big Brother", 58.

Then a decade passed and he was just coming to his senses. Just now trying to sell what Rico left him and to precisely the same party that Rico had been suggesting. Pushing ten years, more than forty years old, and here he was listening to doors open and close in a prison, all movement carefully governed, staring into a wall from behind which he could have been observed the whole time.⁵⁰

Elliot faces the glass of the interview room, mirrored on his side but transparent on the reverse, and feels the probability of surveillance at that moment and throughout his whole career. Once immune to the doubts that plagued Rico, there is now a clear invocation of Foucault's Panopticism in the remand centre, where prison doors open and close, "all movement carefully governed" and Elliot, like Rico before him, internalises the gaze.

Taylor represents the aerial surveillance of the Downtown Eastside. This is not a methodical, intentional surveillance but rather Elliot and Graham's informal observation from, respectively, a small aircraft and Graham's high-rise office on the edge of the neighbourhood. Taylor describes how Elliot

climbed slowly through an altitude from which the downtown eastside could be seen as the old city it was. Hemmed by towers to the west and the east. Here was a craggy grid of streets, evidence of brickwork and solid old buildings. No needles visible from this height. No bad Johns.⁵¹

Given their subsequent intervention in the urban landscape of the Downtown Eastside, Elliot and Graham's observations of the city from above are reminiscent of the panoramic perspective criticised by Michel de Certeau as "a way of keeping aloof, by the space planner urbanist, city planner or cartographer. The panorama-city is a "theoretical" (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a

⁵⁰ Taylor, *Story House*, 262.

⁵¹ Taylor, *Story House*, 258.

misunderstanding of practices”.⁵² de Certeau invokes the simulacrum to suggest that planners cannot experience the reality of the city without walking in it, engaging and experiencing everyday urban life. The aerial view only reveals an image of the city, the grid, and anything they choose to project upon it; not the adaptation of that grid to embodied practices. For Baudrillard, these practices are also simulacra, co-opted into the logic of market relations, but for de Certeau, simulation is not complete: like Baudrillard’s second order of simulation, it masks rather than replaces reality.⁵³ In fact, for de Certeau the visual simulacrum is a tool for Panoptic power and, optimistically, the elements masked by the simulacrum might escape the reach of this disciplinary gaze.⁵⁴

The distanced and limited perspective of camera images is comparable with de Certeau’s visual simulacrum, but Packer, Graham and Elliot seem convinced of the opposite. During his sons’ boxing match, Packer “disappeared behind the viewfinder as if that might reveal the truth to him better than his own famous eyes”.⁵⁵ Elliot is convinced television will reveal something real, and Graham sets up his father’s Bolex to film Graham’s aerial perspective of the Downtown Eastside. Graham and his business partner Fila Sarafi have nicknamed the Downtown Eastside “the Middle East” for “an irresolvable contest of gentrification and decay animating its streets”, and he uses this name as he peruses the landscape from the fire escape of his office.⁵⁶

So, he thought, the Middle East... the place where it had all begun during those years when the city could still be all future

⁵² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 92-93.

⁵³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, 6.

⁵⁴ de Certeau, xiv.

⁵⁵ Taylor, *Story House*, 12.

⁵⁶ Taylor, *Story House*, 54.

ideas of a city. No matter that commerce had fled uptown, that the good families moved west into Point Grey and east to Burnaby and the Chinese herbalists had all fled to Richmond. No matter that the Middle East had become a grid of crack corners and heroin parks, pawnshops and welfare hotels, forgotten parking lots where limousine drivers and cops spent their off hours parked nose to tail, driver's window to driver's window, and the alleys branched out in every direction pasted thick with garbage. Here was still the point of origin. The civic stem cell.⁵⁷

Despite his criticisms of the decline of the neighbourhood, Graham imbues it with significance and authenticity, embodying it with the metaphor of the stem cell. We might read Graham's desire for inspiration from the civic stem cell as foreshadowing his replication of it through film and television, and his attempts to reinvent 55 East Mary Street. Graham extracts what he can from the original, and reproduces it, implicating himself in the conflict that inspired his and Fila's nickname for the Downtown Eastside.

The Downtown Eastside is a "burnt out heartland", according to Graham, which, in the biological rhetoric often used in planning documents, one might assume he wishes to revitalise. Indeed, this becomes Graham and Elliot's mission when they discover that their father built 55 East Mary Street. Elliot wants to build "[s]omething good for the neighbourhood...Something that won't be a crack house in ten years", and Graham is convinced of the importance of their project: "It was a big deal, this symbolic breaking of earth on the downtown eastside [...] 'Maybe for the first time since the building went up. Think of it. A lot of people are excited and proud that he built here first.'"⁵⁸ However, Taylor's protagonists do not engage with the neighbourhood's requirements; there is no community consultation. Despite their panoramic appraisal of the neighbourhood, it does not inform the Story

⁵⁷ Taylor, *Story House*, 113-114.

⁵⁸ Taylor, *Story House*, 279 and 362.

House project, for better or worse. The brothers follow in the footsteps of their father – “*The day I start city planning, remind me and I’ll hang myself*” – taking no interest in the context of their creation and designing an isolated monument.⁵⁹ Story House is a personal project rather than a community or civic effort; it is literally and figuratively imposed on the Downtown Eastside from above.

And from this height, it comes crashing down. The structure at the centre of Taylor’s novel collapses into a pile of rubble after a series of blunders triggered by the brothers’ resuming the boxing match they began in their formative years. Charles Demers suggests that “[t]he crude, commercial exploitation of [55 East Mary Street] – in the novel, a reality TV show, but one that works as a metaphor for myriad planning and real estate development initiatives – ends by destroying it”.⁶⁰ His reading of *Story House* is informed by the real-world context of luxury condominium developments in the neighbourhood, particularly the development of the old Woodward’s department store, which was eventually built with community consultation after a persistent campaign.⁶¹ I would add that the destruction of Story House during the creation of a U.S. cable television show might be read in the context of Hollywood’s regular use of the Downtown Eastside’s gritty streets and the resultant inconvenience to residents, as streets are blocked off and generators and sound effects cause noise pollution. When the city files a lawsuit for damages, Elliot is unconcerned: “if anybody paid, it was going to be the cable

⁵⁹ Taylor, *Story House*, 63 (his italics).

⁶⁰ Demers, *Vancouver Special* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2009), 84.

⁶¹ For more information about this community consultation see Lee Donohue, “Street Smarter” in *Body Heat: The Story of the Woodward’s Redevelopment*, Robert Enright, ed. (Vancouver: Blueimprint, 2010), 157-164.

channel. And they weren't anyway, because they'd win".⁶² Neither brother accepts responsibility for the damage caused by their televisual exploitation of the Downtown Eastside.

Although Taylor draws attention to these processes, it is difficult to deduce whether a critique is implicit. On the one hand, the depiction of Elliot's arrogance and lack of self-awareness, equalled for the most part by his brother, suggests that Taylor keeps an ironic distance from these characters and their self-centred behaviour. Equally, although Graham and Elliot survive the collapse of Story House, they both end up dead in the water, Taylor's punning suggestion that their lives are unable to progress. This comic anticlimax strikes me as a sign that Taylor ridicules the brothers and their search for authenticity through the creation of one screen story to replace another. On the other hand, since no other character holds them to account, Taylor might be seen as reinscribing Elliot and Graham's actions. Moreover, his novel could be considered a "commercial exploitation" in itself, capitalising on fascination with the Downtown Eastside – the setting is foregrounded in publisher's summaries – to sell his novel.⁶³

I am aware that the same criticism might be made of this study: indeed, Taylor implies a critique of researchers imposing their academic interests on the Downtown Eastside through his representation of Deirdre and Riley's interview with Pogey Nealon, a process Pogey tolerates but with which he is clearly uncomfortable. Furthermore, the exploitation of poverty for the sake of academic analysis is implied by Riley's suggestion for an alternative project:

We take the camera down to Stanley Park and shoot one of those shopping cart lean-tos in the bush all layered over with garbage and

⁶² Taylor, *Story House*, 414.

⁶³ Taylor, *Story House*, 33.

shit. Bang together something about the inherent tensions of transient structure and we *ace* this thing.

Riley's cynical view of academic appraisal connotes the attractiveness of marginalised people and places as research subjects. This attraction is likely because of a perceived authenticity, but Riley's attitude demonstrates the potential for insincerity in matters of authenticity.

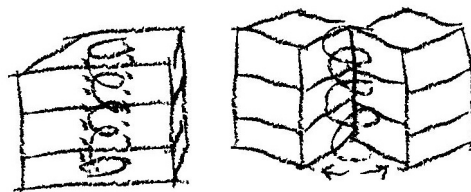
Graham, in contrast, is presented as completely sincere about his academic interest in Haida longhouses, but lacking in self-awareness. His interest has been encouraged by the enthusiasm of both his father and his university tutors. In common with the exploitation of the Downtown Eastside, Taylor's narrative both draws attention to and potentially re-inscribes exploitation, in this case the appropriation of First Peoples' culture and the removal of it from its original context, as Graham builds the inspiration of the Haida Story House into his own structure and the television programme. This echoes, for instance, the real-world erection of Totem poles from other parts of the northwest coast in Vancouver's Stanley Park, or the use of the Inukshuk, an Inuit symbol, as the logo for the Vancouver Olympics.⁶⁴ Although these examples acknowledge Canada's First Peoples in general they are merely an image, like de Certeau's panorama, masking the ongoing presence of First Nations in Vancouver – both the Coast Salish peoples, whose traditional lands include the area now known as Vancouver, and others who have made the city their own. Taylor associates First Peoples heritage with the Queen Charlotte Islands and ignores the culture in his own city, notably the large indigenous population of the Downtown Eastside.

⁶⁴ "Multimedia Art", Vancouver Storyscapes, <http://www.storyscapes.ca/multimedia.htm> (accessed June 5, 2011); "Vancouver 2010 logo revealed", CBC, under "Sports", April 24, 2005, http://www.cbc.ca/sports/story/2005/04/23/2010_vancouver050423.html (accessed June 5, 2011).

Haida culture is not the only influence for Graham's Story House. It is a combination of diverse and contradictory influences removed from their historical contexts. A Modernist, "Meisien ideal" of transparent glass architecture is chosen to pay tribute to the open structure of the Haida Longhouses and to Elliot's hero, Gordon Matta-Clark.⁶⁵ The opening up of Story House references the smoke hole of the longhouse and Matta-Clark's cutting and slicing technique. However, rather than leaving the structure open to the elements, the brothers shield the exposed surfaces with glass, a significant divergence from the practice of Gordon Matta-Clark.⁶⁶ Matta-Clark often worked in neighbourhoods like the Downtown Eastside, with buildings as decayed, and surrounded by decay, as 55 East Mary Street. However, his reasons were very different from Elliot and Graham's. Firstly, vacant buildings were the only structures available for him to use, and secondly, he described his work as "un-doing" architecture, as a critique of "the industry that profligates suburban and urban boxes as a context for insuring a passive, isolated consumer – a virtually captive audience".⁶⁷ In contrast to Matta-Clark's "un-doing" of the structures that facilitate consumption, Graham and Elliot rebuild Story House as part of a commercial endeavour.

⁶⁵ Taylor, *Story House*, 393.

⁶⁶ Taylor represents this plan graphically on subsequent title pages of the novel, in illustrations that resemble those drawn by Matta-Clark on letters to friends and colleagues:



For a letters featuring such sketches see Corrinne Diserens, ed. *Gordon Matta-Clark* (New York: Phaidon, 2003), 93 and 154.

⁶⁷ Gordon Matta-Clark, interviewed by Donald Wall (1976) in "Gordon Matta-Clark's Building Dissections" in *Gordon Matta-Clark: Works and Collected Writings*, ed. Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2006), 58.

Elliot and Graham contribute to the very processes that Matta-Clark critiqued. As Deirdre tells Elliot when she first meets him, Matta-Clark drilled a hole through an apartment “in the middle of rue Beaubourg because they were tearing everything down to make way for the Pompidou Centre”.⁶⁸ She refers to *Conical Intersect* (1975), which used a condemned seventeenth-century building, highlighting what was being lost in the creation of the Pompidou Centre. Since the glass-coated “openness” of Story House – the forthcoming “Zweigler Gallery and Museum of Packer Gordon” – resembles the Pompidou Centre, it might be read as a symptom or herald of gentrification, in contrast to the critique of such processes characteristic of Matta-Clark.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the Pompidou Centre, a structure credited with “transforming what had once been elite monuments into popular places of social and cultural exchange, woven into the heart of the city”, is for Baudrillard, an example of simulation: it gives an illusion of social and cultural exchange in order to distract people from the evacuation of the real.⁷⁰ With that in mind, we might read Elliot and Graham as replacing the authenticity of the Downtown Eastside with a simulation, although we should be wary of romanticising the decay of the original Mary Street structure, and the neighbourhood as a whole, as an oasis of authenticity.

The transparency of the glass architecture might be read as a simulation, rather than a symbol, of openness. Graham claims that his monument depends on the people who come to the museum: “they become part

⁶⁸ Taylor, *Story House*, 42.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *Story House*, 393.

⁷⁰ Robin Pogrebin, “British Architect wins 2007 Pritzker Prize”, *New York Times*, March 28, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/28/arts/design/28cnd-pritzker.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed February 10, 2011); Bruno Dewitt, Gordon Matta-Clark, “Conical Intersect”, 1975, video file posted on UbuWeb, under “Films”, http://www.ubu.com/film/gmc_conical.html (accessed February 10, 2011).

of a field of elements by which the dimension of the space are defined”.⁷¹

However, his inclusive rhetoric glosses over the decision to create a museum disconnected from the surrounding community. The glass façade, like the glass cabinets housing artefacts at museums, sends the message “you can look but you can’t touch” to the Downtown Eastside. Those looking through glass are physically divided from what they see. Graham claims he has a “Miesian ideal” in mind when creating Story House, the openness of glass architecture representing an organic form, permitting the penetration of light.⁷² Yet light is all that can penetrate. As Richard Sennett has noted, the inhabitants of glass buildings view the city streets and the incidents that occur there, but do not hear the cries of those in need, the sirens of emergency services. Sennett blames Mies van der Rohe, Graham’s cited inspiration, for “fathering a soulless environment of glass towers in which men and women are as cut off from one another as from the outside”.⁷³ More recently, Mike Davis has noted that reflective glass is one of several “tropes in an architectural language warning off the underclass Other”, and Graham notes the city’s preference for glass with medium reflectivity.⁷⁴ Unless literal and figurative doors are open, glass architecture facilitates urban regimes of voyeurism and surveillance instead of communication and exchange.

The tension between the construction of Miesian glass architecture and Matta-Clark’s deconstruction reflects the uneasy coexistence of modernism and postmodernism in the novel. Although the design for Story House is

⁷¹ Taylor, *Story House*, 366.

⁷² Taylor, *Story House*, 395

⁷³ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 177.

⁷⁴ Mike Davis, “Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Public Space” in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 154-180. Taylor, *Story House*, 371.

characterised by a modernist philosophy in its desire to unite form and function, finally achieved through Graham's museum design, the subsequent collapse of Story House fragments that ideal. Moreover, the DNA staircase, which on one hand corresponds with the brothers' obsession with authenticity, identity and their inherited genetics, on the other hand undermines their beliefs if we read it as a symbol of Taylor's postmodern playfulness. We might do this because, firstly, the DNA is a favoured symbol of Baudrillard's. He uses it, with television, to suggest the conflation of "cause and effect, between subject and object: precisely the distance of meaning".⁷⁵ We can no longer tell whether events occur and television films them, or whether television creates the event; equally, DNA is both an active material and a representation of itself. Taylor perhaps implies, then, that the same is true of Elliot and Graham; their actions are caught up in the images they create of themselves. Secondly, a careful reviewer notes, "Packer's building went up in 1939. The double helix of DNA was discovered in 1953".⁷⁶ The reviewer calls this a "factual gaffe", but I suggest we might it read as the novel's central irony. The ahistorical reference to DNA implies that there is a postmodern vacuum at the centre of Story House the structure, and *Story House* the novel.

Brandon McFarlane suggests *Story House* comprises a "rejection of postmodernism in favour of an aesthetic that has more in common with modernism. There is no self-conscious narrator who deconstructs the novel's

⁷⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, 31. The translator retains Baudrillard's term, *TV Verité*, perhaps because it suggests a connection to the documentary tradition of *Cinema Verité*. The terms suggests "truthful cinema / TV rather than reality TV, although *An American Family* is often credited with being an early archetype.

⁷⁶ Shaun Smith, "Story House by Timothy Taylor" *Quill and Quire*, April 2006, http://www.quillandquire.com/reviews/review.cfm?review_id=5039 (accessed June 5, 2011).

literary and ideological moves”.⁷⁷ However, the novel might be read as implicitly deconstructing itself. In a further representation of Story House within the novel, Packer Gordon’s biographer Cameron Lark, arrives at 55 East Mary Street to write an article for an architectural magazine. The result is titled “Why things Fall Down – The Story House Meta-narrative”.⁷⁸ Lark’s title is ambiguous: is he implying that a meta-narrative – a grand, unifying story about stories – can be told about the whole Story House incident, including its collapse? Or does he suggest that all possibility of a meta-narrative collapses with Story House? I opt for the latter interpretation, but acknowledge that modernist and postmodernist ideas of architecture, representation and surveillance coexist in Taylor’s novel.

Blood Sports

Blood Sports tells the harrowing screen story of Tom’s life as he struggles to live with the control and obsessive camera gaze of his cousin Jeremy. At the centre of Robinson’s novel is a section framed as police video transcripts. These are Jeremy’s videos and show his manipulation, torture, and filming (both overt and covert), of sixteen-year-old Tom. However, the violence of these videos is juxtaposed with the potential for another, happier screen story. The novel begins five years after the events described in the transcripts, when Tom is father to a baby daughter, Mel. In a letter addressed to Mel, to be opened only when she is eighteen, Tom relates how Mel’s mother Paulie had wanted him to film Mel’s birth by caesarean so that she could “watch you

⁷⁷ Brandon McFarlane, “Urban Structures”, *Canadian Literature*, 196 (Spring 2008): 187.

⁷⁸ Taylor, *Story House*, 427.

coming”, but he was too squeamish to remain in the room.⁷⁹ As the novel closes, Tom thinks about the home movies he and Paulie have yet to take of Mel, and the photographs that are ready for collection from Walmart, to give to their friends on Mel’s first birthday. As he contemplates this, Tom is simultaneously the star of Jeremy’s darkest screen story yet. In parentheses, Robinson narrates Tom’s shooting of Jeremy’s former associate Firebug, an action Tom carries out under Jeremy’s duress in desperation for a chance to make a happier screen story with his family.

Robinson’s novel combines elements of thriller and horror genres with a love story. She cites Stephen King as an influence, not only for his talents in evoking terror, but also for his depiction of working-class characters. Class is an important concern in *Blood Sports* and Robinson suggests she “borrowed shamelessly from the conventions of social realism” in order to draw attention to the difficulties of life on the margins.⁸⁰ In addition to King, Robinson claims her multimedia influences include the films of David Cronenberg. Like the Canadian filmmaker, Robinson shows a keen interest in what it means to intimately film the human body: during sex, torture, illness, under the influence of drugs, and at the moment of death. Moreover, her interest in the blurred boundaries between onscreen and offscreen worlds echoes that of Cronenberg in *eXistenZ* (1999) and *Videodrome* (1983). Robinson’s fascination with multimedia formats and popular culture is evoked through numerous references to screen media and an unusual narrative style that combines transcripts of violent, pornographic and surveillant home videos alongside letters and third-person and second-person narration focalised through Robinson’s protagonist

⁷⁹ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 4.

⁸⁰ “Notes from the Author”. Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 279.

Tom. The fragmented narration, invocation of screen media and playful references suggest a postmodern self-consciousness about the construction of representation, while the ultimate narrative cohesion and realist presentation of events paradoxically encourage an unquestioning acceptance of Robinson's narrative, and, implicitly, of screen media as evidence.

Robinson's use of transcripts to narrate Tom's, Paulie's and Jeremy's pasts illustrates the tensions between realism and postmodernism. Brian McHale has argued that a characteristic of postmodern fiction is that "certain narratological functions that would normally be carried out by the verbal text have been entrusted to some secondary medium (movie, television, computer) represented in the verbal text".⁸¹ However, Robinson provides an extra level of mediation by framing the screen story as a transcript, rather than merely describing screen media in third-person narration. The transcripts identify the people in the videos by name or categorise them by gender and race, relate dialogue and summarise appearances and actions. The written accounts attempt to present an objective interpretation and description of the events on the videos; this attempt is, in Haraway's words, "a god-trick", or a view from nowhere.⁸² This contrasts with the embodied narrations of the rest of the novel: even when Robinson uses third-person narration, it is very clearly focalised through Tom. The objective narration of the video transcripts, however, does not account for Jeremy's position as cameraman or the anonymous interpreter's position as viewer. This indicates a realist or modernist belief in "the revelatory vision of the camera" and a conflation of sight with

⁸¹ McHale, 182.

⁸² Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 191.

knowledge.⁸³ The video transcripts draw attention to the continued pretence of objectivity where interpreting and describing screen media is concerned, particularly in crime investigation.

Robinson seems to endorse this approach by encouraging the reader to interpret the video transcripts as evidence of events that have happened (in the fictional world of her novel). They are our first insight into Tom's, Paulie's and Jeremy's pasts and are framed, firstly, by a letter from Tom's mother, Chrissy, to Detective Pritchard, explaining that she found the tapes in Jeremy's apartment (subsequently losing them, post-transcription, to an unreliable private investigator); and secondly, by a "voluntary statement" written by Tom. The statement by Tom contradicts the contents of the videos, but then Chrissy's letter contradicts Tom's statement: "It's all lies. Jeremy has my Tommy so terrified, he refuses to help me and he won't talk to anyone".⁸⁴ Elsewhere, Robinson's third-person narration focalised through Tom corroborates Chrissy's letter: Tom is scared of what Jeremy will do to them if he goes to the police, but he is also protecting himself from the police as Tom is responsible for the death of a wanted criminal, Rusty. Consequently, while Robinson's framing of the video transcripts momentarily troubles our acceptance of the transcripts as reliably narrating Tom's experiences, this is subsequently explained and resolved. Although Robinson draws attention to the reasons why individuals might tell different, contradictory stories of the same event, the reader ultimately accepts the transcripts as a reliable section of Robinson's story.

⁸³ Madhu Dubey, *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003), 106-109.

⁸⁴ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 61.

The realist elements of Robinson's novel, and the presentation of the transcripts as an objective viewpoint, relate to the representation of surveillance in the novel. Surveillance devices are used by Jeremy, Firebug, the police and Tom, in his job at convenience store Lucky Lou's, and most of the characters rely on surveillance footage to reveal the truth about a situation, just as readers rely on the video transcripts to tell us the "truth" of what happened to Tom, Paulie and Jeremy in 1993. For instance, Jeremy puts a surveillance camera in Tom's room because he wants to know his true personality, even though, by forcing Paulie to visit Tom, he stages the events that will occur. Similarly, he sends Paulie to film Tom with a camcorder hidden in her purse. Firebug puts Tom under surveillance to see if he has been talking to the police. He interprets the resultant footage as evidence that Tom *has* been talking with the police, even though Tom is unaware that his friend Mike's partner is a policewoman. Actually, it is Chrissy who has contacted the authorities, as her letter accompanying the transcripts reveals, and the police have put Tom under surveillance to corroborate Chrissy's claims.

As well as being the subject of multiple layers of surveillance, the agents of which each seek verification, Tom also relies on surveillance. When he notices a black van parked outside his work place and becomes nervous about its regular presence, he uses security cameras and screens to monitor a customer. Tom is right to be suspicious: the customer is Leo, Tom's future abductor, and Tom subsequently tries to reassure Paulie that the security camera footage of Leo might help them. However, as Tom realises from Paulie's silent response, this is unlikely.⁸⁵ In the shop Leo is only a customer

⁸⁵ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 264.

making enquiries: his intent to harm Tom is invisible on the security camera footage. Later, when Tom sees Paulie and Mel on a surveillance monitor after his abduction and detainment in a remote cottage, he automatically sees this as a sign that they are alive and present and shouts out to them. They do not react, and the limitations of knowing through screen media are revealed: potentially, the image of Paulie and Mel could have been transmitted from another place and time. In this case, Leo tells Tom “it’s soundproofed, dumb-ass”, and Robinson confirms that Tom’s instincts were right and Paulie and Mel are here, now.⁸⁶

Tom soon finds himself in the soundproofed basement, a purpose-built prison. The confinement of the basement is further secured by the surveillance system: as Firebug tells them, “Neil will be watching you on the monitors”. Paulie and Tom cannot risk trying to escape in case they are being watched. Their soundproofed cell is windowless, other than the electronic window that allows Neil to monitor them: there is no way of knowing if Neil is watching and they are forced to assume that he is. Robinson thus invokes Foucault’s notion of the internalised gaze. The surveillance system is an electronic replacement for the Panopticon, the remote operation of the cameras masking the watcher from the watched. However, a temporary power failure prompts Tom and Paulie to doubt Neil’s surveillance and they begin work on their escape. Firebug has told Tom that the previous occupants of the basement starved when their captor died. Their utter dependence on Neil for food and power is comparable with the previous inhabitants of the basement, and realising this, Tom and Paulie decide to risk detection by Neil and begin to

⁸⁶ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 192.

chip away at the grates on the ceiling. Paulie and Tom's decision demonstrates that a disciplinary gaze is irrelevant in life or death situations. The threat of what will happen to those who "get caught" by cameras is not likely to deter someone who is desperate to survive. This is, perhaps, an important lesson for urban security in an increasingly polarised society: the Electronic Panopticon today allows surveillance beyond the architectural confines of disciplinary institutions and we are faced with the possibility of being watched in our everyday movements through the city. However, all the surveillance systems in the world will not prevent someone from trying to steal if they are on the verge of starving.

Robinson highlights another potential failure of the Electronic Panopticon: we become so used to the presence of cameras that we are immune to the threat of punitive action and contribute to the surveillance of ourselves, amassing, if not delivering, documents that could incriminate us. Ken Scrutin uses the term self-surveillance to describe the phenomenon of individuals publishing personal information online that might later be used as evidence. Web 2.0, with its emphasis on social networking and user-generated content, has facilitated multimedia self-publication. Crucially, however, the setting of Robinson's novels is pre-Web 2.0, and Jeremy does not publish his videos. Nonetheless, he risks incrimination for serious crimes by videotaping the illegal activities in which he is involved.⁸⁷ The Foucauldian notion of self-surveillance is overturned: Jeremy's visual documentation of his life demonstrates a lack of internalised gaze. His behaviour does not correspond to the law, societal norms, or even a criminal code; he confounds his colleagues

⁸⁷ Ken Strutin "Evidence in an Age of Self-Surveillance" *New York Law Journal*, March 11, 2009, <http://www.law.com/jsp/lawtechnologynews/PubArticleLTN.jsp?id=1202428950936> (accessed February 11, 2011).

with his recklessness.⁸⁸ This is, of course, also indicative that Jeremy is a sociopath, lacking the capacity for empathy and oblivious to responsibility and social norms.

There are occasional suggestions that Jeremy wants to impress his peers, and move into the higher echelons of organised crime. For instance, the first incident described by the video transcript, Jeremy knocking a cyclist down with his car door, is a way of showing he is serious and getting access to Firebug: “I want some serious action...I’ve had enough of amateur night”.⁸⁹ Although Jeremy does not share his videos, his transparency in making them (even when using the hidden camera on Tom, he does not hide his actions from Paulie and Firebug) and his failure to conceal the videos from anyone with access to his apartment suggest he might want people to know about them, that he is proud of his violent and perverse acts and even more proud of the fact that he captures them on tape. This might be another symptom of personality disorder – attention-seeking histrionics – or a means of intimidation. If the latter, his behaviour parallels that of a minor character in the novel, Willy, who paints eyes on his walls and ceilings so that people will be scared of him: “Makes people think twice before fucking with you, Willy had said. People leave you alone if they think you’re more fucked up than they are”.⁹⁰ Willy perceives predators and pre-empts them with the paintings of the eyes, a symbol of the image he wants to project. Similarly, Jeremy pre-empts an external gaze with his videos. In this respect, Jeremy’s videos are symptomatic of a perverted Foucauldian self-surveillance. Rather than modifying his behaviour in response to an institutional gaze, Jeremy performs for an

⁸⁸ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 97.

⁸⁹ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 67-69.

⁹⁰ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 27.

imagined audience. Like Taylor's protagonists, Jeremy is, perhaps, more representative of a Baudrillard's theories: he performs for the virtual camera in his head and for externalised actual cameras that might bring him recognition, even infamy, for his crimes.

The dual role of Jeremy's screen stories as surveillance and entertainment corresponds with a fairly recent television phenomenon. Robinson draws attention to the role that entertainment screen media plays in supporting the logic of surveillance, invoking the use of surveillance cameras for catching criminals through television programmes and the Internet. When Tom becomes suspicious at the recurring presence of a black van in Lucky Lou's parking lot, he thinks in terms of visual evidence: "The distance from the shop blurred the Crime Stoppers-worthy details like the license plates, model and make, but he was sure it was the same van that had been through the lot twice before".⁹¹ The importance of capturing these visual details is framed as a requirement for the media, and Robinson demonstrates Tom's acceptance of this partnership between screen media and policing.⁹² The broadcast of security camera footage is a means of simultaneously entertaining television viewers and solving crimes. Consequently, Robinson implies, there is a televisual hierarchy of image quality and engaging narrative, which limits the crimes that get media assistance. Robinson also shows how the Internet colludes with television in finding an audience for police images: Tom manages to locate information about Rusty on the Crime-stoppers website, and about Rusty's

⁹¹ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 52.

⁹² Aaron Doyle suggests this phenomenon emerged in the late eighties and continues to thrive due to the increasing presence of video cameras, and as television news more commonly sources footage from "alternative sources [...] like home camcorders or surveillance cameras". Aaron Doyle, *Arresting Images: Crime and Policing in front of the Television Camera* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 5.

father on www.gangwars.com, the sensational web address suggesting an even closer synergy between the documentation of “real” crime and entertainment.

Elsewhere in the novel, Robinson implies that even if the details were “Crime-stoppers worthy”, television producers might not take an interest in Tom’s disappearance. When he is lost and suffering from amnesia in the Downtown Eastside – Robinson narrates this section in a second-person perspective to emphasise his disorientation – Tom nonetheless recognises that the media is not concerned with him:

Tammy Lynn is missing. Her parents weep on TV. A hotline has been set up, and a reward for information leading to her return [...] Time is a slippery fish. But you’re sure it’s been a while since you were home. They aren’t exactly breaking out the sniffer dogs for you. No one holds your teddy bear on TV, sobbing for your safe return.⁹³

Robinson emphasises that Tom’s lack of media visibility is not a result of familial indifference when she subsequently narrates Chrissy’s exclamations: “Oh! I tried to get BCTV to do a story on you! And *The Province*! I called every day”.⁹⁴ Similarly, Tom reflects that “Jeremy was entirely capable of making their lives history, a sentence on D72 of the newspaper tucked in between the robbery gone awry and the car crash that held up traffic and killed a family of four”.⁹⁵ Tom anticipates that his and his mother’s disappearance would be buried in the supplements with other deaths that were more of an inconvenience to society than a tragic loss. Implicitly, Tom and Chrissy’s poverty consigns their tragic stories to the newspaper supplements and keeps them off television screens. Given that Robinson was writing *Blood Sports* at a time when media and police were criticised for not listening to the families of

⁹³ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 141.

⁹⁴ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 212. Eden Robinson refers to BCTV, a large local television network affiliated with CTV that joined Global, and was rebranded as such, in 2000.

⁹⁵ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 222.

Vancouver's missing women, it is likely that Robinson refers to that real-life instance of class-based discrimination.⁹⁶

While Robinson criticises the media for their bias and draws attention to the unfair invisibilities of Downtown Eastside residents, her tale of a somewhat glamorous murderer exacerbates sensational associations of the neighbourhood with crime, adding to the surveillance of its populations as Vancouver residents and authorities respond to the image of deviance.⁹⁷ Like *Story House*, Robinson's novel potentially capitalises on fascination with the Downtown Eastside. Although she suggests in interview that she expected her book to be "a hard sell", given her tourist-unfriendly vision of Vancouver, she forgets that the neighbourhood's "gritty streetscapes" are also a commodity, attracting film and television makers and increasingly, tourists interested in Vancouver's crime history.⁹⁸

The Downtown Eastside is an apt setting for what she calls a "dark fantasy".⁹⁹ Her description of the appalling hotel conditions lived in by Willy,

⁹⁶ Maggie de Vries, *Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Vanished Sister* (Toronto: Penguin, 2004), 196.

⁹⁷ Aside from setting, perhaps a closer real-life parallel is the Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka case, where the first victim was Karla's sister and the couple videotaped this and other crimes, hiding the tapes in a ceiling fitting. "Key events in the Bernardo/Homolka case" CBC, under "News", Thursday, June 17, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2010/06/16/f-bernardo-homolka-timeline.html> (accessed January 18, 2011).

⁹⁸ "Q: *You also depict a side of Vancouver – with its drugs and violence – that most people would rather sweep under the rug. Any complaints from the tourism industry?* A: Well, I know I won't be invited to carry the Olympic torch in 2010. Some of the new fiction that tackles urban life gets marginalized or radicalized. I was very aware that this book might be a hard sell". Rachel Geise. For "gritty streetscapes" see "Urban Innovation", British Columbia Film Commission, under "Locations", http://www.bcfilmcommission.com/locations/world_of_looks/urban.php (accessed June 5, 2011); for tourism see Charles Demers' description of the Vancouver Police Museum, "in the heart of the city's storied Downtown Eastside". Demers compares the contents of the museum to "the debris left by the broken, terrifying, and terrified layer of brute violence in Vancouver captured by authors like Clint Burnham in *Airborne Photo* and Eden Robinson in *Blood Sports*, or else by Chris Haddock and his army of writers and actors for *Da Vinci's Inquest*". He also describes a "Sins of the City" walking tour. Demers, *Vancouver Special*, 174-178.

⁹⁹ In the author's note Robinson writes, "I prefer the older, bloodier versions of fairy tales. Set in Vancouver and surrounds, *Blood Sports* is an homage to the original Hansel and Gretel, the version where Hansel uses a finger bone from a previous victim to convince the witch he's too

Tom's schizophrenic friend, might be read as a social realist critique. Alternatively, the description of "spray-painted eyes on [Willy's] door and the surrounding walls [...] shocked, wide and dull", and the case of money and cocaine hidden in the wall of a cockroach-infested bathroom, might be read as an evocative underworld scene, worthy of any horror movie and liable to increase fascination with the idea of the "seedy underbelly of the Downtown Eastside", a description the paperback cover foregrounds as the novel's setting. Although Lynne Van Luven has suggested, "Robinson may well be the first young novelist in Canada to pay the lives of the urban poor the attention they deserve. And her characters' lives are laced with high spirits and humour as well as money woes and childrearing tedium", the darker parts of the novel might appeal to the voyeurism of readers rather than their empathy.¹⁰⁰

In *Blood Sports*, violence and addiction are not limited to poor neighbourhoods. They are only more visible for cameras to capture because poverty forces people out onto the streets. Robinson emphasises that while violence and substance abuse may occur openly in the Downtown Eastside, they are also domestic phenomena. Middle-class people, like Paulie's parents, are able to keep their addictions private, literally keeping them underground by drinking "themselves stupid in the basement so they would not break their antiques when they went haywire on each other".¹⁰¹ In the Downtown Eastside, people do not always have that privilege. As Charles Demers suggests:

skinny to eat. For those who are curious, this story is not autobiographical or based on anyone that I know. Although I borrowed shamelessly from the stylistic conventions of social realism, this is a dark fantasy". Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 179.

¹⁰⁰ Lynne Van Luven, "Hansel and Gretel on Vancouver's Downtown East Side: Robinson's characters ward off desperation with resourcefulness and grit". *Literary Review of Canada* 14, no. 4 (May 2006): 17.

¹⁰¹ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 20.

The distinction between indoors and outdoors is key to how Vancouverites think about the Downtown Eastside...the glaring thing about the area is how everything happens outside – the sleeping, the socializing, the panhandling... – and somehow, the only way to make the phrase drug market seem more menacing is to qualify it as open-air.¹⁰²

Demers challenges the association of “indoors” with civilisation, as does Robinson through her depiction of Paulie’s parents and their suburban basement brawls. It is the necessity of an outdoor existence that leaves people more vulnerable to voyeurism, surveillance and unwanted media visibility. They are doubly overexposed: to the elements, and on film, their privacy and dignity taken from them.

Although Tom has a roof over his head, Jeremy’s arrival at Tom and Chrissy’s home compromises his privacy and undermines his dignity, as Jeremy insists on forcing entry and filming Tom even when he has locked the bathroom door. Moreover, he puts a surveillance camera in Tom’s bedroom, hoping to get footage of Tom with Paulie, knowing that Tom is attracted to her. As David Lyon has noted, Orwell demonstrated that

privacy was an aspect of human dignity. Winston Smith finally caves in, betraying his girlfriend Julia and declaring his love for Big Brother, not when his privacy is invaded but when deprived of his dignity by a confrontation with rats. From that moment his identity merged with Big Brother's. His very personhood was impugned.¹⁰³

Like Big Brother – and Jeremy tells Paulie that he is Tom’s big brother – Jeremy’s surveillance targets Tom’s dignity as well as his general privacy. This is evident when Jeremy forces Tom to lose his virginity on camera with Jeremy’s girlfriend Lilia. Jeremy is indifferent or oblivious to the reasons why Tom does not want it to happen:

‘You’ll thank me when you want to watch it.’

¹⁰² Demers, *Vancouver Special*, 83-84.

¹⁰³ Lyon, “From Big Brother”, 61.

‘But I won’t want to watch it. Jeremy. There’re some things you don’t record, you know.’

‘Like what?’

‘Like this! You don’t videotape your...your...stuff. You don’t see people going to funerals with camcorders and sticking them in the caskets, do you? You don’t go around videotaping your dog taking a dump, do you? You don’t go showing people your colonoscopy, do you?’¹⁰⁴

Tom’s complaint is about privacy but also dignity, the dignity one loses when one shares (or is forced to share) intimate bodily experiences. Robinson does not oversimplify the issue: after all, she has already informed us that Paulie wanted Tom to film Mel’s birth so Paulie would be able to “watch it later”.¹⁰⁵ However, in this case it is Paulie’s body and Paulie’s choice, and she and Tom have a trusting relationship. Robinson invites a comparison between this scenario and the power imbalance in the production of Jeremy’s screen stories, where Jeremy is always the cameraman, and Tom the scrutinised subject.

Tom’s convictions about when one should and should not make or share an image signal an authorial interest in the proliferation of cameras in contemporary everyday life. As Tom’s reference to colonoscopy highlights, cameras now penetrate the inside of our bodies as well as documenting our exterior. Tom does not condemn this technology, but merely implies that the resulting document can be misused. Nonetheless, Robinson plays with the idea of a life lived entirely onscreen and with the notion of a simulated world.

Tom’s early reference to a set of twins named Truman and Seraph might be read as intertextual references to characters in *The Truman Show* (1998) and *The Matrix Trilogy* (1999-2003); the former a film about a man whose entire existence has been engineered for television in an artificial world, and the latter a series of films about a simulated world. Moreover, Tom’s claims about what

¹⁰⁴ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 121.

¹⁰⁵ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 4.

should not be filmed echo Baudrillard, as quoted in my epigraph: “Live out your amorous passions in real time – the whole thing on video from start to finish. Penetrate your body in real time – endovideoscopy: your own bloodstream, your own viscera as if you were inside them”.¹⁰⁶ Tom’s protest at Jeremy’s videotaping of intimate events is, for Baudrillard, a futile remonstrance against something that is already in process.

The use of the phrase “real time”, today a media buzzword for live simultaneous footage or information, is, for Baudrillard, a sign that the world is automatically doubled by information and communications technology. Robinson, however, seems to be interested in the possibility of observing a bodily phenomenon while experiencing it at the same time. This is demonstrated in Robinson’s description of Tom and Lilia’s intercourse, videotaped and screened as it happens: “On the large-screen TV in front of the sofa, he could see duplicates of him and Lilia” and later, “Tom couldn’t stop glancing at Jer, at the big screen TV that showed him and Lilia together on the couch”.¹⁰⁷ Robinson describes this event at two points in the novel, the double narration drawing attention to the double image of her protagonist, onscreen and offscreen. Moreover, the descriptions fall on pages 120 and 240, suggesting she has playfully and meticulously structured her novel to emphasise the theme of doubling. This emphasises the role of the television as an “ontological pluralizer”, a term suggested by McHale. The television is a second plane of existence within Robinson’s novel and the constant presence of “TV sub-worlds variously complicates the heterogeneous ontological texture of a world already riddled with segments of diverse and often indeterminate

¹⁰⁶ Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, 28.

¹⁰⁷ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 120 and 240.

ontological status (fantasies, speculation, dreams, alternative scenarios, etc)”.¹⁰⁸ Although I argue that Robinson’s novel is largely realist in form and that she carefully frames excursions into the sub-worlds of screen media, she also explores the moments in her characters’ lives where ontological status is indeterminate, and the boundaries between reality and illusion are blurred.

In *Blood Sports*, drugs, illness, and fear affect the characters’ perception of reality. Screen media potentially contributes to and/or becomes a metaphor for feeling disconnected from reality. For instance, Robinson’s protagonist lives with epilepsy, and the particular qualities of this condition are explained in detail at the outset of the novel:

That first seizure is called an aura [...] a sensory seizure. When it starts, I feel it in my stomach, like I’m seasick. Then it changes. You know that feeling you get after you’ve watched a scary movie late at night, alone, and you know no one’s in the house with you. It’s just your imagination but you can’t stop being scared anyway. That’s how that seizure feels.¹⁰⁹

Subsequently, Tom warns his daughter that smoking too much pot is like watching too much TV: “a whole whack of your life passes you by, and you don’t realize it until you stop. You get stuck in this zone not quite in the real world”.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, Tom looks back fondly on his time smoking pot, watching “dumb movies” and playing computer games with his friend Mike. Here, screen media is escapism and fantasy. He and Mike play *Doom*, *Quake*, and *Streetfighter*, until Tom decides, in an echo of the unnamed player’s role in *Doom*, that his conflict with Jeremy would involve “no civilians. [...] Mike might want to help and end up streamrolled if Jeremy blew his top”.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Brian McHale, 128.

¹⁰⁹ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 8.

¹¹⁰ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 9.

¹¹¹ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 231. The computer game *Doom* is experienced through the eyes of the unnamed protagonist. As the *Doom* storyline informs players, “Three years ago, you

Robinson suggests Tom's life has become almost as strange and violent as the videogames he plays, and he cannot bear to share this with other people.

A part of the novel which implies Tom's experience of disconnection from reality is narrated in the second-person perspective, when Tom is suffering from amnesia after his fatal run in with Rusty, and is lost in the Downtown Eastside with a head injury and a lack of epilepsy medication. As he argues with himself about whether his experiences are real, after a charity worker accuses him of making something up, another character tells him: "don't get hung up on what's real or not real. That's just another strait jacket".¹¹² Without wishing to trivialise a traumatic experience, I suggest Robinson's second-person narrative might be read as a reference to the first-person shooter video games he plays and, moreover, as a form of literary simulation. *Doom* pioneered a form of entertainment where one could project one's subjectivity into a simulated environment. Storylines were, therefore, written in a second-person perspective, to contextualise the game-world before the player assumes his/her role. Despite the titular difference in perspective, the First Person Shooter is comparable with the second-person narrator in literature as both eliminate the distance between the player/reader and what he sees/reads, involving the player/reader in the fictional world. To compare the two in Robinson's novel implies a playful exploration of the way screen media inform our understanding of experience. In addition, it encourages a serious reflection upon how we experience a form of simulation other than

assaulted a superior officer for ordering his soldiers to fire upon civilians. He and his body cast were shipped to Pearl Harbor, while you were transferred to Mars, home of the Union Aerospace Corporation". Doom Manual, README.TXT file Copyright (C) 1995, Id Software on *Doom* Version 1.8, Classic Doom, <http://www.classicdoom.com/doominfo.htm> (accessed June 4, 2011).

¹¹² Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 142-143.

Baudrillard's. In contrast to his emphasis on simulation as signifying the wholesale inauthenticity of the contemporary environment, we see a model of simulation that encourages an empathy and identification.

In Robinson's novel, "you" does not merely address the reader, but also references Tom: the reader is aware that the perspective s/he identifies with is Tom's. Consequently, Robinson's second-person narration modifies the usual representational relationship. Instead of consuming representations of the Downtown Eastside from a distance, the second-person narration figuratively brings the reader into the image Robinson has created. Robinson thus presents an alternative to the voyeurism or surveillance permitted by film and television representations: the reader can look, but only through Tom's eyes, necessarily adopting Tom's judgements. As David Herman suggests, "[t]he chain of empathic identification stretches beyond the diegetic situation of the novel – beyond that virtual *you* ... and reaches those fragments of our world(s) in which pity for [the suffering subject] is actually to be found".¹¹³ The second-person narrative emphasises the role of the reader in entering the word-world Robinson has built and vicariously experiencing Tom's discomfort and disorientation. In building an abstract and simplified model of the world, players/readers can virtually encounter scenarios to which they would not otherwise have access. Indeed, Keith Oatley and Raymond A. Mar have argued that all fiction functions as simulation: "to abstract social information so that it can be better understood, generalized to other circumstances, and acted upon".¹¹⁴ Literary simulations might thus aid the development of empathy and

¹¹³ David Herman, *Storylogic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 342-345.

¹¹⁴ Raymond A. Mar and Keith Oatley, "The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience" *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, no. 3 (2008): 173.

the reduction of prejudice. Robinson's second-person narration draws attention to these possibilities.

Robinson encourages reader identification with an extremely marginalised citizen, someone whom we might fear, consider a nuisance or guiltily avoid, dismissing them as mentally unstable. While presenting Tom as someone who is suffering from mental illness, she also emphasises how this is exacerbated by people's assumptions. Moreover, as a homeless person, he is subject to surveillance and exclusion. He is monitored by charity workers who hand out sleeping bags to rough sleepers and by wary shopkeepers:

“Get out, get out, get out,” the woman says shooving you out of the corner store. “Don’t come in my store”.
“Someone’s following me,” you say.
“Someone’s always following you. Scare away my customers. Get out, get out, get out. Go take a bath.”¹¹⁵

The shopkeeper's assumption that Tom is delusional is challenged by the context of Jeremy's relentless surveillance of his cousin. Although Tom becomes confused about what is real and what is not in this section, it is other people who, in dismissing his experiences as hallucinations, cause the confusion.

In contrast, the character of Jeremy is described as indifferent to the distinction between simulation and reality. However, rather than suggesting this is a common condition, it is emphasised to demonstrate Jeremy's psychosis. Watching Jeremy react to a zombie film on television, Tom realises that excessive visceral images, real or fake, all have the same effect on his cousin. He tests his theory by creating a “homemade zombie movie” to present to Jeremy on his birthday. Providing fake blood and chicken guts, Tom lets

¹¹⁵ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 141.

Jeremy pretend to disembowel him with a “jagged knife” on the kitchen table. Robinson describes Jeremy as “rapt, engrossed. He was flushed, his hands shook...Jer looked annoyed if Tom distracted him from the real show, his fake guts spilling onto the counter”.¹¹⁶ Jeremy’s fixation on Tom’s fake guts reminds us that Jeremy is, paradoxically, discerning in his simulation tastes: he prefers “pre-CGI” films with their visceral homemade gore and the knowledge that actors are cutting into flesh and drawing blood even when if the flesh and blood are animal rather than human.¹¹⁷

Robinson invites a comparison between the zombie scene and two earlier occurrences related in the video transcripts: Jeremy holding a serrated buck knife while Tom lies unconscious on the coffee table;¹¹⁸ and two girls having intercourse at Jeremy’s instruction and subsequently lying unconscious on the bed. In the latter of these instances,

Mr Rieger returns to the 1st Female and picks up a serrated buck knife, which he traces between her breasts down to her belly button. From the camera angle, it appears as if he suddenly and repeatedly stabs her, but he stabs beside her. Mr. Rieger makes sound effects for the knife entering her stomach and for agonized screaming.¹¹⁹

These scenes evoke the most illicit genre of screen media, snuff. Snuff claims authenticity in its representation of murder, but rumoured “genuine” snuff films have been revealed as fakes, leading critics to conclude that the genre may be “the most scandalous attempt to pass off fiction as fact”.¹²⁰ In keeping with this scepticism, Robinson’s transcript suggests Jeremy only pretends to

¹¹⁶ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 249.

¹¹⁷ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 230. CGI stands for Computer Generated Imagery.

¹¹⁸ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 80.

¹¹⁹ Robinson, *Blood Sports*, 73.

¹²⁰ Julian Petley, “Cannibal Holocaust and the Pornography of Death” in *The Spectacle of the Real: From Hollywood To Reality TV and Beyond* ed, Geoff King (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005), 173.

stab the woman. There is a slippage here between the visual and the written evidence: the fictional person transcribing the tapes not only relates what he/she sees but interprets that the knife stabs beside her. The multiple hermeneutic possibilities of visual documentation are emphasised, and its fallibility as evidence exposed. It is Jeremy's faked sound effects that reveal the visuals as simulated. However, later in the narrative Tom describes Jeremy's camera lingering upon scars on the stomach of Lilia. Although Lilia does not resemble the women described in the video transcripts, Robinson plays with our acceptance of perception and actuality, real and simulated as readers wonder if Jeremy is responsible for those scars.

Similarly, at the conclusion of the novel, we can only judge whether Jeremy succeeds in making a snuff film by the image seen on his videotape: "The tape is short. Tom walks into the frame. He presses Betty against Firebug's forehead to muffle the sound. The unseen crows aren't disturbed and continue to argue in the background. The recording stops". It is unclear whether Tom has pulled the trigger on Firebug's gun, Betty: one might assume he has, given that he gets as far as putting the gun against Firebug's forehead. However, since the crows are undisturbed, we might deduce that Tom did not go through with it. Robinson plays with audience assumptions, aware that they might not notice small gaps in narrative. This is reminiscent of Paul Virilio's suggestion that cinema relies on *picnolepsy*, small lapses in attention that prevent the audience from noticing the moments between frames when the screen goes dark.¹²¹ This is an epileptic state of consciousness and, according to Virilio, it is induced by the speed of contemporary life and its time-space-

¹²¹ Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 19-25; Sean Cubitt, *Simulation and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 2001), 56.

annihilating technologies. In light of this, we might read Robinson's narrative form as echoing her content: the minor omissions of her narrative (which the reader is liable to ignore) and the larger gaps between the narrative fragments are comparable with Tom's experiences of absence – "being stuck in a zone not quite in the real world" – brought on by his epilepsy, smoking pot and watching too much television. Paradoxically, the omissions of her narrative strengthen the reader's belief in the fictional world: we are eager to know what happens to Tom at the end of the novel: what causes him to leave Paulie and Mel and write the letter that opens the novel? Robinson's realist effect is dependant on her postmodern use of absence.

Conclusion

Robinson's and Taylor's novels present diverse perspectives on the Downtown Eastside. I have read Taylor's novel as employing psychological realism to narrate the perspectives of middle-class characters, whilst invoking postmodernism to undermine their search for authenticity. Marginalised perspectives are relatively unrepresented: Pogey Nealon is the only working-class character through whom Taylor focalises his narration, and First Nations are all but absent from Taylor's Downtown Eastside. However, we might read this as a refreshing shift of focus away from the Downtown Eastside poor and racial minorities. Taylor's novel instead scrutinises the behaviour of his own demographic, the professional middle classes working on the peripheries of the Downtown Eastside but living elsewhere.

Robinson's novel focuses on a working-class protagonist, Tom, but critiques the middle classes through the character of Paulie, who rejects her

parents' pretensions. Robinson's use of social realism and focalisation through Tom, a flawed but likeable young man, encourage readerly empathy and affect. Nonetheless, Robinson is influenced by postmodernism: a fragmented structure and playful intertextual references invoke Baudrillardian simulation and Virilio's notion of picnolepsy as means of explaining different experiences of the real. Robinson's postmodernism does not, like Taylor, undermine the experiences of the protagonist. Rather, she invokes simulation as a model through which we might further identify with Tom's plight. *Story House* also offers us another way of thinking about simulation, by describing images – the panoramic view and television shots – that mask much of reality.

Alongside simulation, surveillance is explored as a contemporary condition of urban existence. *Story House* and *Blood Sports* illustrate the relevance of Orwellian and Foucauldian models of surveillance, but they also imply the insufficiency of these models to explain the multidirectional surveillance of the contemporary era, further complicated by the proliferation of screen media and its increasing overlap with surveillance. Robinson shows how surveillance combines with screen media to produce entertainment, whilst also emphasising that surveillance and screen media footage is often regarded as evidence. Taylor reveals the manipulation involved in non-fiction TV, questioning the truth-telling capacity of images and inviting a reassessment of the term non-fiction, and implicitly, reality TV.

Both novels, particularly Robinson's, explore benign and malevolent surveillance and screen stories. Surveillance, like representation, is sometimes controlling or exploitative, but it can also be a sign that someone cares enough to pay attention. What is gained by bringing these novels together is a greater

understanding of this paradox of visibility in the Downtown Eastside. On one hand, as *Story House*'s non-fiction television invasion suggests, the Downtown Eastside is exploited by screen media for commercial gain. On the other hand, as Robinson suggests, missing marginalised residents are ignored by screen media. The novels also indicate that understanding class difference, or perceptions of class difference, is crucial for comprehending the relationship between the Downtown Eastside and the rest of Vancouver. Read together, Robinson's and Taylor's texts imply significant polarisation between classes. However, in foregrounding the question of class and its relationship to inequality in screen media and surveillance, these screen stories may be a first step in challenging the images and realities of a divided city.

Chapter 2

Looking Through Televisual Fiction: *Da Vinci's Inquest*

We can't think we're creating truth with a camera. But what we can do is reveal something to viewers that allows them to discover their own truth.

Michel Brault

Visibility is a trap.

Michel Foucault¹

The Downtown Eastside is a central location in the long-running and award-winning Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) series, *Da Vinci's Inquest* (1998-2005).² Chris Haddock is *Da Vinci's Inquest's* creator and co-producer, and is credited as director of eight and co-writer for all but eleven of the programme's ninety-one episodes. I argue that *Da Vinci's Inquest* showcases surveillance as a policing strategy and a televisual convention. However, occasionally, and particularly in episodes directed by Haddock, *Da Vinci's Inquest's* aesthetics and thematic concerns imply self-conscious reflection on the programme's role in increasing the visibility of the Downtown Eastside. The representation and evocation of surveillance in *Da Vinci's Inquest* is linked with the "hybrid realism" of the series. The screen stories told by Chris Haddock and his team invoke reality through televisual realism, direct cinema

¹ Michel Brault interviewed in Peter Wintonick, dir. *Cinéma Vérité: Defining the Moment*, DVD, (Canada: NFB, 1999); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 200.

² See the *Da Vinci's Inquest* site for a list of Gemini, Leo, Writers Guild of Canada and Directors Guild of Canada awards accumulated by the cast and crew of *Da Vinci's Inquest*: "Reviews and Awards" *Da Vinci Online*, http://www.davincisinquest.com/reviews_dvi.php?showID=2 (accessed March 24, 2011).

conventions and references to actual events. The correspondence between reality and fiction evident in *Da Vinci's Inquest* thus facilitates a complex view of the Downtown Eastside. These are screen stories that encourage and facilitate surveillance of the body, the body politic and, in particular, the Downtown Eastside; however, they also reveal the limitations of surveillance. After introducing the concept of hybrid realism, I provide an overview of how *Da Vinci's Inquest* represents the Downtown Eastside. I then analyse the thematic and aesthetic engagement with surveillance throughout the series, before focusing on the episode "Pretend You Didn't See Me". I argue that this episode demonstrates a self-conscious exploration of scopic regimes in the Downtown Eastside through aesthetics and storyline.

Hybrid Realisms

Da Vinci's Inquest is a fictional television programme, but it is notable for mirroring contemporary events and dramatising real Vancouver issues in its storylines. Moreover, it adopts the conventions of television realism and occasionally adapts the aesthetics of documentary film. The programme consequently troubles the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. Recent scholarship on English-Canadian television has emphasised the importance of non-fictional modes in current and historical programming. Zoe Druick and Aspa Kotsopoulos propose the term "hybrid realisms" to describe television programmes that "straddle the border between reality and fiction".³ While a 2009 *Canadian Journal of Communication* issue entitled "Reality/Television" focuses on the renewed interest in non-fictional modes since the international

³ Zoe Druick and Aspa Kotsopoulos, *Programming Reality: Perspectives on English-Canadian Television* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2005), 1.

surge of reality TV,⁴ Druick and Kotsopoulos stress that hybrid realisms predate reality programming and have been part of television since its inception.⁵ They trace the history of mixed genres in English-Canadian programming, suggesting that the phenomenon is especially evident at the CBC, where television-makers arguably inherited the strong documentary tradition of the National Film Board (NFB).

The Canadian public service context is crucial for understanding *Da Vinci's Inquest*.⁶ The CBC and NFB have similar mandates to reflect Canada and its regions; consequently fictional productions have an added imperative to relate to the real experiences and concerns of citizens.⁷ It is unsurprising that the CBC draws on the traditions of national filmmaking given the CBC's and NFB's shared history as crown corporations, government-owned commercial enterprises.⁸ David Hogarth has suggested that documentary "shaped the way the medium [of television] was thought of and used in Canada".⁹ The

⁴ "Reality/Television", *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34, no. 1 (2009). This issue focuses on the impact of reality TV on national programming, noting CBC's modified mandate to justify more factual programming in 2005.

⁵ Druick and Kotsopoulos, 1.

⁶ Unlike other public broadcasters, such as the BBC in the UK, the CBC has a hybrid public/private format since 1953 when license fees were abolished. Since then, it has depended on advertisers in addition to government subsidies to fund its productions. The high cost of domestic drama and the relatively small domestic audience mean that Canadian drama is uneconomical. A higher proportion of cheaper programming (such as "non-fiction entertainment" as CBC calls its concession to reality TV) and/or programming that can easily be sold internationally is necessary to balance the CBC budget. In recent years more emphasis has been placed on economic efficiency and making the CBC more competitive with private broadcasters, arguably to the detriment of quality in Canadian productions. Useful analysis of the dilemmas faced by the CBC regarding drama versus cheaper types of programming in recent years can be found in Bart Beaty and Rebecca Sullivan, *Canadian Television Today* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006), 73-75.

⁷ "About the NFB: Mandate" National Film Board of Canada, <http://www.nfb.gc.ca/eng/about-us/organization.php> December 1, 2010 (accessed February 23 2011); Policy 1.1.1. CBC/Radio-Canada Mandate, CBC/Radio Canada, under "Policies and Guidelines", <http://www.cbc.radio-canada.ca/docs/policies/program/mandate.shtml> July 6, 1994 (accessed February 23, 2011).

⁸ The CBC became a full crown corporation in 1938, at this time broadcasting radio prior to the invention of television. In the same year, the Government asked John Grierson to advise them on national film production, leading the 1939 founding of the NFB.

⁹ David Hogarth, *Documentary Television in Canada: From National Public Service to Global* (Montreal: McGill, 2004), 5.

docudrama has long been a popular format at the CBC and documentary has more subtly influenced crime television, among other genres.¹⁰ For instance, Mary Jane Miller notes the influence of the documentary tradition on the aesthetic of *Wojeck*, a 1960s series about a Toronto coroner and a clear antecedent of *Da Vinci's Inquest*.¹¹ *Wojeck* experimented with documentary aesthetics in televisual fiction only two years after Don Owen and Gilles Groulx created feature films in the documentary style known as direct cinema.¹² The use of documentary/direct cinema conventions in *Da Vinci's Inquest* is consequently explored later in this chapter.

Although the national context has certainly informed *Da Vinci's Inquest*, I also consider this series in relation to a broader phenomenon of hybrid genres in recent years. Although *Da Vinci's Inquest*, first aired in 1997, predates the popular interest in reality TV and the events of September 11th 2001 (often recognised as the defining media moment of the contemporary era) we might retrospectively analyse the programme through the lens of what Geoff King calls “the spectacle of the real”. King refers to a paradox in contemporary television where fiction aspires to authenticity and non-fiction is increasingly contrived.¹³ He suggests that we might understand various modes of verisimilitude in fiction and the spectacularisation of “real” people and events in non-fiction programming (from the news coverage of September 11th

¹⁰ See David Hogarth's section on Canadian Docudramas, 86.

¹¹ Mary Jane Miller, *Turn up the Contrast* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987), 48.

¹² I refer to the films *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (Don Owen, 1964) and *Le Chat dans le Sac* (Gilles Groulx 1964). These films were largely improvised and made “reluctantly by the NFB despite its continuing commitment to documentaries”. *Nobody Waved Goodbye* was made with a budget for a half hour documentary on juvenile delinquency, dealing with the same theme, and Gilles Groulx wanted to “eliminate the boundaries between documentary and fiction”. Louis Gianetti and Jim Leach, *Understanding Movies*, 2nd Canadian ed. (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2001), 342-345.

¹³ Geoff King, “Introduction” in *The Spectacle of the Real* ed. Geoff King (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005), 6.

2001 to reality television) as a spectrum of interlinked phenomena that evidence the multimedia spectacle of the real in screen media. Stella Bruzzi, similarly connecting audience perceptions of authenticity in fiction and non-fiction screen media, suggests that the events of September 11th 2001 “had a striking effect on how factual images are integrated into our culture, especially when it comes to film, television and media”. She employs the concept of “approximation” to describe works that “approximate reality rather than straightforwardly represent it”.¹⁴ Bruzzi posits that contemporary audiences approach representations of reality differently since the advent of digital technologies that allow them to manipulate images as well as interpret them. This suggestion is comparable with John Ellis’ conviction that “we are seeing the emergence of an increasing sophistication of attitudes towards the truth-claims of moving image and sound”; however, Bruzzi and King importantly note that this affects how we understand fiction as well as “factual” footage – the two are mutually implicated.¹⁵ If we can accept that “documentary is a negotiation between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other”, we might also apply this logic to fiction that approximates the real.¹⁶ King’s “spectacle of the real” and Bruzzi’s “approximation” thus offer useful frameworks for understanding the intersection of fiction and reality in

¹⁴ These quotations come from Bruzzi’s abstract about her upcoming Leverhulme research project, which I sought out after hearing her unpublished talk on “The Documentary Real” at the University of Nottingham on February 16th 2011. Stella Bruzzi, “Approximation: Documentary, History, and Staging Reality”, The Leverhulme Trust, 2010, http://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/news/news_item.cfm/newsid/27/newsid/70 (accessed 23 February, 2011).

¹⁵ John Ellis, “The Digitally Enhanced Audience: New Attitudes to Factual Footage” *Relocating Television: Television in the Digital Context* ed. Jostein Gripsrud (London: Routledge, 2010), 184.

¹⁶ Stella Bruzzi, *The New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed (London: Routledge: 2006), 6-7.

Da Vinci's Inquest's use of realist conventions, documentary aesthetics and its dramatisation of real crimes and issues.

Da Vinci's Inquest's approximations of reality are essentially promotional, capitalising on audience interest in “real crime” and “real people”. The series demonstrates a strategic engagement with reality, designed to create special appeal for viewers familiar with corresponding events in the real world, but without compromising entertainment value for those who lack appropriate context. Most storylines draw from Vancouver news events and Haddock has made no secret of the fact that the character Dominic Da Vinci was inspired by Larry Campbell, Vancouver coroner and Mayor (2002-2005). Campbell also acted as a consultant for the series and has writing credits for ten episodes, most of them co-written with Haddock. Although Haddock is careful to point out that there are significant differences between Campbell and the fictional character, this connection between the fictional and the real Vancouver figures proved a productive reciprocal relationship. In 2002, “Campbell's supporters in the mayoral campaign happily capitalized on the connection, gleefully sporting “Mayor Da Vinci” buttons on their lapels and convincing voters that the long-ruling NPA party cared little for the downtrodden Downtown Eastside”.¹⁷ Three years later, mock-election posters placed around Vancouver, advertising Dominic Da Vinci as “democratically elected” and “unbought and unbossed”, was a memorable advertising campaign for *Da Vinci's Inquest* spin-off, *Da Vinci's City Hall* (2005-2006).¹⁸

¹⁷ Adele Weber, “Did a TV Crime Drama Influence a Local Election?” *The Hollywood Reporter*, December 31, 2002, <http://www.allbusiness.com/services/motion-pictures/4924135-1.html> (accessed March 1, 2011).

¹⁸ A friend living in Vancouver at the time alerted me to this advertising campaign, which is recorded by another Vancouver resident here: knightbefore_99, “Da Vinci for Mayor”, Flickr,

Another significant interplay between *Da Vinci's Inquest* and real events occurred when programme writers made allusions to "the pig farm" in season five. This referred to the "real-life" discovery of human remains at the Port Coquitlam farm of Robert Pickton in 2002, and Pickton's subsequent charge with the murders of many of Vancouver's missing women. *Da Vinci's Inquest* explores the abduction, abuse and murder of sex workers from the very first episode, drawing attention to real life cases at a time when the media and police had taken little interest. The television drama thus had a quasi-documentary function, staging scenarios that suggested the women might have been targeted by one or several serial killers. However, the pig farm references in season five are the first time an explicit link is made to real events. The allusions are made in conjunction with Angela's investigation into disappeared Downtown Eastside women but are never explained in the script. In this instance *Da Vinci's Inquest* risked alienating international viewers: awareness of the Pickton case could perhaps be taken for granted in Canada, where the news was widely reported, but caused confusion elsewhere, particularly for viewers watching episodes some years after their initial Canadian run.¹⁹

As fans of *Da Vinci's Inquest* were referred to the "real world" to explain the pig farm references, followers of the missing women case were referred to *Da Vinci's Inquest* on at least one occasion. Maggie De Vries, whose sister Sarah De Vries went missing from the Downtown Eastside in 1998, describes the conversation between the Toronto hosts of CBC's *Midday*

entry posted on June 3, 2008, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/9817122@N05/2548987964/> (accessed March 2, 2011).

¹⁹ U.S. viewers have sought explanations on the *Da Vinci's Inquest* forum: Hondo, comment on "What's the deal with the pig farm??" Comment posted on 24 February, 2008, <http://davincisinquest.tv/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=2246> (accessed 8 September, 2009); mmaatagirl, comment on "OK, I give up - what is the 'pig farm' they keep on about?" Comment posted on 22 February, 2009, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0156442/board/thread/131147453> (accessed 8 September, 2009).

programme, that followed an interview she had given in the Downtown Eastside's Oppenheimer Park: "They talked about how dreadful it was that all these women had vanished without a trace, and how hard it must be for the families. Then the female host said that all you had to do was watch *Da Vinci's Inquest* and there was the story". Although this might be a rather tactless, if unintentional, advertisement of another CBC programme, as De Vries subsequently describes there is some truth in the host's remark, although the conflation of actual suffering with dramatised entertainment trivialises her own painful involvement:

And she is right, in a way. That is why I have never watched *Da Vinci's Inquest*. Not because I don't want to watch shows about crime or about human misery, but because I don't want to watch entertainment that so closely mirrors my own experience. Still, I thought that it was inappropriate to compare these real events to a television show. Her comment made light of the disappearances, although that was not her intent.²⁰

De Vries's experience poignantly reveals the hybrid realism of *Da Vinci's Inquest*. Haddock's decision to weave references to real life into his television drama results in a screen story that is part fiction and part documentary. These examples demonstrate that the discourse surrounding the disappearance of women from the Downtown Eastside crosses the frame of the television set and the assumed boundary between fiction and non-fiction.

The *Da Vinci's City Hall* advertising campaign and the references to "the pig farm" clearly demonstrate Haddock's interest in foregrounding the interpenetration of television and reality in his show. Kim Elliot has suggested that *Da Vinci's Inquest* occasionally features:

an unintentional moment of self-reflection on the role the show plays as mediator of an image of a real place, real struggles,

²⁰ Maggie de Vries, *Missing Sarah: A Vancouver Woman Remembers Her Vanished Sister* (Toronto: Penguin, 2004), 232.

permitting the rest of Canada and the world to glimpse the Downtown Eastside from a safe distance behind our TV screens.²¹

I would argue that self-reflection is intentional. Although for the most part *Da Vinci's Inquest* does not use self-reflexive devices, occasional lines of dialogue and aesthetic resemblance to direct cinema connote self-reflection in certain episodes of *Da Vinci's Inquest*, as I will demonstrate. These self-reflexive moments potentially reduce the distance between the viewer and the place represented onscreen, prompting viewers to reconsider their implication in, and surveillance of, the challenges facing residents of *Da Vinci's Inquest's* fictional Downtown Eastside, and of the real neighbourhood from which it draws inspiration.

Representing Place

In *Da Vinci's Inquest*, we are introduced to the “Eastside” as the workplace of Vancouver coroner Dominic Da Vinci, pathologists Sunny Ramen and Patricia Da Vinci, and homicide detectives Leo Shannon, Mick Leary and Angela Kosmo. In the programme, the Vancouver Police Department, Coroner's Office and Court, and pathology labs are all located adjacently in the neighbourhood that local viewers will recognise as the Downtown Eastside. Chance meetings between characters occur overwhelmingly on the streets outside or in nearby cafes, notably the Ovaltine Café, a distinctive neon-signed establishment on Hastings Street. The streets are presented as a mixture of colour and dreariness: walls adorned with murals or posters and graffiti, dilapidated hotels with partially functioning neon signs, boarded up and faded shop fronts, and a large number of ethnically diverse, but often aged and male,

²¹ Elliot, 15.

pedestrians. Investigations frequently take the protagonists into alleyways where bodies are found, evidence is retrieved from garbage bins, and witnesses are questioned. Police looking for information seek out sex workers and small-time drug dealers in these locations; it is implied that this is a small community where people know each other's business.

The debut episode, "Little Sister", foregrounds a number of issues which recur throughout the seven seasons of *Da Vinci's Inquest* and the subsequent season of *Da Vinci's City Hall*: the murder and disappearance of women from the Eastside; rumoured plans for a casino and new cruise ship terminal adjacent to the Vancouver port; the existence of badly run and maintained single room occupancy hotels; Vancouver's high levels of alcohol and drug overdoses. Viewers familiar with Vancouver are likely to associate these issues with the Downtown Eastside but the name of the neighbourhood is unmentioned. They might also recognise clearly signposted locations, such as the Arco and Beacon Hotels and the 2 Jay's Café on Hastings and Pender Streets. The types of hotels featured in this episode, often offering ill-maintained, low-rent single room occupancies, are found in the Downtown Eastside and are commonly associated with it.

It is clear from this first episode that location is constructed so that it has a two-tiered appeal. For the most part, references to the Downtown Eastside are substituted by "Eastside" and "skid row", constructing a generic image of an impoverished inner city neighbourhood that holds meaning for international viewers.²² Meanwhile, a careful strategy of signposting – clear

²² The East End is often synonymous with the poorer part of the city, for instance, the East End of London, the Lower Eastside of New York, the Central City East of Los Angeles. Skid row also signifies a dilapidated part of town with an impoverished population, although the term – a corruption of skid road – originated in the lumber trades, where corduroy road surfaces aided

shots of street signs, business fronts and distinct locations – enable local viewers to form deeper connections. As Sarah Matheson notes in an article about industrial television filmed in Toronto, “[t]he phenomenon of place involves the negotiation of a variety of discourses and images that informs the individual’s experience of particular places, including, for example, the meanings specific landscapes hold”.²³ Viewers will connect with the location of a television programme on a variety of levels, and people who have had “personal relationships with these urban spaces” will extract more enjoyment from a programme, linking onscreen images with more tangible experiences.

A programme’s ability to encourage multi-level identification with place is particularly useful for the CBC. As a crown corporation, the CBC must appeal to national and international audiences to justify its subsidies and bring in additional income. It must consequently balance the necessity of achieving international sales and attracting sufficient audiences to satisfy advertisers with its mandate to “be predominantly and distinctively Canadian” and “reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences while serving the special needs of those regions”.²⁴ Creating a local sense of place while also retaining generic appeal facilitates achievement of both cultural and market goals. There is some debate, however, over the CBC’s ability to “reflect Canada and its regions”. Serra Tinic suggests that CBC production in Vancouver (and other Canadian regions outside of Ontario) has been

the movements of logs. Entertainment districts frequented by transient workers grew up around lumber mills and were negatively associated with heavy drinking culture and drug and sex trades.

²³ Sarah Matheson, “Projecting Placelessness: Industrial Television and the ‘Authentic Canadian’ City” in *Contracting out Hollywood: Runaway Productions and Foreign Location Shooting* eds. Greg Elmer and Mike Gasher (Boulder: Rowan and Littlefield, 2004), 133.

²⁴ “Policy 1.1.1 CBC Mandate”

increasingly marginalised since the 1970s.²⁵ The west coast, for instance, has limited representation in CBC drama. Before *Da Vinci's Inquest*, *The Beachcombers* (1971-1990) was the only notable series to represent the region. In 1994, however, the CBC sought out proposals for a Vancouver-based drama as part of a regional revitalisation initiative. *Da Vinci's Inquest* was the chosen proposal, but Tinic emphasises Toronto's decision-making role, suggesting it is symptomatic of the CBC's superficial and inconsistent regional policy and their refusal to grant creative control to the Vancouver production centre. Their choice, she suggests, "reinforced the enduring sentiment that Toronto's definition of regional production was primarily concerned with setting rather than socio-cultural specificity in prime time", because *Da Vinci's Inquest* "self-consciously and explicitly refers to the site and context of the city but in a manner that emphasizes the generic markers of any crime or murder-mystery program".²⁶ While Tinic's interrogation of the decision-making process is valuable, she misrepresents the programme that came out of it: *Da Vinci's Inquest* thoroughly engages with the history, geography and current affairs of Vancouver and was a significant step in regional revitalisation, given the duration of the programme and its spin-off productions, *Da Vinci's City Hall* and the television movie *The Quality of Life* (2008), Haddock's subsequent west coast series *Intelligence* (2005-2007), and fruitful collaborations with central figures in the Vancouver independent film industry.²⁷

²⁵ Serra Tinic, *On Location: Canada's Television in a Global Market* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 65.

²⁶ Tinic, 92.

²⁷ Chris Haddock, creator, *Da Vinci's City Hall*, television, (Canada, CBC and Haddock Entertainment, originally aired 2005-2006); Chris Haddock, creator, *Intelligence*, television, (Canada, CBC and Haddock Entertainment, originally aired 2006-2007).

As I have noted, some generic markers are used in *Da Vinci's Inquest* to attract audiences unfamiliar with Vancouver. However, I argue that there is socio-cultural specificity in *Da Vinci's Inquest's* engagement with the local landscape and local issues. Many of the storylines relate to the particularities of Vancouver's geography and history. For instance, storylines engage with Vancouver's identity as a port city on the Pacific Rim in "Cheap Aftershave" (4:4) where a Chinese boat migrant dies on hunger strike in a detention centre. The long history of Chinese migration to Vancouver and subsequent human rights abuses are explored throughout season four where an excavation reveals the remains of Chinese people in shipping crates. Vancouver's proximity to the American border is evident in "The Hunt" and "The Capture" (1:12-13), when Vancouver police forces must work with US authorities to track down a pair of murderers, and in "All Tricked Up", (3:8) where two Mexican teenagers are found hidden in shipping trucks that have been transported from Portland.

In season seven Vancouver homicide detectives find themselves working in conflict with United States DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) agents over the death of a Canadian marijuana smuggler, who happens to be an old friend of Mick Leary's. The sympathetic portrayal of a marijuana smuggler, drawing on Vancouver's renowned, if somewhat stereotyped, tolerance of cannabis use, is symptomatic of *Da Vinci's Inquest's* efforts to represent the city's unique approach to drug issues. Vancouver's trajectory towards harm reduction policies, rather than the "war on drugs" approach more common in the U.S., is also evident as Dominic campaigns for a safe injection site in the Downtown Eastside. Furthermore, he pushes for a red light district in an effort to protect vulnerable women from violence. As I

have noted, there are a number of storylines about murdered or abducted prostitutes echoing historical events in Vancouver. Tragically, the abuse of society's most vulnerable women is far from unique to Vancouver. However, *Da Vinci's Inquest* engages with the particular social issues that arise from Vancouver's geography and history. The migration of aboriginal youth from the reserve to Vancouver, and commonly the Downtown Eastside, is explored in the first three episodes, "Little Sister" (1:1-3), where a tribal policeman comes to Vancouver to try and find his sister. The region's history of genocide and human rights abuses is evident in storylines involving pathologist Patricia Da Vinci, who sees parallels between historical genocide and the unnecessary tubal ligation (sterilisation) of aboriginal women by a white male doctor.

I see the location of the Downtown Eastside as central to the socio-specificity of *Da Vinci's Inquest*. The existence of this neighbourhood in a city with a glowing reputation for liveability is a contradiction at the heart of *Da Vinci's Inquest*. Haddock claims, "I wanted to make a true, adult series about the city I knew", as "a response to B.C.'s rampant tourism".²⁸ He elaborates: "Vancouver often gets portrayed internationally as a very pristine, lovely little white city. Well, that's not the city I know".²⁹ While the illegal trade and economic polarisation portrayed in *Da Vinci's Inquest* are also evident in cities around the world, the particular histories of the displacement of First Nations, Chinese immigration, the transition from a resource economy to a service economy, and urban revitalisation collide in Haddock's Downtown Eastside.

²⁸ Stephen Cole, "Vancouver Complication: TV auteur Chris Haddock returns with *Intelligence*" CBC Arts and Entertainment, October 10, 2006, <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/tv/haddock.html> (accessed March 8, 2011).

²⁹ Chris Haddock in "Behind the Scenes: Vancouver", YouTube file posted by DaVincisInquest on February 12, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oKJLwDncU8> (accessed March 8, 2011). This video is promotional material for the series posted on YouTube by American television company Programme Partners. It can also be found in "Extra Features" on Acorn Media's DVD box set of *Da Vinci's Inquest* Season Three.

It is notable that the Downtown Eastside is rarely referred to by its full name until the third series. At this stage, the writers refer to it more frequently within the programme and in extra-textual promotional material. For instance, on Haddock Entertainment's *Da Vinci Online*, the synopsis for "That's the Way the Story Goes" (3:1) reads, "Dominic 'tilts at windmills' while investigating a death on the streets of his beloved downtown Eastside".³⁰ The suggestion that the neighbourhood is beloved to the protagonist personifies it and frames the location as central to the series and the protagonist's behaviour. "That's the Way the Story Goes" is concerned with economic polarisation in the Eastside and the tensions that arise when expensive property developments exist alongside extreme poverty. A number of other episodes in the season mention the "downtown Eastside" in dialogue (and in online synopses) and feature storylines which engage with issues relevant to the DTES. "It's Backwards Day" (3:11) focuses on a doctor's son who has become a heroin addict and is living in the Downtown Eastside, frequently robbing a convenience store to fund his habit. "The Sparkle Tour" (3:12) implies police discrimination and mistreatment of a First Nations leader from the Downtown Eastside. Economic polarisation, addiction and institutional racism are all issues raised by *Da Vinci's Inquest* prior to this season, yet it is only now that they are explicitly connected to the named location. Viewers are invited to get to know Dominic's "beloved" neighbourhood and to engage with the issues with which he is concerned.

Season four continues to familiarise viewers with the Downtown Eastside and the issues that particularly affect its residents. "Oppenheimer

³⁰ "Episode #27 That's the Way the Story Goes", *Da Vinci's Inquest Online* (programme synopsis), http://www.davincisinquest.com/episodes_Da_Vinci's_Inquest.php?season=3&episodeNumber=27 (accessed 8 September, 2009).

Park” is a rare episode named for a Downtown Eastside location rather than a line of dialogue, and focuses on the mysterious death of an elderly woman living in the park toilets. “Pretend You Didn’t See Me” is concerned with a surveillance camera proposal in the DTES, as I will subsequently explore. Moreover, a tendency towards longer narrative arcs is evident from season four onwards, and one of these focuses on Kosmo’s investigation into violence against Downtown Eastside prostitutes. The references to the pig farm begin in season five, and this inferred conclusion to the case allows *Da Vinci’s Inquest*’s narrative to take a different direction: Kosmo becomes primarily occupied with investigating the death of a drug dealer in collaboration with her Eastside informant Sue. As the season progresses Sue implicates a corrupt policeman, Detective Brian Curtis, in this murder and more generally in the Eastside’s drug and vice trades. Curtis also begins to blackmail a city councillor whose support Dominic is relying on in the coroner’s campaign for a red light zone and a safe injection site.

In seasons six and seven of *Da Vinci’s Inquest* and in *Da Vinci’s City Hall*, the writers continue to explore the connection between Downtown Eastside issues and the complex politics of the wider city. From the outset, *Da Vinci’s Inquest* storylines regularly implicated the rest of Vancouver in the struggles of the Downtown Eastside. However, long story arcs increasingly replace the subtle connections and individual incidents of these early episodes. The more complex chains of events in later seasons imply endemic corruption throughout the city that impacts upon the Downtown Eastside. The programme evolves from a crime drama, predominantly focusing on police procedures, to a to a hybrid genre focusing on policing, politics, big business and power. Glen

Lowry suggests that the new focus is increasingly generic and relies “on its ability to reproduce American-style politics and political figures for a growing international audience”.³¹ Dominic’s interventions in the Downtown Eastside become more abstract and are dependent on trade-offs with politicians, developers and the Police Chief.

I agree to an extent with Lowry that in *Da Vinci’s City Hall* the protagonist is increasingly “removed from the city and the streets that gave him life”.³² However, the writers continue to make frequent references to the Eastside as Dominic, now Mayor of Vancouver, realises his ambition for a red light district to prevent harm to Downtown Eastside sex workers, and intervenes between police and the activist and/or homeless squatters of a vacant Downtown Eastside department store. Moreover, the evolving relationship of retired policeman Zack McNab with the neighbourhood fills the vacuum created by Dominic’s departure. Indeed, I would argue that as Dominic enters City Hall, despite Dominic’s physical distance from the neighbourhood, the programme becomes more dependent on the dramatisation of Downtown Eastside struggles, reworking historical incidents such as the Woodward’s squat and the opening of North America’s first safe injection site, and imagining potential solutions such as a red light district.

Surveillance of the Body and Body Politic

As a contemporary crime drama, *Da Vinci’s Inquest* showcases police surveillance techniques as a means of solving crime. However, the limitations and complexities of surveillance are also, on occasion, revealed. Several

³¹ Lowry, 265.

³² Lowry, 265.

episodes show officers positioned discreetly to monitor suspects, and a few episodes feature the use of wiretaps to gather evidence.³³ Writers reference surveillance and security camera footage on only a couple of occasions, notably in “Pretend You Didn’t See Me” where Dominic demonstrates his opposition to surveillance cameras in the Downtown Eastside. In one of only a few episodes that demonstrates the value of security cameras for providing evidence, the footage is not used to solve crimes but to undermine the power of senior police officers and expose their conflicts of interest. So, for instance, in “A Delicate Bloodbath” (7:11) Leo Shannon catches Police Chief Jacobs having an extra-marital affair with Sergeant Kurtz on hotel security footage. This contributes to the programme’s increasing exploration of misconduct within the police force, and foreshadows the themes of power struggles and internal surveillance within city institutions explored in *Da Vinci’s City Hall* (2005-2006) and *Intelligence* (2006-2007), the subsequent CBC series made by Haddock.

Pathologists and forensic investigators on *Da Vinci’s Inquest* use microscopes and x-rays to make visible parts of the body that are usually invisible, demonstrating the surveillance of the body by using technology that can monitor what the naked eye cannot. The focus on forensic science is not central to *Da Vinci’s Inquest* in the way that it is to U.S. contemporary, *CSI* (2000), which, according to Martha Gever, emphasises the necessity of visualising the body and the social body using digital devices in order to

³³ The use of wiretaps in this programme is minimal compared to U.S. show *The Wire* (2002-2008) with which comparisons might usefully be drawn. *Da Vinci’s Inquest* is less thematically structured than *The Wire*, although the two programmes are similarly interested in city institutions and the impact of municipal decision making upon social conditions and in turn, crime and policing. Both have a fairly bleak outlook on the influence of money and power in preventing significant change and social progress.

uncover the truth.³⁴ In keeping with Mary Jane Miller's description of CBC drama "at its most distinctive", and in contrast to *CSI*'s usual conclusive triumph of science and technology, *Da Vinci's Inquest* often takes "ambivalent moral stances; it challenges its audience with open or downbeat endings".³⁵ Even when science and technology provide missing information in *Da Vinci's Inquest*, this does not always lead to a conviction. The three-part storyline with which *Da Vinci's Inquest* made its debut is characteristic: when Sunny fails to find incriminating evidence in her comparison of the victims' stomach contents with a sample of food from the café of a suspected killer, Charlie Josephs, Patricia takes a second look through the microscope and finds a rare pathogen present in both. These are deaths that Patricia pronounced accidental on her initial examination. Before this evidence (and evidence from a surveillance team) can be used to convict the killer, he is found dead. It is implied that Goose Flowers, the brother of one of the victims, has taken action after Detective Leo Shannon, frustrated at the previous lack of evidence, identified the killer to Goose. Although Charlie is under surveillance by police, Goose has apparently avoided detection after Leo warned him Charlie was being monitored. Consequently, the text reveals that direct and technology-assisted surveillance are fallible and thoroughly reliant on human interpretation and intervention.

The aesthetics of *Da Vinci's Inquest* might be recognised as a type of televisual realism that reinforces the logic of surveillance footage as authentic. As John Hartley and John Fiske note in *Reading Television*, television realism

³⁴ Martha Gever, "The Spectacle of Crime, Digitized: *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and Social Anatomy" *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 8 (2005): 445.

³⁵ Miller, *Turn up the Contrast*, 386. For *CSI*'s triumph of science see: Elke Weissmann and Karen Boyle "Evidence of Things Unseen: The Pornographic Aesthetic and the Search for Truth in *CSI*" in *Reading CSI* ed. Michael Allen (New York: IB Tauris, 2007), 102; and Gever.

is a popular mode for crime drama. They describe how the credit sequence of *The Sweeney* uses

“grainy” still photographs denoting a Flying Squad car (which is an unmarked saloon) approaching the camera in a succession of closer shots...the realistic look of the stills refers us to the codes of surveillance photography (as used by the Flying Squad).³⁶

The Sweeney’s creators invoke a parallel between the policing activities depicted in the programme and the audience reception of the programme. Both look and learn by way of the camera, which enhances vision and creates a record of visual occurrences. Fiske and Hartley write that the credit sequence is a ritualised boundary, a convention that helps the audience to accept the realism of the programme. Ritualised boundaries such as credit sequence and filler shots are seen in *Da Vinci’s Inquest*, the style varying from season to season. In season three, a series of black and white, “grainy” shots establishes the location before a new scene begins. For instance, in the episode “That’s the Way the Story Goes”, we see images of the Downtown Eastside. These show buildings at different angles and street-level shots of a person sat on the sidewalk.

These filler shots connote authenticity through their low quality. As Bruzzi has observed, “[t]here is an inverse relationship between style and authenticity: the less polished a film, the more credible it will be found”.³⁷ The graininess of images suggests that the camera was small and unobtrusive and that it might have incidentally or accidentally captured an unstaged Downtown Eastside scene, as might surveillance or home-movie footage. Of course, *Da Vinci’s Inquest* stylises footage to suggest authenticity: the television-makers have likely selected the images carefully to set the scene and manipulated the

³⁶ John Hartley and John Fiske, *Reading Television* (London: Routledge, 1976), 160-170.

³⁷ Stella Bruzzi, *The New Documentary*, 9.

images post-production to achieve the grainy effect. In addition to the filler shots, grainy black and white images are also used in scenes where suspects are under interrogation in the homicide interview room. For instance in “Bang Like That” (2:11) Leo’s interviews with witnesses and suspects are partially represented in a grainy black and white image. The aesthetic suggests that these are the images captured by the interview room camera, lending an aspect of authenticity, when actually the camera captures the exchange between characters much more intimately and fluidly than a fixed surveillance camera.

A surveillance aesthetic is used to poignant effect in “Ugly Quick” (4:5) when Detective Mick Leary is investigated for the shooting of another officer and finds himself on the other side of the interview table with the camcorder focused closely on his face. The writers overturn the usual order of surveillance: in this instance the police officer faces the gaze of the camera, his actions under scrutiny. Mick is a sympathetic character: the audience is unlikely to blame him for an accidental shooting in a confusing and pressurised situation (and, moreover, it is later revealed that the officer Mick is suspected of shooting actually killed herself). In this situation, the surveillance technologies seem harsh and unnecessary, whereas in other episodes, when the audience identifies less with the suspect, the technologies seem justified. The placing of police under surveillance and on camera troubles audience understanding of who is deviant and who is exonerable, and prompts audiences to consider if the surveillance apparatus at the police station connotes culpability through its scrutinising gaze, even if the suspect turns out to be innocent.

Stylised filler and interview room images refer to the codes of surveillance and suggest a parallel between the cameras used in police work and television cameras. It is a convention that contributes to televisual realism but is entirely contrived. In contrast, the scenes of *Da Vinci's Inquest* that employ a direct cinema aesthetic are apparently filmed with minimal manipulation, thus occupying a different position on the spectrum of hybrid realisms or "the spectacle of the real", and making a more complex claim to reality. Although this is also a convention chosen to convey authenticity, it is achieved through lack of stylisation and potentially reveals unstaged, unintentional actions, thus functioning as a form of surveillance in contrast to stylised footage that merely invokes surveillance. The episode "Pretend You Didn't See Me" is particularly distinctive for its use of direct cinema aesthetics and thematic interest in surveillance, and thus allows for analysis of how the two intersect.

"Pretend You Didn't See Me"

"Pretend You Didn't See Me" is the eleventh episode of season four and is directed by Haddock.³⁸ In many ways, the episode is atypical of *Da Vinci's Inquest*, yet it references recurring themes crucial to the series as a whole and develops a direct cinema style of filming the Downtown Eastside that is only present elsewhere in brief scenes. "Pretend" is one of only two episodes filmed

³⁸ More than twenty directors have worked on *Da Vinci's Inquest*, with Stephen Surjik the most regular contributor having directed ten episodes. Chris Haddock has directed eight, and Anne Wheeler, a Vancouver filmmaker, directed seven (including the debut trilogy). Local filmmakers Mina Shum and Lynne Stopkewich guest direct an episode each, and *Da Vinci's Inquest* actors Nicholas Campbell, Mick Leary, and Donnelly Rhodes, have directed four, two and one episode respectively.

entirely in the Downtown Eastside area, although the location is not named.³⁹

Over half of the episode takes place on and around the Hastings and Main intersection in the heart of the Downtown Eastside. The remaining scenes occur in an apartment building near to Port Metro Vancouver. Each location is shot in distinctive styles. The diverse visual strategies used in these locations intersect with characters' conversations about scopic regimes: in the street scenes the characters discuss surveillance; in the apartment scenes there is a thematic concern with voyeurism and racial (in)visibility.

In "Pretend", Dominic is in the Downtown Eastside to find a woman named Rita Samuels because her brother has died and he wants to be the first to inform her. In the course of the episode he never finds her, although he only ever seems to be one step behind. The plot revolves around Rita, yet she is completely invisible. Dominic, in contrast, is highly visible as the coroner and as a bearer of bad news. Hoping to prevent Rita from anticipating his sad tidings before he can speak to her personally, he tells Jackie, a mutual acquaintance of Dominic and Rita's, to "pretend you didn't see me", should she run into Rita. Dominic's pursuit of Rita is interrupted by a call to attend a death in a nearby apartment complex. A young, black man is dead having apparently fallen or jumped from the roof, and it emerges that the victim is Alexander Winchester, an illegal immigrant living with his brother John and using John's name to work and acquire medication for schizophrenia. Dominic assesses the scene of death before Leo and Mick arrive and try to ascertain the events that led to Alexander's death.

³⁹ My definition of the Downtown Eastside is the wider City of Vancouver definition that includes Gastown.

“Pretend” takes place on one day and starts and ends at the Ovaltine Café. Leo and Mick eat breakfast there and return with Dominic at the end of the episode, fictionally several hours later (Dominic exclaims, “I haven’t eaten all day!”) The episode thus focuses on a relatively short period of time in contrast to the majority of other episodes that represent the action of several days. Moreover, the episode is unusual in that there is minimal parallel editing: for the most part, we accompany Dominic on his morning at work rather than seeing multiple parties (coroner, detectives, pathologists) playing their respective roles in an investigation, as is typical of the series. We only leave Dominic halfway through the episode when Mick and Leo arrive and start their own investigations, and even then they are all working in the same apartment complex together until Leo and Mick visit a restaurant in nearby Gastown, reconvening with Dominic on Hastings Street shortly after. In focusing on a short period of time and reducing parallel action, Haddock plays with the conventions of his own programme, which typically makes more temporal and spatial leaps within the course of an episode. The simplicity of this episode’s form allows for detailed debate about surveillance – an issue relevant to the fictional location and its non-fiction referent – and permits a more comprehensive visual representation of the geographical location.

The opening shot is over nine minutes long and the camera appears to be handheld. The lack of editing requires that the camera spin rapidly when the focus of action moves abruptly. This creates a sense of immediacy and authenticity, as though the camera is moving with the action, rather than the action occurring for the camera. Typically of *Da Vinci’s Inquest*, the location is marked for local viewers as East Hastings Street by the bold signage of the

Savoy Pub and the neon façade of the Ovaltine Cafe. Noises of cars driving through puddles, sounding horns, a car alarm, and the falling rain are audible almost to the point of distraction, and this too is characteristic of the series' outdoor scenes, especially those shot in the Downtown Eastside. The streets are busy despite the rain and people stand around chatting, smoking, and eating. Adding to the direct cinema effect is Leo and Mick's rather banal conversation about what they ate for lunch and the resultant hot sauce stain on Leo's shirt. The conversation has the feel of improvised dialogue, and fans have speculated that this is a regular feature of *Da Vinci's Inquest*: the occasional hesitations and repetitions in this episode suggest this might be the case. Alternatively, it might signal that the writers and actors are working hard to achieve the effect of natural conversation.⁴⁰ An indication that these conversations are at least loosely scripted is the tendency for the dialogue to serve a purpose. Even Leo's concerns about having to iron another shirt update a long-running story arc about the deterioration of his wife Lana as a result of Alzheimer's disease.

The direct cinema style used for the lengthy street scenes of "Pretend" (and shorter Downtown Eastside scenes in other episodes) has a generic antecedent in the 1960s series *Wojeck*. Mary Jane Miller describes *Wojeck*'s aesthetic as reminiscent of direct cinema and *Da Vinci's Inquest* bears many of the same hallmarks:

The NFB style of "direct cinema" used by the *Wojeck* crew, whose experience was in documentaries and news, was the antithesis of the slick, hard-edged look that Nelson rightly associates with most filmed Hollywood copshows though the direct-cinema style was rediscovered by the producers of *Hill Street Blues*.

⁴⁰ The realism of street scenes and dialogue is fairly typical of the programme and the question of whether actors improvise or whether it is an effect – in other words they "went to a lot of trouble to make it look unrehearsed" – is discussed by fans: savas-3, comment on "Did they improvise a lot?" Internet Movie Database, comment posted 11 March, 2007, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0156442/board/thread/68986003> (accessed 12 August, 2009).

Miller suggests that direct cinema “tends to focus on unknown or forgotten people in a more personal treatment of subject matter” and the focus on the marginalisation of Downtown Eastside residents and an illegal immigrant in “Pretend” demonstrates an ethos in keeping with that of direct cinema.⁴¹ Miller lists the use of “hand-held cameras, awkward framing, ragged editing rhythms, harsh lighting and imperfect sound, grainy film stock, and sometimes a sense of improvisation in dialogue” as characteristic of direct cinema. “Pretend” uses all of these elements and connotes authenticity in that there is minimal intervention – less scripting, editing and manipulation of sound and light than usual.

Crucially, Miller notes that direct cinema “typically shows the filming process within the film itself”. It was in this respect that Canadian direct cinema differed from Canadian Candid Eye cinema and American direct cinema, which aimed to use handheld cameras and synchronised sound to “record life as it happens”.⁴² By implicating themselves in the images they produce – by mixing fiction with documentary conventions, for instance, or revealing the microphone onscreen – direct cinema filmmakers make sure that viewers know that this is not life as it happened, but a mediated representation. Miller does not mention if or how *Wojeck* showed the filming process, but it might be argued that the hybrid of direct cinema with televisual drama in itself draws attention to the filming process, by confounding the expectations of viewers used to the conventions of televisual realism. In *Da Vinci's Inquest*,

⁴¹ Miller, *Turn up the Contrast*, 48.

⁴² Wolf Koenig, “A Note on Candid Eye” in the booklet accompanying DVD box set *Michel Brault: Oeuvres 1958-1974* (Canada: National Film Board, 2005), 15-22.

this might also be the case, particularly since the direct cinema style is used only occasionally.

Additionally, I suggest the number of people who look directly at the camera in “Pretend” reveals the camera’s presence and draws attention to the filming process in a manner comparable with direct cinema. Although these instances are potentially an incidental by-product of taking a film crew into a busy location, they might be read as self-reflexive moments in *Da Vinci’s Inquest*. The stares of the individuals, potentially non-actors reacting to the presence of the camera or employed extras asked to look at the camera, effects a confrontation with the television audience. Their comfortable one-way perspective on the Downtown Eastside is disrupted and the viewer may become self-conscious at his or her fascination with these streets and their inhabitants. The stares of passers-by prompt viewers to wonder if these people are acting, and if not, if they mind the seasonal surveillance of the *Da Vinci’s Inquest* cameras. The hybrid realism of this scene is achieved by placing actors in what appears to be an unstaged street scene – the reverse of many reality-based formats where “real” people are placed in staged scenarios. The sheer volume of people and traffic suggests that this is a “real” image of the Downtown Eastside and its residents, although arguably the very presence of the actors and the camera, which the direct cinema aesthetic draws attention to, automatically mediates reality into a representation.⁴³

The conversation between Mick, Leo and Dominic subsequently turns to the issue of surveillance after Dominic berates a councillor who “is in charge

⁴³ The Canadian tradition of direct cinema is characterised by the filmmaker accepting “that the presence of crew and equipment must effect the reality being filmed, and the film is a record of this intervention in the way things are”. Giannetti and Leach, 318.

of putting in the new surveillance cameras down here”.⁴⁴ As Mick, Leo and Dominic start to discuss this plan, the camera rotates around the three of them. It is positioned at roughly the same level as the characters’ faces, showing the heads, shoulders and chests of the three men from outside their small circle, so that periodically one of the characters is excluded from the frame or shown from the back. The camera is *outside, looking in*. This manner of filming has been used before in *Da Vinci’s Inquest*: for instance, just a few episodes prior when Kosmo talks to Rae, a prostitute and informer, on the streets of the Downtown Eastside in “Shoulda Been a Priest”. In “Pretend”, the effect of the rotating camera intersects with the subject matter. It might be read as symbolic of Dominic’s concerns about the invasion of privacy that occurs through use of surveillance cameras. The over-the-shoulder shot puts the viewer in the same position as someone watching surveillance camera footage, uninvolved in a situation but able to observe it from outside.

The constant rotation of the camera also enacts encirclement and is suggestive of the three hundred and sixty degree enclosure of Panoptic architecture. Of course, Panoptic surveillance emanates from the centre in its most literal manifestation, but if we are to take Foucault’s suggestion that Panoptic society describes the more general proliferation of surveillance as a means of discipline, it is instructive in the analysis of this scene. Foucault writes that “discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions”.⁴⁵ Mick,

⁴⁴ The airing of this episode coincided with the ongoing dispute over a proposal for twenty-three fixed and two mobile surveillance cameras in the neighbourhood that I refer to in my introductory chapter.

⁴⁵ Foucault, 219.

Leo and Dominic's encirclement can be read as symbolic of the restricted movement and the positioning of bodies in space that occurs as a result of surveillance as a disciplinary strategy. Of course, here we see the bodies of the police and coroner who are encircled by the camera, although the conversation concerns the surveillance of marginalised residents. The camerawork might, then, be symptomatic of *Da Vinci's Inquest's* interest in turning the gaze onto the authorities, as the series often investigates the implication of police or political figures in crimes and emphasises the pressure on the detectives and Dominic to meet the demands of their supervisors. Although less subject to control than marginalised populations, Leo, Dominic and Mick are also subject to disciplinary measures.

The idea that a television camera replicates surveillance strategies raises questions about the effect of *Da Vinci's Inquest* film production in the Downtown Eastside. Do these cameras similarly invade the privacy of residents by creating visual data of their lives that they might not want to be seen? Dominic notes his concern for heroin addicts whose safe places to inject are limited enough without the fear of being captured on surveillance camera, and the same might be said of television cameras. Kim Elliot notes the contradiction of "progressive representations of marginalized people that nevertheless exploit people in the process of filming", and cites a DTES resident's perspective on the film and television industry: "It's big money for the city of Vancouver. It's big money for everyone except the marginalized...But they get some of the handouts".⁴⁶ The disproportionate benefits and inconveniences of the filming process are evident. While media

⁴⁶ Elliot, 28.

reports suggest that the filming of *Da Vinci's Inquest* is something exciting to witness, and that Nicholas Campbell, the actor who plays Dominic, has become a familiar and well-loved face in the Downtown Eastside, the probability that television crews disrupt Downtown Eastside residents' day-to-day existence is less well publicised.⁴⁷

Dominic notes that the Downtown Eastside is being singled out for surveillance, thus highlighting the inequality of visibility. The character's criticism might ironically extend to *Da Vinci's Inquest* which uses many locations other than the Downtown Eastside, but none as much as the Downtown Eastside. Dominic implies that the city would not attempt to install surveillance cameras in any other neighbourhood because the residents would object. Similarly, the poet Shannon Stewart, whose poem *Inquest* reflects upon her husband's research as art director for *Da Vinci's Inquest*, taking photographs of DTES rooms he enters with the police, implies that people like herself – comfortably middle-class, one presumes, in contrast to people in low-income accommodation – have the opportunity to “hide the clutter” when they are photographed.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, her husband is complicit in police checks on single room occupancies that invade resident privacy.⁴⁹ The process of representing the Downtown Eastside, even in fiction, is intrinsically connected

⁴⁷ Dana Gee, “Downtown Eastside loves its hero” *The Province* March 1, 2007, <http://www.canada.com/theprovince/news/sports/story.html?id=f41812d9-69dd-4f4a-bbf3-52a8bcbad280> (accessed March 1, 2011).

⁴⁸ “You think of him / standing in doorways, / the flash of his camera / making bright instants / of mugs, cans and boxes. / You think of your own / rooms, the time you take / to hide the clutter”. Shannon Stewart, *Penny Dreadfuls* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2008), 66. See also Patty Jones, “Shannon Stewart faces the dreadful with sly humour” *Georgia Straight* October 16, 2008, <http://www.straight.com/article-166079/shannon-stewart> (accessed May 15, 2011).

⁴⁹ “Lawyer Laura Track, who is Pivot's lead person on housing issues, pointed to a city bylaw that calls for operators to conduct room checks every 24 hours. Police officers may ask to be appointed a hotel's ‘agent’ to do room checks, if staff is unavailable to make the necessary visits”. Mike Howell, “Downtown Dives get a make-over” *Vancouver Courier* Friday, March 27, 2009 <http://www2.canada.com/vancouvercourier/news/story.html?id=7b0eb9a0-09ea-464a-ae73-acad52240721> (accessed September 14, 2009).

to police surveillance. Stewart's poem is thus an interesting reflection on the role of all those involved in producing and watching *Da Vinci's Inquest* who, consciously or not, contribute to an inequality of visibility by regularly scrutinising the Downtown Eastside and endorsing the invasive procedures of the police and art director. We might read a parallel between surveillance cameras, the art director's camera, and the television cameras that all invade the privacy of residents.

As I explored through *Story House* and *Blood Sports*, there are advantages and disadvantages to visibility, and the media attention and surveillance that create visibility. The Janus-faced nature of visibility is also evident in *Da Vinci's Inquest*. Representation is often linked with making the marginal visible, and in recent cultural theory representation has been implicitly linked to power.⁵⁰ Canada's National Film Board and the CBC have encouraged an ideology of visibility as democratic and have aimed to represent as many diverse Canadian experiences as possible. However, increased visibility can also bring unwanted attention: the social control that is implied by surveillance. As Foucault noted in his discussion of Panoptical surveillance, "visibility is a trap".⁵¹ Drawing on Foucault, Peggy Phelan argues that "In framing more and more images of the hitherto under-represented other, contemporary culture finds a way to name, and thus to arrest and fix, the image

⁵⁰ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1. Although Phelan was responding to the particular methods of identity politics in the 1980s and early 90s, the continued relevance of Phelan's observations, and their particular applicability to the Downtown Eastside, is demonstrated by citations in Jennifer England, "Disciplining Subjectivity and Space: Representation, Film and its Material Effects" *Antipode* 36, no. 2 (2004), 314 and Claudette Lauzon, "What the Body Remembers: Rebecca Belmore's Memorial to Missing Women", in *Precarious Visualities: New Perspectives on Identification in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture* eds. Oliver Asselin, Johanne Lamoureux and Christine Ross (Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press, 2008), 160. Both England and Lauzon are keen to stress that visibility does not necessarily equal power, and that excess or overexposure of minorities in visual culture might encourage an objectifying gaze.

⁵¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 200.

of that other”.⁵² The plethora of images of the Downtown Eastside in the media in recent years might be seen as an example of Phelan’s claim. The presence of a population with a concentration of Othered people – the poor, elderly, racial minorities, mentally ill, drug addicted – is feared by the “normative” majority in Vancouver. The media overexposure of the Downtown Eastside represents an attempt to contain the Other.

Academics studying representations of the Downtown Eastside have noted that some of the neighbourhood’s most marginalised groups experience both visibility and invisibility negatively. Jennifer England identifies a “trope of visibility/invisibility” in the experiences of aboriginal women living in the Downtown Eastside who feel inadequately represented, “invisible” in media representations but “hypervisible” to police who harass them on the basis of stereotyped assumptions that they are participating in illegal activities.⁵³ Dara Culhane and Leslie A. Robertson’s volume of narratives by Downtown Eastside women highlights a similar paradox. “Laurie” explains why she chose the title “Hiding in Plain Sight” for her narrative:

“Hiding in Plain Sight” is an excellent title. See, the buses come and go down here, and you see people looking. But they don’t see nothing. All they see is the dope. People can hide in plain sight: they can be about this far away from you. Like when they put that new sci-fi movie on TV, *The Invisible Man* – the thing is, these people they’re invisible to society. Everybody looks for one thing and that’s the dope. Not the people – the dope. They look at you but they’re not looking at you, they’re looking through you.⁵⁴

Media representations of the Downtown Eastside such as *Da Vinci’s Inquest* increase the representation of a marginalised community. However, as

⁵² Phelan, 2.

⁵³ Jennifer England, “Representation and the Production of Space: Aboriginal Women in the Downtown Eastside”, (Master’s Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2000), 118-119.

⁵⁴ Leslie A. Robertson and Dara Culhane, eds. *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2005), 60.

storylines frequently feature characters involved in the drug or sex trades they run the risk of reinforcing stereotypes which contribute to negative experiences of visibility and surveillance.

“Pretend” does not feature characters involved in either the sex or drug trade and thus potentially helps overturn stereotypes about the Downtown Eastside. Moreover, the storylines reflexively deal with issues of visibility. The elusiveness of Rita, whom Dominic seeks throughout the episode, is symbolic of the invisibility of many people in the Downtown Eastside to those in the outside world. Dominic’s criticism of the imposition of surveillance cameras on the Downtown Eastside illustrates a similar point: “It’s the same old story down here, these people don’t count, their vote doesn’t matter, it’s just a transient neighbourhood and it’s the same old assumptions all over”. The implication is that when their rights as citizens are at stake, people “down here” are invisible.⁵⁵ The phrase “down here”, which is used as a substitute for the name of the Downtown Eastside throughout the episode, suggests a place below the line of vision, out of sight. Haddock’s decision to leave it unnamed in this episode also suggests invisibility.

The use of a direct camera aesthetic combined with the discussion of surveillance draws attention to the paradoxes of visibility and challenges the reliability of images. Dominic suggests that surveillance is “not about truth. It’s about the illusion of truth. You get your picture or your sound. You watch the news, you know that much”. Dominic’s comment suggests that recorded images and audio create an illusion of reality rather than a reliable

⁵⁵ The phrase “down here” is often used colloquially to refer to the Downtown Eastside. Also, *Down Here* is the title of a documentary film about the neighbourhood and local poet Bud Osborn (who also has a poem called “Down Here”). *Down Here* dir. Veronica Alice Mannix (Canada: Eldorado Films, 1997) Google video file, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5431406369864929816> (accessed June 4, 2011).

representation, whether they are recorded for surveillance purposes or for the television news. Moreover, as Dominic questions both surveillance images and media representations of the neighbourhood, one might extend this logic to the images created by *Da Vinci's Inquest* cameras and read this as an indication of self-reflexivity. This intersection of dialogue and aesthetic invokes the direct cinema principle explained by Michel Brault, as quoted in my epigraph: "We can't think we're creating truth with a camera. But what we can do is reveal something to viewers that allows them to discover their own truth".⁵⁶ Brault's suggestion requires that viewers accept their interpretation of direct cinema as their own truth(s) rather than an objective reality. However, Dominic fears that police watching surveillance camera footage will be fooled by the illusion of truth and treat images as objective evidence. His dialogue serves as a warning to viewers of *Da Vinci's Inquest* to be wary of recognising the apparent authenticity of its images as truth.

While Dominic is right to suggest that people lose their opportunity to explain their actions if filmed by surveillance cameras rather than attracting the attention of a police officer on the street, he neglects to question whether direct confrontation between officers and citizens necessarily leads to a true outcome. Since the *Da Vinci's Inquest* creators suggest elsewhere in the series that the coroner was once an undercover police officer, it is evident that he is not against surveillance per se but specifically the "remote policing" of cameras. He assumes that an investigator can understand an incident by "looking at the situation, eye to eye with the guy on the street". This fails to acknowledge that even though the police officer is directly present his behaviour may be shaped

⁵⁶ Brault.

by pre-existing judgements. An individual arguably only *knows* reality through one's own mediated perspective: "Just as surely as representational technologies – the camera, the canvas, the theatrical frame, language itself – order visual apprehension to accord it with a (constructed) notion of the real so too do human eyes".⁵⁷ In *Da Vinci's Inquest*, police officers often refer back to their notes in order to verify a situation, demonstrating that early methods of surveillance described by Foucault are still very much in use.⁵⁸ These notes are just as subject to interpretation and potentially just as likely to misrepresent a situation as any surveillance camera images that might supplement them. Similarly, when Amanda, a police constable who challenges Dominic's views on surveillance cameras, points out that Dominic takes photographs at the scene of death "because you can't trust your memory to tell the truth", she fails to consider that although the photographs might record something Dominic initially ignored, they are more than likely to replicate his existing perspective.

This use of dialogue between two characters as a means of presenting two sides of a debate is typical of Haddock and his *Da Vinci's Inquest* co-writers. Amanda is a one-off antagonist for Dominic; he is more regularly paired with traffic detective Zack McNab, who argues with him about everything from fishing (later in this episode) to the assessment of crime scenes, to wider issues of public health and law enforcement such as the merits of safe injection sites (in "It's Backwards Day"). This technique seems to be a rather obvious and sometimes pedagogical method of representing multiple

⁵⁷ Phelan, 14.

⁵⁸ Foucault describes the organisation of the eighteenth-century Paris police. Surveillance functioned via "thousands of eyes everywhere", including those of police officers, observers, secret agents, informers and prostitutes, whose observations were recorded in "series of reports and registers; throughout the eighteenth century, an immense police text increasingly covered society by means of a complex documentary organisation" Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 214. In the contemporary era one might consider the expansion of an even more immense digital police text.

perspectives on an issue and avoiding the appearance of an absolute position.⁵⁹

In presenting multiple perspectives, *Da Vinci's Inquest* is reflexive about its own role in shaping opinions. Audiences are presented with arguments but also encouraged to join in the debate. Inevitably, perhaps, Dominic's arguments automatically gain more credence. In spite of, or perhaps because of, his personality flaws (impetuosity, a weakness for women and alcohol, a tendency to hold grudges, an attraction to power) he remains a strong central figure and sympathetic protagonist. His arguments are often emotional and include badly expressed ideas or leaps in logic, yet this emphasises the humanity and realism of the character rather than detracting from his opinions.

Representation of Dominic's physical presence in the Downtown Eastside also builds his credibility in matters relevant to that community. He is the only character shown to know and to be known in the community among people who are not offenders, snitches or victims but activists, support workers or ordinary people trying to get by. He is thus connected to this place through his associations. In "Pretend", Dominic is in the Eastside to deliver some bad news to Rita Samuels, a woman who never appears on screen. Nonetheless, the search for Rita motivates Dominic's tour through the Downtown Eastside, from the Ovaltine Café to the Carnegie Centre, to a nearby hotel, towards Pigeon Park, and almost down an alleyway when a page calling him to another scene of death takes him away from the task. Although the Downtown Eastside

⁵⁹ In the CTV movie *The Life*, written by *Da Vinci's Inquest* collaborators Chris Haddock and Alan Di Fiore, the tactic of using dialogue between characters to explore debates about representation of the Downtown Eastside is employed even more frequently. The protagonists, two police officers working in the DTES, argue about the morality and practicality of filming neighbourhood drug users to show to school children as a deterrent. Arguments that have been associated with documentary filmmaking and with using cameras in policework, ever since Jacob Riis accompanied police on visits to tenements, are exchanged by the characters: the advantages and disadvantages of visibility, of giving voice, of exploiting the subject's pain, of getting consent. Lynne Stopkewich, dir, *The Life*, DVD, (Canada: CTV, 2004).

remains unmentioned, these landmark locations act as signposts in the dialogue, reference points for those familiar with the city or for fans that have subsequently come to explore. The invisibility of Rita and the writers' decision not to include detailed information about this character facilitates the visibility of the location. The search for Rita becomes a guided tour of the DTES with Dominic as tour guide.

Along the way Jackie, a character new to viewers but familiar with Dominic, joins him. Dominic learns from Jackie that he has just missed Rita and the two of them set off to try and catch her up. They chat about Jackie's progress on "the programme", which based on previous *Da Vinci's Inquest* references to "the programme" (for instance by Kosmo, addressing Sue, in "Shoulda Been a Priest"), leads one to assume it is a methadone programme. *Da Vinci's Inquest* writers also take a second opportunity to mention the possibility of a pilot safe injection site, which Jackie thinks will be well used. Dominic then seeks Jackie's opinion on the prospect of surveillance cameras "down here". She jokes "I don't care as long as I look good", once again emphasising the relationship between television cameras and surveillance and implying that cameras only reveal appearances rather than substance. There is also a hint that, as Dominic subsequently suggests to Amanda, people change their behaviour for the cameras. If one can make oneself "look good" on camera – and we might consider "good" as meaning honest as well as attractive – one can mask illegitimate behaviour.

Jackie then suggests that the cameras are part of a "big money conspiracy to chase us out from down here and turn this into some Las Vegas

of the north”.⁶⁰ Las Vegas is widely recognised as a city developed with the express intention of appealing to tourists. The implication of Jackie’s comments is that surveillance cameras can be employed as a tool of spatial exclusion, ridding urban space of residents like Jackie in order to make room for tourists, transforming the DTES from a home into a destination, from a lived reality to a simulation. With its imitation Eiffel Tower and Caesar’s Palace, Las Vegas is the ultimate example of superficiality for Jean Baudrillard: an “absolute advertising city”.⁶¹ Yet it might be remembered that while Dominic and Jackie are critical of a potential Las Vegas-ification of the Downtown Eastside, *Da Vinci’s Inquest* is simultaneously implicated in transforming the Downtown Eastside into an attraction, effectively advertising its own sin city image to an international audience, to the extent that tourist guide *Lonely Planet* suggests visitors should try to catch the filming of *Da Vinci’s Inquest* in Downtown Eastside alleyways between June and November.⁶²

In response to Jackie’s suggestion of a conspiracy, Dominic claims, “Jeez, I’ve been saying that for damn years”. Jackie replies, “Yeah? Maybe

⁶⁰ Her comment harks back to the opening scene of the first episode of *Da Vinci’s Inquest*, where Da Vinci criticises the fact that “they” (presumably the city and developers) want to build a casino and a new cruise ship terminal adjacent to the port (and the Downtown Eastside), despite the increasing numbers of bodies washing up in that location. Da Vinci tells Winston, “Vegas is coming to you”. In *Da Vinci’s City Hall*, Da Vinci’s earlier disapproval of plans for a casino and cruise ship terminal is put to the test as he negotiates with developers in order to gain support for his red light zone and to keep Hastings Racetrack open. The television programme fictionalised a developer’s attempt to build a casino on Vancouver’s waterfront, a proposal that was eventually rejected as a result of public opposition. More recently, Vancouver council rejected a second, similar proposal: Jeff Lee, “Vancouver council unanimously reject \$500 million dollar casino expansion” *Vancouver Sun* April 20, 2011, <http://www.vancouversun.com/health/Vancouver+council+unanimously+rejects+million+casino+expansion/4642576/story.html> (accessed May 15, 2011). The coalition of individuals and organisations opposing the casino called themselves “Vancouver not Vegas”, <http://vancouvernotvegas.ca/> (accessed May 15, 2011).

⁶¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 91.

⁶² Karla Zimmerman, *Lonely Planet Vancouver: City Guide* (London: Lonely Planet Publications, 2005), 21.

that's where I heard it". This light-hearted exchange highlights one of *Da Vinci's Inquest's* key representational strategies. I have noted that the character of Dominic is woven into the representation of the Downtown Eastside community by references to the people he knows in the neighbourhood. Yet it is rare for *Da Vinci's Inquest* writers to include characters that speak as representative residents of the Eastside community. Instead, Dominic is identified as "a hell of an advocate for the Downtown Eastside", as lawyer Richard Norton suggests in "Ride a Crippled Horse" (7:10). On the rare occasion that an Eastside resident features unconnected with any crime, as Jackie does in "Pretend", their views are shown to be complementary, if not parallel, to Dominic's. In subsequent seasons, there is a notable shift in Dominic's relationship to the neighbourhood and social causes associated with it. For instance, his involvement with the safe injection site becomes more pronounced. In "Pretend", both Mick and Jackie ask him about the injection site, implying his involvement in its initiation; in season seven Dominic is shown to be the principal force behind the plan's realisation and continuation.

Season seven also shows the increasing complexity of Dominic's relationship with the people for whom he professes to fight. "A Delicate Bloodbath" (7:11) is also directed by Chris Haddock and is the episode after Dominic has been called "a hell of an advocate for the Downtown Eastside". Dominic is persuaded to run for Mayor by two different political parties and Chief Coroner Bob Kelly. As he begins to strategise with Kelly, he is pointedly shown to ignore a panhandler. Moreover, this episode sees the return of Jackie, who is now a "squeegee kid", washing windows and asking for money at the traffic lights. She argues with Dominic about a new law against "aggressive

panhandling”, accuses him of sitting on the fence, and runs off with his wallet. A later scene reconciles Dominic with Jackie (and symbolically with the people of the Eastside) and is clearly orchestrated to justify Dominic’s Mayoral candidacy. Jackie and Dominic agree that the aggressive panhandling law is “bull crap” and she tells him “You’re the only person I know that can do something about shit like this”. He denies that he can, although he agrees to make some calls. The programme implies that as Mayor, Dominic could “do something”. In an interview about *Da Vinci’s City Hall*, Haddock describes how Dominic has railed at the political system from the outside for long enough, and decides he needs access to the halls of power to make the social changes he wants.⁶³ While this narrative of “taking responsibility and stepping into political action” is inspiring, it is also problematic in that it emphasises that only a sympathetic outsider in a position of power can help the Eastside. Although the television series is fictional, it threatens to mask the achievements of grassroots activism and resident political leaders in the historical Downtown Eastside, particularly since 1973. Inevitably, visibility of the Downtown Eastside is limited to its assistance in telling the story of Dominic Da Vinci.

“Pretend” features a second narrative strand that continues the exploration of in/visibility in the Downtown Eastside. Following the nine-minute opening shot where Dominic searches for Rita along Main and Hastings, talking to his colleagues and Jackie along the way, the episode finally cuts to a new location, an apartment complex where a man has died after falling or jumping from the roof. At this stage the aesthetic becomes more

⁶³ Gee.

conventional and fewer qualities of direct cinema are evident. The long take of the previous scene is replaced by continuity editing in this second narrative strand, although handheld camerawork and diegetic sound remain. Indeed, music that appeared to be non-diegetic at the end of the last scene is shown to be part of this scene: a stereo playing loudly in the apartment of the deceased. Haddock uses long shots, medium shots and close-ups from a number of perspectives to represent the dead body, the layout of the apartment complex, and the police officers and residents present. He and his editors employ eyeline matching: one camera shows Dominic looking at something, and a second camera shows what he is looking at. In one instance, as Dominic looks up towards the third floor of the complex, the eyeline match is followed by a shot of a resident watching Dominic and then looking up to see what the coroner is looking at, followed by an overhead shot of two other witnesses being interviewed by a police officer, with Dominic looking at the body below. The overall effect is that attention is drawn to the process of looking and seeing. Continuity editing symbolises the logic of human curiosity: if one person looks, others follow their glance.

The location also contributes to the emphasis on looking and seeing. At this point the apartment complex is uncontextualised within the rest of Vancouver with a focus on the interior courtyard, surrounded by transparent balconies on which a number of residents stand, observing the police, coroner and corpse. With dramatic music echoing throughout the complex, it is evocative of an amphitheatre or as Dominic suggests, “the coliseum”. This reference to the Pacific Coliseum, former home of the Vancouver Canucks hockey team, will be recognised by local viewers, while international

awareness of the Roman coliseum means that the dialogue nonetheless holds meaning for distant viewers. He comments that residents “got the good seats, they’re not gonna give them up”, criticising the residents’ blatant voyeurism and asking a woman to take her child inside before he uncovers the body. However, a number of lingering overhead shots of the corpse seem to highlight the fact that *Da Vinci’s Inquest* habitually reveals dead bodies and that this is part of the programme’s appeal. The architectural setting, the stylistic emphasis on looking, and Dominic’s disapproval of the “looky loos” on the balconies can be read as a reflexive comment on the viewer voyeurism that *Da Vinci’s Inquest* depends on: looky loo is a slang term sometimes used to describe people who hold up traffic by slowing down to look at an accident. The recent coining of the phrase “car crash TV” for compulsive but painful viewing reiterates the parallel between watching traumatic events directly and on television.

The exterior location of the apartment complex is subsequently established as near to Vancouver’s port and thus only blocks away from the Main and Hastings intersection where the previous scene took place. Mick interviews one resident on the rooftop patio of the three-story complex and the port’s cranes are seen in the near background. Vancouver’s Harbour Tower is also visible in a long shot from another perspective. In other episodes of *Da Vinci’s Inquest*, establishing shots of the city are often part of the continuity editing, or interspersed between scenes for aesthetic effect and, no doubt, to fill time. In later seasons stylised filler shots are infrequent. Once the programme establishes a loyal audience, and as storylines become more complex, there is arguably less need and less time for establishing or filler shots. In “Pretend”,

the background of the port and Harbour Tower, as the camera follows Mick moving towards and away from the witness, is the closest we get to an establishing shot, but adequately functions as a reminder to viewers of the Vancouver setting and of one of the city's defining features, the port.

Arguably, the portside/Eastside location is irrelevant in this plotline, as most scenes take place within the complex. However, the apartment complex is a striking juxtaposition to the busy streets of the previous scene and might be read as a comment on different modes of urban life. The compact but pleasant, light apartments of the complex, with landscaped courtyard and rooftop patio appear favourable in contrast to the dingy hotels represented in other episodes set in the DTES. However, the isolation of the residents, who know little about one another but for culinary smells and foreign accents, forms a less desirable contrast with the initial scene of "Pretend", where Dominic's search for Rita through the streets of the DTES, facilitated by the helpful people he comes across, suggests a friendly and integrated community.

Both the programme and my reading of it risk romanticising community and street life in the Downtown Eastside. Yet there is an undeniable contrast between the neighbourliness of the two locations. The isolation of residents in the apartment complex might be related to the glass architecture, echoing my reading of *Story House*. The glass balconies, large windows, and central courtyard of the apartment complex enable everyone to look at each other but interaction remains minimal, a potential consequence of glass architecture that I described with reference to Sennett and Baudrillard in my previous chapter. The apartment complex might have been designed, like the Pompidou Centre, as a "space of deterrence, articulated on the ideology of

visibility, of transparency, of polyvalency, of consensus and contact, and sanctioned by the blackmail to security” but it results in “total disconnection”.⁶⁴ Architecture, like surveillance cameras, is liable to cause exclusion in the urban environment by increasing visibility, instead of encouraging interaction.

Questions of visibility also relate to the identity of the man, Alexander Winchester, who jumped, fell, or was pushed from the apartment complex roof. He is an illegal immigrant from Jamaica, forced to share his brother’s apartment and identity and strive for invisibility so that he does not attract the attention of the authorities. The colour of his skin results in a paradoxical in/visibility as he is recognised by one of his neighbours as “that black”, yet simultaneously remains invisible and without value to her to the extent that, when she sees him fall from the roof, she does not call the emergency services. There is a parallel here between racial invisibility/hypervisibility and the similar paradoxical experience of Downtown Eastside residents who are all too often seen as drug addicts or prostitutes. Furthermore, Alexander is a schizophrenic. As a result of his mental illness he experiences another layer of in/visibility: Leo comments that immigrants known to be schizophrenic are not granted visas and even after his death, it is evident that presumptions associated with his illness will mask the circumstances of his death.

Although the programme has championed the rights of often invisible members of society, the last few minutes of “Pretend” show Dominic, Zack, Leo and Mick, four white, heterosexual males walking along the streets of the Downtown Eastside. We are reminded that *Da Vinci’s Inquest* ironically

⁶⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, 62-63.

reinforces the power relations of society by foregrounding relatively powerful figures and relegating difference to the backdrop; minorities to minor roles. I should note that in contrast to many television programmes, *Da Vinci's Inquest* features a number of women and racial minorities in crucial roles, for example Sergeant Sheila Kurtz, Dr Sunita Ramen, Dr Patricia Da Vinci. Moreover, it is self-reflexive about the dominance of white males in the professions: in "Little Sister", Dominic suggests the case would benefit from sending a First Nations policewoman undercover, before sarcastically asking if the Vancouver Police Department has any First Nations policewomen. However, the writers emphasise the banter and clashing egos of the male leads, echoing conventions of older police procedurals as a strategy to attract and reassure audiences, who potentially forego alternative visions of society for familiar representations.

The end of the episode highlights how different institutions use digital surveillance to monitor one another as well as to control the general population. Moreover, the ambivalent conclusion to the Alexander Winchester storyline holds a lesson about Baudrillardian simulation and the politics of representation. Mick and Leo update Dominic on the Winchester case: they have visited Alexander's workplace, a nearby Gastown restaurant, where the owner informs them that the restaurant was raided by immigration officials hours before Alexander's death. Although the restaurant owner prompted Alexander to leave when immigration arrived, immigration seized the papers of all the workers. Consequently, Mick and Leo deduce that immigration officials chased Alexander onto the roof where he threatened to jump if they did not leave him alone, following through on his threat. This scenario is supported by witnesses that heard him shouting but the fact that Alexander is a

schizophrenic casts doubt on the likelihood of events. As Dominic points out, “maybe he was hallucinating”. The only evidence that someone else was involved in his death is an unidentified handprint found next to his body.

Alexander’s brother insists that Alexander was taking his medication and showed no signs of psychosis, yet the hallucinations stereotypically attributed to schizophrenics are a convenient explanation. The suggested hallucination might be compared to simulation: the consequences of hallucination and simulation can be the same as a “real” cause – Alexander jumps from the building if he is chased by immigration *and* if he imagines that he is chased. Yet if we believe in the hallucination/simulation, there is less opportunity for criticism of those responsible for his death: the alleged methods of intimidation used by immigration officials in tracking down illegal immigrants.

Finally, Zack suggests running a CPIC (Canadian Police Information Centre) search – if immigration have run their own search on Alexander prior to knocking on his door it will show up in the system. This implies a transparent system where it is possible to check on how others are using an information database for their own surveillance. However, since CPIC is restricted to police communities there is an evident limitation to transparency. In the closing scene, an image of an unequal surveillance system, yet one with the potential for more democratic visibility, is presented. A more democratic, transparent system would allow police and citizens to monitor the behaviour of law enforcement officials to prevent human rights abuses or misconduct. The digitalisation of information hints at a movement towards Baudrillardian simulation – the doubling of the world through automatic computerised

records. However, the circumstances of Alexander's death emphasise the importance of discerning between illusion and reality.

Conclusion

My overview of *Da Vinci's Inquest* and close analysis of "Pretend" have demonstrated an evolution of representational strategies in the programme and isolated an episode that stands out as self-conscious about its own representational strategies. My analysis indicates that representations of the Downtown Eastside, the theme of surveillance and the thematic and stylistic layering of fiction and claims to reality are apparent throughout *Da Vinci's Inquest* but particularly evident in "Pretend" and other episodes directed by Chris Haddock. This episode has a particularly complex engagement with what Geoff King calls "the spectacle of the real", combining sections of direct cinema aesthetic with conventional television realism, and referencing and "approximating" real Downtown Eastside issues.

I have also suggested that, despite the television-makers' evident awareness of debates surrounding representation and visibility in the DTES, and a concerted effort to locate the wider causes of struggles in the DTES elsewhere, *Da Vinci's Inquest* is prone to re-inscribing potentially damaging stereotypes and binaries of powerful/subjugated, visible/invisible. It is notable for its representation of progressive approaches to the drug and sex trade, housing and poverty. However, the programme's projection of these ideas through the character of Dominic Da Vinci risks a celebration of individual achievement rather than the power of community. Finally, while "Pretend" presents a thorough debate about the disadvantages and advantages of using

surveillance cameras, the programme and the episode ultimately endorse diverse surveillance methods. *Da Vinci's Inquest* also encourages crew and viewer surveillance of the neighbourhood, although "Pretend" might be read as a self-reflexive critique of this unequal visibility. The direct cinema aesthetic used for one storyline of this episode and the eyeline matching used for other scenes intersect with the thematic interests of the television-makers and prompt an exploration of how we look and see the Downtown Eastside through televisual fictions and more generally.

Chapter 3

Documentary Storytelling in the Downtown Eastside: *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* and *Our City Our Voices*.

‘Poornography’ – portraying people who are poor as sufferers – is part of the journalistic technique of ‘putting a face on the problem.’ The problem with this is that it doesn’t politicize the problem, it doesn’t point to the causes of poverty, and it doesn’t point to a solution (often charity is offered as the answer).

Jean Swanson¹

In this chapter I argue that collaboration and storytelling in non-fiction film and video production reduce the risk of contributing to a surveillant gaze on the Downtown Eastside. In emphasising the role of storytelling in documentary, the filmmaker(s) foreground the subjective nature of the representation, encouraging viewers to engage with and debate the represented issues rather than accepting the representation as objective evidence. In incorporating a collaborative relationship with subjects in production, post-production or distribution, or facilitating self-representation, a documentary project can diminish the power imbalance between those in front of the camera and those behind it. My first case study, *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* (Nettie Wild, 2002), is a feature-length documentary in which Wild interviews participants living or working in the Downtown Eastside. She worked alone during post-production, but collaboratively distributed the film with several of her subjects. My second case study, *Our City Our Voices: Follow the Eagle and Slo-Pitch*

¹ Jean Swanson, interviewed by Joanne Fine, *Between The Lines*, http://www.btlbooks.com/Links/swanson_interview.htm (accessed March 15, 2011).

(Lorraine Fox, David Moosetail, Vera Wabegijig, Louise Lagimodiere and Mary Suchell, 2005), is a pair of short documentaries collectively directed by aboriginal Downtown Eastside residents, trained by NFB staff in video and storytelling. Residents are also credited with concept, camera and sound work. To different extents and in contrasting ways, both *Fix* and *Our City* are self-conscious screen stories, emphasising the role of collaboration and storytelling in order to complicate the way viewers perceive the Downtown Eastside.

Breaking the Goldfish Bowl

I argue that documentary film inherently shares certain attributes with visual surveillance. Although theorists have emphasised that films are images of reality, and that documentary narratives are constructed to make an argument, to entertain or be aesthetically pleasing, the word documentary still connotes a truth claim. It has, as Brian Winston notes, “evidentiary status”, and as a result has “ideological power”.² As I noted in my previous chapter, in the 1960s, this evidentiary status was reinforced when Candid Eye filmmakers claimed lightweight equipment and synchronised sound would allow them to record reality as it happened. Direct Cinema proponents, who emphasised the inevitable interference of the filmmaker in the events they filmed, disputed this claim that documentary could represent the real. Nonetheless, the camera’s ability to witness is still claimed by champions of surveillance video footage, reality television, human rights documenters, and occasionally by documentary filmmakers.³

² Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real II, Documentary: Grierson and Beyond* (London: BFI & Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 14.

³ Organisations such as Witness and its Canadian partner The Video Advocacy Institute promote the use of video for witnessing injustice and advocating change. See Liz Miller and

Although few documentaries are made with the explicit aim of surveillance – collecting and analysing data to govern populations – they nonetheless provide a documented perspective that might be used for the management of certain populations. So, for instance, “evidence” from documentary film might be employed in a call for a change in legislation to the advantage, or disadvantage, of subjects and in keeping with, or contrary to, the filmmaker’s aims; even the most oppositional documentaries might be recuperated by ruling powers.⁴ The more marginalised the subjects, the more there is at stake: the subjects might already experience discrimination and lack the means or opportunity to counter negative representations. The notion of “breaking the goldfish bowl” is a useful analogy for considering how documentary modes might complicate the one-way gaze of the camera and the viewer upon marginalised subjects. In the early days of documentary filmmaking, partly due to the limitations of technology, a so-called “voice-of-God” narrator spoke for subjects shown on screen: these subjects did not have the opportunity to tell their own stories. Today, as a result of improved technology and increased awareness of ethical considerations, subjects usually speak for themselves and occasionally become participants as they influence and contribute to the final product. Storytelling and collaboration in

Martin Allor, “Report: Strategies for Representing the Pain of Others: The Video Advocacy Institute” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 34, no.1 (2009): 137-141, <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/issue/view/126/showToc> (accessed June 4, 2011).

⁴ Indeed, Nettie Wild had to fight to prevent scenes from her film *Blockade* (1993) being used as evidence in a court case against the members of the Gitksan First Nations she had been filming in northern British Columbia: Canadian National Rail “attempt[ed] to use our film footage as evidence in CN’s case against the Gitksan. We refused to turn over the footage. [...] If CN was successful in seizing the footage, my work would have been used against the very people whose trust I had developed in order to make BLOCKADE in the first place. Beyond my own personal case, the court was in danger of setting a precedent that could seriously damage the ability of all independent filmmakers and journalists to continue their work”. Nettie Wild, “History” Canada Wild Productions, under “Blockade”, <http://www.canadawildproductions.com/blockade/history.html> (accessed April 17, 2011).

documentary filmmaking and distribution can replace a sort of surveillance with something akin to conversation. These documentary practices are not new: indeed, Canadian filmmakers, often with the support of the National Film Board, have been particularly active in debating and theorising documentary ethics and experimenting with different modes of practice.

John Grierson, who had been Canada's first head of the National Film Board (1939-1945), claimed that *Housing Problems* (Edgar Anstey and Basil Wright, 1936), a film Grierson produced while still working in the UK, was an pioneer in “‘breaking the goldfish bowl’, and of making films ‘not about people but with them’”.⁵ *Housing Problems* was one of the earliest documentary films to use interviews: British slum dwellers had the chance to explain their own situation rather than leaving it solely to the filmmaker's narration. However, as Brian Winston notes, *Housing Problems* presented these subjects as victims, exploiting their difficulties in order to champion “enlightened local councils and the Gas industry [...] who were working hard to make slums a thing of the past”.⁶ Moreover, a voice-of-God narration was retained alongside the interviews with slum dwellers, and conveys authority in comparison with the interviewee's colloquial, and often stilted, statements. *Housing Problems* did not credit the slum dwellers with any agency of their own and, in this respect, maintained a “goldfish bowl” manner of looking at subjugated populations.

The tenor of *Housing Problems* is partly explained by the film's reliance on sponsorship from the British Commercial Gas Association. Canada's National Film Board, established with the guidance of Grierson, is an important

⁵ John Grierson, “Memo to Michelle about Decentralizing the Means of Production” in *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* eds. Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010) 63.

⁶ Winston, 50-54.

source of funding for filmmakers in Canada who do not want their critical voice to be restricted by commercial sponsorship. Grierson's comments about "breaking the goldfish bowl" were part of a memo on decentralising the means of film production, published in the NFB Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle (CFC/SN) newsletter. CFC/SN was an activist documentary filmmaking programme that ran from 1967 to 1980. Although the first CFC/SN film, *The Things I Cannot Change* (Tanya Ballantyne Tree, 1967), echoes the Griersonian "tradition of the victim" and a Candid Eye belief in the camera as witness with its observation of a chronically poor family in Montreal, subsequent CFC/SN filmmakers made significant attempts to increase interaction and collaboration between filmmakers and grassroots organisations.⁷

Many filmmakers facilitated community control over the end product by, for instance, sharing rough cuts with local participants and incorporating their feedback into the final edit, or training individuals in the operation of film or video equipment so that they could use it to change their own situations. One of the most famous CFC/SN projects was the Fogo Island film experiment, officially known as the "Newfoundland Project Series", which "pioneered the use of the documentary for community development", using documentary as a tool to stimulate debate within the community and improve communication with people in power.⁸ While there were inevitable problems with these processes – for instance, Peter Weisner suggests it was sometimes difficult for NFB filmmakers to sacrifice their artistic ambitions in order to facilitate a collaborative grassroots project and notes cases of subsequent over-reliance on

⁷ Winston, 53.

⁸ Peter Wiesner, "Media for the People: The Canadian Experiments with Film and Video in Community Development" *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* eds. Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), 73.

video in community development – the Fogo Island films nonetheless demonstrate a more democratic alternative to the goldfish bowl dynamics of looking that, at one time, was the default mode of documentary representation.⁹

The metaphor of the goldfish bowl is useful for considering how visual representation might function as surveillance in the Downtown Eastside. Debates about representation of this neighbourhood largely mirror the ethical dilemmas debated by documentary filmmakers in the NFB and elsewhere. The goldfish bowl symbolises how films that represent marginalised people might emphasise their Otherness, stressing the containment and isolation of the subjects, who may be criminalised or pathologised, within the representation and the neighbourhood (at a safe distance from viewers). This mode thus connotes the dependency of residents on the help of outsiders yet discourages meaningful interaction between the two. Similarly, in her analysis of the representation of poverty in *Da Vinci's Inquest*, Kim Elliot suggests that “the idea of a zoo [...] can also allude to the removed status of residents of the area; a phenomenon to be gazed upon by outsiders”.¹⁰ Media coverage of the neighbourhood, in addition to televisual and filmic representations, has contributed to this phenomenon.

In addition to feeding demands for increased surveillance, legislation and policing, some representations likely encourage voyeuristic pleasure in seeing those worse off than themselves. For instance, Allan King's *Skidrow* (1956), an early documentary about the area that would become known as the Downtown Eastside, was accused of voyeurism for its focus on alcoholic and

⁹ Wiesner, 81-82.

¹⁰ Kim Elliot, “In the Bear Pit: Considering *Da Vinci's Inquest* in the Context of Representations and Discourses of Poverty” *Studies in Political Economy* 68 (2002): 13-34.

homeless men trapped in a cycle of self-abuse.¹¹ The film interviewed these men but also included a voice-of-God narration and surveillance-like shots of DTES residents.¹² A more recent documentary film about the Downtown Eastside has been similarly controversial. *Through the Blue Lens* (1999) came out of NFB director Veronica Alice Mannix's collaboration with "The Odd Squad", a group of policemen who enlisted drug addicted residents to help them educate young people about the dangers of experimenting with drugs.¹³ E. A. Boyd labels *Through a Blue Lens* "poornographic" in a letter published in the Carnegie Centre newsletter.¹⁴ Boyd headed the letter "Poverty Pimping in the Downtown Eastside", and argued that filmmakers were encouraging voyeurism and making money by portraying the suffering of DTES citizens.

A Downtown Eastside poverty worker and artist, Patricia Chauncey, coined the phrase "poornography" to describe the media's portrayal of the poor as victims, and its failure to criticise the societal structures that create poverty or suggest what might be done to alleviate such suffering.¹⁵ Jean Swanson's succinct definition is quoted in my epigraph. Like pornography, "poornography" depends on voyeurism and connotes exploitation.

¹¹ John Riley, "Allan King: Controversial Canadian film-maker whose documentaries lighted on the dramas of everyday existence", *The Independent* August 3, 2009, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/allan-king-controversial-canadian-filmmaker-whose-documentaries-lighted-on-the-dramas-of-everyday-existence-1766590.html> (accessed March 15, 2011). In response to accusations of voyeurism, King suggests that "from the outset, filmmaking tends to be voyeuristic". Allan King, interviewed by Tammy Stone, "The King of Cinéma Vérité: an interview with Allan King", *Take One* March 1, 2003, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+King+of+cinema-verite%3A+an+interview+with+Allan+King.-a099984455> (accessed June 4, 2011).

¹² A number of shots appear to be taken covertly from the windows or roofs of buildings. Moreover, there are early vérité style street scenes: King claimed his cameraman was "not afraid to take his camera off the tripod" (although the lack of synchronised sound recording equipment meant that these street scenes were shot in silence). Allan King, "Skidrow", Allan King Films, <http://www.allankingfilms.com/skidrow.html> (accessed March 15, 2011).

¹³ Veronica Alice Mannix, dir. *Through a Blue Lens* (Canada: National Film Board, 1998).

¹⁴ E. A. Boyd, "Poverty Pimping in the Downtown Eastside" *Carnegie Newsletter* December 12, 1998.

¹⁵ Jean Swanson, *Poor-bashing: The Politics of Social Exclusion*. (Toronto: Between the Lines Books, 2001), 97.

Poornographic media representations, including *Through a Blue Lens*, re-inscribe a “goldfish bowl” mode of viewing the DTES. *Through a Blue Lens* does not attempt to motivate political reform, focusing instead on a simple message of visual deterrence: look at these people, learn from their mistakes and avoid the Downtown Eastside.¹⁶ However, we might also see the legacy of CFC/SN in *Through a Blue Lens*. The National Film Board worked with the local community to improve communication between people who might not usually come into contact. The film was distributed with the participation of several of the participants who met and conversed with young people about their experiences of addiction. A related NFB short film, *Flipping the World: Drugs through a Blue Lens* (Moira Simpson, 2000) documented these conversations.¹⁷ This element of collaboration between the filmmakers and the subjects might be seen as breaking the goldfish bowl. The term “poornography” and the controversy surrounding the documentaries *Skidrow*, *Through a Blue Lens* and *Flipping the World* are informative contexts for my exploration of how participatory practices begin to challenge the asymmetrical dynamics of looking at the Downtown Eastside in *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* and *Our City Our Voices*.

¹⁶ Jennifer England has suggested that the film intentionally focused on individuals who “recognised that they were authors of their own misfortune” in order to produce an apolitical film that focused purely on the consequences of bad decision-making, rather than societal factors such as racism and colonialism that contribute to endemic drug use amongst some populations. Jennifer England, “Disciplining Subjectivity and Space: Representation, Film and its Material Effects” *Antipode* 36, no.2 (2004): 300.

¹⁷ Moira Simpson is now NFB Filmmaker in Residence in the Downtown Eastside, working with Fearless City Mobile, whose work I focus on in the next chapter. Interviewing another NFB Filmmaker in Residence, Katerina Cizek, Liz Miller suggests, “Filmmaker-in-Residence: [is the] The Digital Grandchild of Challenge for Change”. Liz Miller, “Filmmaker-in-Residence: The Digital Grandchild of Challenge for Change”, in *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* eds. Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker and Ezra Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), 427.

Fix: The Story of an Addicted City

It would be convenient to suggest that *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* was made by a privileged outsider who came to the Downtown Eastside and exploited the situation for personal gain, in contrast with the self-representation of residents in the collaborative *Our City Our Voices* project. However, such a binary is reductive. Wild describes Vancouver as her hometown and has a history of arts activism in the city. She began her filmmaking career shortly after co-founding the activist Headlines Theatre, when the success of their production, *Buy, Buy, Buy Vancouver* (1981) about the city's housing crisis, led to a documentary video treatment of the same topic, called *Right to Fight* (1982). *Right to Fight* was made with the hope that it would prompt the creation of tenants' rights groups in Vancouver, where many (including the theatre founders) were experiencing housing problems due to rising rents and evictions.¹⁸ Part of the video is filmed in the Downtown Eastside, where the crisis is most desperate and a group of pensioners have united to protest evictions and campaign for affordable housing. Wild produced a step-by-step booklet on tenants' rights and how to use them, which was circulated as she and a colleague took the film on tour around British Columbia and other parts of Canada. This practice of touring to encourage ongoing conversations was a model Wild would return to in *Fix: the Story of an Addicted City*.

In the meantime, Wild made her name filming in taut political situations. Her topics included the revolutionary struggles in the Philippines and Mexico in *A Rustling of Leaves* (1987) and *A Place called Chiapas* (1998) respectively. In *Blockade* (1992), Wild documented disputes over land and

¹⁸ Lynn Mockler, "Making The Headlines: The Evolution of Headlines Theatre Company", (Masters Thesis, University of British Columbia, October 1998), 6.

governance in Canada: she travelled to Northern British Columbia to film the confrontations between the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en's people, who collectively claim ownership of 22 000 square miles of traditional lands, and the white logging industry workers trying to make a home and a living in the same area.

Twenty years after *Right to Fight*, Wild returned to the Downtown Eastside to make *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* (2002), about “the birth of a new social movement”.¹⁹ Focusing on the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU)'s campaign to establish North America's first safe injection site in the Downtown Eastside, Wild's film has the unlikely stars of VANDU's president, Dean Wilson, a heroin addict struggling to overcome his addiction throughout the film, Ann Livingston, VANDU co-founder, a Christian non-user and Wilson's then partner, and Philip Owen, Vancouver's Mayor at the time (1993-2002), a member of the centre-right Non Partisan Association party. At the beginning of the film, members of the NPA and the business communities that back the party have convinced Owen that the provision of health and support services for the Downtown Eastside attracts addicted people to the neighbourhood and facilitates their habits. The Mayor has thus agreed to prevent further services opening for ninety days. After an encounter with Wilson,

¹⁹ Nettie Wild, interviewed by Jeff Kubik, “Interview Transcript for Nettie Wild interview” *Gauntlet*, March 25, 2004, <http://thegauntlet.ca/story/3746> (accessed July 25, 2011). It would appear that Wild came across this movement when it was gaining momentum, but the birth was perhaps in 1996, when drug users set up an illegal safe injection site called The Back Alley. Weekly meetings began in 1997, coordinated by Ann Livingston and Bud Osborn, and VANDU emerged in 1998. Susan Boyd, Donald MacPherson and Bud Osborn *Raise Shit: Social Action Saving Lives*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2009), 11 and 43. *Raise Shit* is a comprehensive history of the movement through narrative, newspaper and logbook clippings, photographs and poems. See also Larry Campbell, Neil Boyd and Lori Culbert, *A Thousand Dreams: Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and the Fight for Its Future* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2009), 113 for information about VANDU's first meeting.

Livingston and VANDU members, Owen shifts his sympathies towards VANDU and develops a harm reduction policy for Vancouver.

Wild builds her story around Owen, Livingston and Wilson and their personal and political struggles. A counterpoint is provided in her representation of Doug Lang, a policeman working in the DTES who admits that drug use in the neighbourhood cannot be successfully policed but feels that harm reduction policies are dangerous for society. Wild also represents the perspective of Bryce Rositch, leader of the Community Alliance, a group of Gastown and Chinatown residents and business owners who want a police crackdown on the open drug market and a reduction of social services – drop-in centres, health and counselling facilities, charitable organisations providing food, clothes and shelter – that are often accessed by drug-using members of the community. The conflict between the Community Alliance and VANDU members is at the heart of Wild's film.

Fix does not fit comfortably into either the documentary “tradition of the victim” or the CFC/SN ethos of encouraging community control in filmmaking. Wild's awareness that representations of the neighbourhood often dwell on its problems is revealed in her claim that “I came to this film reluctantly because I didn't want to make just another movie about how God awful it is in the downtown east side of Vancouver”.²⁰ Indeed, her Downtown Eastside subjects are presented as active citizens rather than helpless victims, demonstrating energetic political activism on screen. For instance, as Belinda Smaill notes, “Wilson is figured in the documentary

²⁰ Wild, interviewed by Kubik.

not by a re-inscription of pain in the face of social powerlessness, but rather he is framed by his abilities and determination to work on behalf of the community and lobby those in power”.²¹ However, Wild is keen to stress her control over the representation of her protagonists. She explains that her loyalty is to telling a balanced story above and beyond advocating for any one of the causes represented in the film.²² Wild did not involve her subjects in the editing process, emphasising her authorial role.

In attempting to maintain a balanced story and excluding participants from the editing process, Wild admits there is a resultant distance from her subjects, whom she films

Past the point when your heroes look heroic. The reason you do that is not to destroy those people but rather when the contradictions present themselves [...] I think it's very important to keep the camera rolling as opposed to stopping because it's in those contradictions that the real drama of the story lies. Where this elusive thing called truth lies.²³

There is a tension here between Wild's authorship of the film, which emphasises the constructed nature of stories told, and an ideology of capturing real stories. In this interview, Wild implies that the story is revealed by camera observation in a manner that resembles the beliefs of Candid Eye filmmakers. She does not foreground her own presence as a factor in bringing out drama and contradictions.

²¹ Belinda Smaill, "Injured Identities, Pain, Politics and Documentary" *Studies in Documentary Film* 1, no. 2 (2007): 155.

²² Wild, interviewed by Kubik. See also Wild's explanation of how she communicated with VANDU members about her filmmaking process: "I'd say to the drug users, 'I'm going out with the police tomorrow,' and right at the beginning when I pitched the proposal, saying, 'Is it okay that I film you guys, this is my project, this is my objective--and I'm also going to spend time with the police, and I'm also going to spend time with Bryce Rossich [sic] and the people who are screaming at you.' And I explained to them why it's really important for people to see these people and understand the nature of the conflict, I can't just have you speaking for them, I've gotta get these voices". Travis Hoover, "Hot Docs: Wild at Heart" Film Freak Central, under "Notes from the Projection Booth", April 2003, <http://www.filmfreakcentral.net/hotdocs/hotdocsnettiwild.htm> (accessed June 4, 2011).

²³ Wild, interviewed by Kubik.

In other respects, Wild seems to follow in the footsteps of the Candid Eye tradition. Her digital camera allows a fluid handheld journey through DTES streets and an intimate perspective on Livingston and Wilson's home life. During the filming process, she became a part of her protagonists' lives, amassing 350 hours of footage over an eighteen-month period.²⁴ Livingston and Wilson were particularly accommodating, allowing her to film in their home and even in their bedroom. Sometimes, as when the couple are in bed, Wild seems like a fly-on-the wall. However, in other scenes, where the couple talk and carry out domestic tasks and Livingston's children watch television, the illusion of transparency is soon broken as one of the protagonists addresses the camera directly. For instance, when Livingston quizzes Wilson about how many papers of heroin he is using, it is clearly a discussion aimed for the camera. She turns and tells the camera (or Wild behind it) "if Dean will admit to one, he is usually using two or three". In this respect, Wild confirms what proponents of Canadian direct cinema noted, that the means of production necessarily influence the events recorded. Stella Bruzzi makes a similar argument, emphasising that "the important truth any documentary captures is the performance in front of the camera".²⁵ It is, then, not so much that the camera keeps rolling to capture contradictions and intimacy, but perhaps that the camera keeps rolling and thus prompts performances of contradiction and intimacy. Wild is a participant as well as an observer and, consciously or subconsciously, her protagonists are performing for the camera.

Wild's participation is more obvious when we hear her interviewing the protagonists and asking them to repeat themselves in the film. She includes

²⁴ Wild, interviewed by Kubik.

²⁵ Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 90.

her voice in the frame, although she is not so reflexive as to include content of the filmmaking process, discussing her creative decisions onscreen, for instance, or including images of herself or filming equipment in the final edit.²⁶ Again, this is symptomatic of her determination to distance herself from subjects in the filmmaking process, to retain creative autonomy until “the picture is locked”. Only after this can “people claim [it] and run with it” – the subjects can use the film for their own ends.²⁷ Moreover, Wild seems to have not only endorsed but also collaborated in this activist distribution. For instance, Philip Owen chose to hold a screening of *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* at the end of his Mayoral duties instead of a fundraiser for the next NPA candidate, raising money that helped fund the transfer of the film onto 35mm and a tour of Canadian cinemas. Livingston, Wilson and Owen toured with Wild and the film across “two dozen big cities and small towns across Canada” in order to participate in introductions and question-and-answer sessions, creating an interactive screening environment.²⁸ Moreover, Wild and Owen went to Parliament Hill, Ottawa, and showed the film to the federal health minister, Anne McLellan, resulting in formal approval for injection sites.²⁹ In this respect Wild’s film is clearly not the kind of film that presents victims to motivate outside help, especially charity. The move for social

²⁶ Contemporary Canadian examples of this self-reflexive direct cinema approach are found in the work of Peter Wintonick. For instance, in *Manufacturing Consent* (1992), he and Mark Achbar’s documentary about Noam Chomsky, or *Cinéma Vérité: Defining the Moment* (2000), a documentary which traces the different strands of the Vérité movement into the present day. In both these films the directors and full camera crew are seen on film, preparing to record interviews and interacting with the film’s subjects.

²⁷ Wild, interviewed by Kubik; Erin Research Inc. for the Documentary Policy Advisory Group, “Breaking New Ground: A Framework for Measuring the Social Impact of Canadian Documentaries”, NFB, under “Publications”, April 25th 2005, www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/publications/en/pdf/social_impact_engl_study.pdf (accessed May 15, 2009).

²⁸ Campbell, Boyd and Culbert, 193.

²⁹ Tom Lyons, “A Passion for Social Justice” *Take One*, March 2003, 3-4, http://citizen.nfb.ca/extraits/media/A_Passion_for_Social_Justice.pdf (accessed May 15 2011).

change exists prior to Wild's film; she discovers and documents this social movement and gradually becomes part of it.

Although all Wild's films have documented existing social movements, *Fix* seems to trouble Wild's earlier stance on filmmaking. In her previous films, Wild narrates and explains the action onscreen using voice-over; for *Fix* this seemed inappropriate as she wanted to emphasise that this was not "the definitive statement on the downtown eastside of Vancouver'...It's certainly not the voice of God on everything that moves down there".³⁰ In *A Place Called Chiapas* (1998), Wild claimed "I'm an outsider, looking at those who must change the world in order to survive it".³¹ Back in her hometown of Vancouver, it is not so easy to assume outsider status. When the film stock for *A Place for Chiapas* was stolen from her car outside a Gastown editing studio, prompting her to search Downtown Eastside alleyways and dumpsters, she became aware of the number of addicts with nowhere to go, and was motivated to attend a VANDU meeting and eventually make the film.³² The closeness of the subject matter to her home and workplace, and the connections with her earlier work on the lack of affordable housing in Vancouver, destabilise the illusion of distance she prefers to cultivate in her filmmaking. She becomes a part of the story she is telling.

Her realisation that she cannot claim to be a distanced observer of the struggles occurring in the DTES is revealed, as I see it, through the formal structure of her film. The explanatory narration of her earlier films is replaced

³⁰ Wild, interviewed by Kubik.

³¹ Wild, in the opening narration of *A Place Called Chiapas*, DVD, dir. Nettie Wild (Canada: Canada Wild Productions, 1998). Despite this statement, Wild is more than an observer and at times draws attention to her intervention in the situation: When a group of indigenous Mexicans, forced from their homes by paramilitary mercenaries, attempt to return to their village, Wild suggests, "The presence of our camera and crew is the only security they feel they have".

³² Wild, interviewed by Kubik.

by new strategies in storytelling. Wild uses a fairly conventional linear narrative, combining observational documentary modes with interaction, as she interviews protagonists, and compilation, as archival news footage is inserted to narrate events. Abridgements are made to save time and for clarity: Wilson's four attempts to stop taking heroin during the period of filming are conflated into one. Occasional title cards replace, to an extent, the function of the voice-over in narrating wider events such as existing drugs legislation near the start of the film, explaining what is happening on screen during the film, and detailing post-production developments at the end: Owen has been pushed out of his party, the safe injection site is opened by Vancouver's new mayor in 2003 and Wilson still struggles with his addiction.

The linear narration is repeatedly interrupted by three recurring themes: footage of people, including Wilson, assembling wooden crosses; montages of drug use in the streets and alleyways of the DTES; and brief scenes where televisions play in unlikely locations. Wild includes these staged scenes at four moments in the film: CTV news reports play on televisions positioned in an alleyway, outside Bryce Rositch's office, in Chinatown and in Livingston's church. This functions as a means of transitioning from on-location to archived footage. Since Wild's film is made "in association with CTV", it is also a form of advertisement. A reciprocal relationship with CTV was demonstrated when they premiered an abridged version of the documentary in November 2002,³³

³³ "CTV Announces Special British Columbia-Only Broadcast of 'Fix: The Story of an Addicted City' – Airing Saturday, November 9 on CTV British Columbia", CTV, October 31, 2002, <http://media.ctv.ca/ctv/releases/release.asp?id=5737&yyyy=2002> (accessed March 29, 2011). At the end of *Fix*, the credits state that the film was "made in association with CTV with the assistance of Telefilm Canada and British Columbia Film". There are also a large number of other private and public, national and provincial organisations listed as providing production and financial assistance.

although they could not be persuaded to show the full feature length film.³⁴ Yet despite this apparent sponsorship, Wild's playful display of CTV footage implies criticism of the role media images play in shaping understanding of the Downtown Eastside. Using these metascreens – screens represented within the screen story of *Fix* – Wild reminds her audience they are watching a mediated version of events. She reflects self-consciously on her role as an image-maker contributing to the already pervasive glut of representation of the DTES.

What effect does this self-referentiality have? By putting a question mark over television images, does Wild undermine the validity of her own film? I suggest, rather, that she only undermines the images produced under the label of “the news” which purport to be objective. In contrast, Wild draws attention to her subjectivity while encouraging the audience to question media representations. Throughout the film, she illustrates how little can happen in the DTES without the press taking interest, suggesting that the neighbourhood is under surveillance by the media. However, the stories told by reporters are sometimes inaccurate. For instance, in the film, Livingston reacts angrily when a news story falsely suggests VANDU have illegally opened a safe injection site, when Livingston has merely rented a room with the aim of using it as a drop-in centre. Though Wild recycles original news commentary about events concerning the Downtown Eastside throughout the film, rather than reinforcing the media's view of the neighbourhood, she reframes it in a political context and shows that life continues when the news cameras stop filming. During protests, she turns her camera eye to the crowds of journalists with cameras and

³⁴ “Nettie Wild couldn't convince CTV to run the 93-minute feature version, even though she pointed out that they could thereby have a backgrounder to a big national story. They used the 43-minute version instead, with “W” Television and Knowledge Network buying second window rights”. “Breaking New Ground”, 51.

microphones trying to capture the action, reversing the usual media gaze, observing the observers. Finally, her meta-screen scenes imply that the image-making industry must be responsible for the effects of its representations: inaccurate or irresponsible images of the DTES find their way back to haunt residents.

Wild's meta-screens also speak to the technological divide evident in the Downtown Eastside. The large percentage of low-income and under-housed people means that opportunities to consume or participate in media are limited and more commonly occur in public places – community centres, drop-in centres, services, cafes. The televisions in the alleyway, church, Gastown and Chinatown Streets imply that these places function as living rooms for the under-housed. Here they can meet and share information about events that affect them. It is a reminder that this film is not just about drug addiction but also about poverty. At one point in the film, frustrated at hearing Community Alliance representatives speaking at City Hall, Wilson suggests that people blocking new services in the Downtown Eastside are not just waging a war on drugs but a war on poor people. This scene, where Wilson points to a map of Vancouver, gesturing towards the Downtown Eastside, is a brief but important moment of contextualising the Downtown Eastside as part of the wider city. It is people with “vested interests” living elsewhere in Vancouver who want to control the Downtown Eastside.

The City Hall scenes in Wild's film are important for situating the problems in the Downtown Eastside within larger issues. As Geraldine Pratt has observed, *Fix* “begins, significantly, with the trip by advocates for drug addicts outside of the Downtown Eastside into the centre of official local

political life: City Hall”.³⁵ This embeds poverty and drug addiction within a wider spatial and political realm, rather than compounding the image of the Downtown Eastside as the sole location where the city’s problems reside. It represents the possibility of what Neil Smith calls “jumping scales”.³⁶ The film’s protagonists are largely represented with a focus on the body and the community, yet the sequences in City Hall show that they are mobile at the scale of urban space. The film’s content, however, does not move much beyond this scale of politicised space. It is limited in its ability to describe the Downtown Eastside as a product of global forces that influence the condition of the people who live there by determining the availability and price of drugs.

Tom Lyons notes,

[Wild] was unable to gain sufficient access to the business community to investigate allegations that Vancouver land speculators have been fuelling the drug-addiction problem in the city's rotting Downtown Eastside...[Also,] getting Russian mafia, Asian triad members and Colombian drug lords to explain the finer points of their current distribution strategies proved impossible even for Wild.³⁷

Lyons’ commentary is tongue-in-cheek, but makes a serious point about the obvious limitations of documentary investigation: the most powerful people are rarely transparent about their methods. Instead, we might look to fictional screen stories, such as *Da Vinci’s Inquest* and the short-lived CBC series *Intelligence*, for “approximations” of how legal and illegal global trade shapes the city.

Fix shares with fictional representations the problem of perpetuating stereotypes and encouraging, at best, a concerned attention to the Downtown

³⁵ Geraldine Pratt, “Abandoned Women and Spaces of the Exception” *Antipode* 37, no. 5 (2005): 1076.

³⁶ Neil Smith, “Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the production of Geographical Scale” *Social Text* 33 (1992): 66.

³⁷ Lyons, 3-4.

Eastside, and at worst, a voyeuristic fascination. Although Wild broadens the geographical scale of implication in the drug “problem” from the neighbourhood to the entire city, there are an overwhelming number of striking images of drug use in Downtown Eastside alleyways. These feature in hard-hitting montages interspersed amid the chronological narrative as well as in the background of observational and interactive scenes. The montages are not for the squeamish; we see needles enter scrawny arms and necks repeatedly, and hollow-eyed, toothless men and women puffing on crack pipes. For a film that was not meant to be about “how God-awful the Downtown Eastside is”, these are disturbing images, liable to warn viewers away from the neighbourhood rather than increasing communication or encouraging viewers to feel connected to subjects.

The montages of drug use and drug users are clearly intended to make the viewer feel uncomfortable. It is likely that *Fix* uses self-conscious shock tactics as a wake-up call for Canada, a plea for recognition of the increasing number of people struggling to feed severe addiction and stay alive on the streets of Canada. *Fix*’s strategy therefore has elements of the tradition of the victim, which perhaps originates with social reformers such as Jacob Riis long before *Housing Problems* and *The Things I Cannot Change*. The problem with this strategy is that it exacerbates the felt difference between better-off audiences and those suffering onscreen. Riis’ famous title, *How the Other Half Lives*, remains worryingly pertinent to representations of such extreme and geographically located suffering.³⁸ In representing the poor as “the other half” it becomes harder to imagine how they might ever be other than Othered, how

³⁸ Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

they are or could be neighbours and friends rather than merely the unfortunate residents of Vancouver's "bad neighbourhood" one encounters through media.

When Wild accompanies Police Sergeant Doug Lang on his beat in the Downtown Eastside, she echoes Riis's strategies, the earlier DTES documentary *Through a Blue Lens* and, as discussed in the last chapter, the collaboration between police and television-makers for *Da Vinci's Inquest*. She films Lang at work as he wakes people from precarious slumber in doorways, moves them along and reminds them not to inject drugs in the streets.³⁹ This scene is reminiscent of the startled faces in Riis' photographs as they wake to the intruding officer and photographer. Although Lang and Wild do not cross into private property, the indignities committed are perhaps greater, the sleeping people even more vulnerable. The people in these images must have given consent as their faces are not pixilated (other individuals in the film's street scenes are), but one wonders if they were in a suitable condition to make such a decision, to comprehend the consequences of having their image fixed on film for years to come. Wild also shows Lang reprimanding a man for marijuana possession: what consequences might lie in the future for this man if his image is seen by law enforcement agencies, potential employers, his own family? However sympathetic her gaze, Wild's document of people's suffering persists across time and space and might be discovered by relatives or authorities in another country, or by grandchildren long after the filmed individual has overcome their addiction or passed away.

³⁹ A further parallel is implicit between Doug Lang's efforts to enforce the law and Sergeant Bernie Smith's policing activity in a much earlier Downtown Eastside documentary, *Whistling Smith*, dir. Michael Scott and Marrin Canell (Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 1971) video file, http://www.nfb.ca/film/whistling_smith/ (accessed June 4, 2011). Both officers demonstrate concern for residents, claiming they save the lives of those who appear to be sleeping but have actually overdosed or are sick / injured. However, it is clear, especially in *Whistling Smith*, that moving people on is also part of a strategy to clear the visible evidence of addiction from Downtown Eastside streets.

The title of Wild's film inadvertently draws attention to the permanence of her images as well as their subject matter. Although Wild's film was captured on digital video, we are reminded of the final step in film processing, where a "fixer", a mixture of chemicals that sets the image in place, is applied to film: as Wild's subjects fix, so does the filmmaker.⁴⁰ The potential consequence of image fixture is an issue raised by Margot Leigh Butler in her analysis of Lincoln Clarkes' photographs of female heroin addicts in the Downtown Eastside. Clarkes took his photographs throughout the late 1990s and published the book *Heroines* in 2002, the same year that *Fix* was released. *Heroines* won the City of Vancouver Book Award in 2003, but critics accused the former fashion photographer of voyeurism and exploitation.⁴¹ Butler describes one of Clarkes' photographs and asks the reader, "How does she look to you?" Butler highlights the multiple connotations of the image and speculates as to Clarkes' intentions: "Is she meant to look like she is in 'survival sex trade work,' which means that for her, then, a pimp, a drug habit, or extreme poverty leaves her with no other option [...]? Still, in a shutter's moment, she's set in perpetuity. Fixed".⁴² Although Clarkes' intentions differ from Wild's, and her images are moving and in colour rather than black and white stills, the same problem persists: individuals are permanently captured in vulnerable, often tragic, moments of their lives.

This is most striking in an image of a very young woman who Wild films, apparently inhaling from a crack pipe and then appearing in profile. Her

⁴⁰ "Format: Digital Betacam (NTSC) Colour" Andrew McIntosh and Stacey Donen, "Fix: The Story of An Addicted City" *Canadian Film Encyclopaedia* January 1, 2005, <http://tiff.net/CANADIANFILMENCYCLOPEDIA/content/films/fix-the-story-of-an-addicted-city> (accessed March 15, 2011).

⁴¹ John M. Glionna, "Light and Darkness in Canada" *Los Angeles Times* June 1, 2003, <http://www.aegis.com/news/lt/2003/LT030601.html> (accessed March 16, 2011).

⁴² Margot Leigh Butler, "The Hero of Heroines" *Mosaic* 37, no. 4 (December 2004): 277.

image is haunting, but Wild does not reveal anything more about this woman: she is unnamed and we are left to wonder whether she has a home or family. The image is ironically juxtaposed to the soundtrack of the national anthem that continues from a previous scene, implying a criticism of the nation for allowing this girl to end up apparently alone, addicted and malnourished on the streets. Butler comments on Clarke's decision not to name the women in his photographs, particularly since Barbara Hodgson's introduction to his book asks us to remember that they are not "unnamed outcasts". Butler asks, "If they requested anonymity, if this is for their protection, why not say so? Why not use assumed names?"⁴³ Viewing *Fix*, we might ask, what are the reasons for anonymity in Wild's film? What are her strategies for getting permissions to film and making sure her subjects understand the potential consequences of appearing in *Fix*?

Wild's images of drug use in Downtown Eastside alleyways function as a sort of surveillance. It gives viewers a distanced perspective into parts of the city into which they might not normally venture. The pixellation used to mask some individuals suggests they have asked Wild to protect them from identification, or else that Wild has not been able to get permission to use their images. Most of these people are unnamed and do not speak on camera. An individual whose background image is not pixelated is Kara. This young woman is captured in a number of Wild's street scenes. Wild eventually engages with Kara as she helps a friend to administer cocaine by injection in an alley around the corner from Livingston's drop-in centre. Finally, Kara is seen in the closing moments of the film after Livingston and her team have been

⁴³ Butler, "Hero of Heroines", 277.

evicted from their drop-in centre. Wild films from within the centre, through the window onto the street: she follows Kara moving erratically along the sidewalk and stopping to press her face against the window, looking straight at the camera and sticking her tongue out, thus confronting Wild and the viewer and challenging their scrutinising gaze.

Before Wild interviews her, Kara seems to be one of many people caught by the incidental surveillance of Wild's footage. Wild eventually asks Kara to tell her story and she does so articulately, challenging prejudices viewers might have formed based on earlier images. Kara appears in some of the most physically and ethically difficult moments of the film. When Kara injects cocaine into the neck of her girlfriend, Wild uses a close up so that the audience is not spared the detail. When it looks as though Kara deals crack as well as using it, Wild pushes the limits of her audience's empathy. While many see addicts as victims, dealers are often condemned as the villains. On CTV footage incorporated into *Fix*, Owen resorts to this over-simplification in his advocacy of harm reduction: "we've got to separate the user from the dealer. The user is sick, the dealer is evil". Kara's story potentially complicates this binary, although the interview does not explain how users are often forced into dealing to pay for their own habits. There is a suggestion of the futility of trying to police drug use and prosecute for possession, however, when Wild asks Kara if she is afraid of getting picked up by the police. Kara tells Wild she has been in and out of prison since she was a kid, and suggests that prison – three square meals a day and a chance to detoxify – is appealing compared to her usual existence in the Downtown Eastside. The realities of what we might term "survival drug work" – participating in the drug trade in order to get basic

commodities such as shelter, food, and enough drugs to maintain one's habit – are thus revealed: there is so little freedom or security in this existence that jail is a preferable alternative.⁴⁴

Wild's interview with Kara also suggests a reason for why people use drugs. Kara tells Wild, "well I didn't wake up one day and think, 'I want to be a drug addict'... People are crack heads or alcoholics because they're covering up things. If you don't deal with that personal shit, you're not going to get anywhere". Smaill notes that Wild "denie[s] access to the authenticating moment that encapsulates the other's pain" in the case of Dean Wilson: she only hints at the trauma in his past. In Wild's dialogue with Kara, however, it seems "the putative origin of the wound" is pinpointed.⁴⁵ Kara explains that she was raped at the age fifteen, became pregnant as a result and that she gave the baby up for adoption. Kara's analysis reveals the complexities of drug addiction. Emotional issues have to be resolved, coping mechanisms and healing strategies put into place. Treatment has to be more than a bed to detoxify. Wild's strategy of weaving Kara into the initial, central and final moments of the film both resembles surveillance and encourages viewers to view Kara sympathetically and rethink the stereotypes with which they enter the cinema. Although when we first see Kara, she is one of many addicts moved on by the police, the later opportunity to hear what she has to say minimises the likelihood of a one-dimensional response. It has the effect of challenging and overturning stereotypes that viewers might have assumed on first glance.

⁴⁴ I use this term in the same way that "survival sex work" has been used, connoting that participants live a very basic existence without any economic freedom. In these instances, people sell drugs or sex as a survival strategy.

⁴⁵ Smaill, 159.

Equally, Wild challenges assumptions about Mayor Owen. He is a member of the Non Partisan Association, which opposes party politics at the level of civic government, but is usually seen as centre-right, stating, for instance, their preference for free enterprise over government intervention.⁴⁶ She emphasises his affluent lifestyle and enjoyment of luxuries, but later reveals his willingness to sacrifice his position for the cause of harm reduction. He is seen dressing for dinner and dancing with his wife to a swing soundtrack which continues as Wild moves into her first montage of people injecting drugs on the street, the people that Owen later comes to talk to and eventually supports in their desire for a safe place to inject. The continuing swing music might appear to trivialise the suffering of these people. However, the juxtaposed sequence and soundtrack might also be read as a criticism of how business occurs as usual in the city of Vancouver despite the health crisis in the DTES. While most Vancouverites get on with their lives, every day, Wilson claims, a drug user dies of complications somewhere in the city. The title of the film equally implicates all Vancouverites. It is the city that is addicted, not a minority within it. Most of us have addictions, Wild's title reminds us, whether it is to alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, money or power.

Fix: The Story of an Addicted City also gestures towards society's addiction to images: our increasing appetite from making and viewing visual media, taking photographs, watching YouTube videos, relying on surveillance footage. Susan Sontag's suggestion in 1977 that society was full of "image junkies" who need to "have reality confirmed" is even more prescient in the

⁴⁶ "Philosophy", Non Partisan Association, <http://www.npavancouver.ca/philosophy> (accessed March 16, 2011).

new millennium, and has an ironic relevance to Wild's film.⁴⁷ Wild's title tells us that this is the story of an addicted city, and as the film proceeds we realise that, ironically, the city craves images; television news reports are the daily fix. This begs the question: does Wild's film add to the usual diet of images or challenge our unquestioning consumption? In interview, Wild suggests her aims are to reveal subtle yet vital contradictions that force the viewer to reconsider their assumptions and search for new solutions. She believes that with a feature length documentary, "you get a depth and complexity that I'm hoping will throw people down a road they haven't walked. At the end of those 90 minutes they'll go, 'Jeez, what would I do?' I think that's very hard to achieve in the mainstream media".⁴⁸ Her ambition to "throw people down a road they haven't walked" suggests she is not interested in merely confirming assumptions about reality, as Sontag suggests, but wants to introduce viewers to new perspectives. Arguably this is achieved, as Wild's film brings detailed representations of debates about harm reduction to new audiences.

The distribution of *Fix* helped to ensure that Wild's images were not just thought-provoking, but actively brought about debate. She speaks of how she directly involved audiences in the dilemmas of her documentary subjects by going on the road with the film's "stars" – Wilson, Livingston, Owen. In thirty-five cities and towns after weekend matinee performances at mainstream cinemas participants were available to take questions for twenty to thirty minutes. Wild suggests that the cinema became "the village well", an analogy that emphasises the intimate scale of discussions and a reversion to a more

⁴⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1977), 24.

⁴⁸ See Kubik; alternatively, Canada Wild distributed the film in 33 communities, one at a time, according to "Breaking New Ground", 54.

traditional yet more interactive form of communication.⁴⁹ This method of distribution brings a physical human presence to an image-based form of communication, facilitating conversation between those seen on screen and those watching. It shows that technological progress does not necessarily result in the replacement of public space with public image, as theorists such as Paul Virilio have warned.⁵⁰ Here the image and *interactive* space combine to facilitate communication.

Wild, Livingston, Wilson and Owen thereby reclaim the commercial space of multiplex cinemas for public discussion. Wild has commented on the unusual experience of screening her film in large commercial cinemas alongside blockbusters: "It's great when you're really working in the popular culture, you're not buried in some church basement – nothing against church basements – but it's a very exciting place to be".⁵¹ Wild's claim to be working in popular culture is perhaps exaggerated, although one Internet Movie Database reviewer suggests that *Fix* "had ten shows in Kelowna, where, with the exceptions of the late shows, [it] out-sold the opening weekend of X-2: X-Men United".⁵² The cinema became much more than a place to see a spectacle, as Wild invited local health care professionals from whichever city they were screening in, so that there were people with appropriate knowledge on hand to

⁴⁹ Nettie Wild, "On Activist Distribution", video, CitizenShift: Media for Social Change, under "Dossiers", "Rebel With a Cause: Nettie Wild", 2004, <http://citizenshift.org/nettie-wild-activist-distribution> (accessed June 4, 2011).

⁵⁰ "The public image has today replaced the former public spaces in which social communication took place. Avenues and public venues are from now on eclipsed by the screen, by electronic displays, in preview of the 'vision machines' just around the corner". Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 64.

⁵¹ Kubik.

⁵² Brian, "Well Worth It!" International Movie Database, comment posted May 6, 2003, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0332618/usercomments> (accessed May 16 2011). The box office success of *Fix* is reiterated by producer Betty Carson who explains that, although Telefilm's system only reveals the success of films that have simultaneous release in multiple cinemas, "in many instances FIX outperformed every other picture running in the Cineplexes in which it played". "Breaking New Ground", 58.

answer questions about addiction issues, publically or discreetly after the event.⁵³ As a result, the film broadened its scope to address addiction in multiple Canadian cities, dispersing the geographical focus upon the Downtown Eastside by linking it with other diverse communities.

Wild has continued to distribute her film and encourage debate about harm reduction through the online Citizenshift project. Citizenshift, “a multimedia platform dedicated to social change”, was initiated by the NFB in 2004 and “inspired by the nfb's [sic] Challenge for Change”.⁵⁴ The website contains audio and video statements from Wild, with space for comments and discussion inbuilt into each page, although as yet no one has contributed. Wild offers advice on her experience of activist distribution and changing people's opinions through film. *Citizenshift* also features some excerpts from *Fix*, widening the audience of the film to Internet browsers. Those without Internet access, including, no doubt, VANDU members who participated in the film, are excluded from potential conversations. There are a few comments posted next to these excerpts, but these comments are facile opinions rather than considered arguments – my judgement here is part of a larger debate about what constitutes meaningful online engagement. Nonetheless, while Citizenshift operates as a good resource for those interested in social documentary, it appears to be a poor substitute for the community debates

⁵³ "What has become very interesting is that people are willing to talk about it in public. It's just mind boggling when you consider some people reveal for the first time that they're dealing with an addiction, standing up and saying it in a movie house full of strangers or taking a more private moment and sidle up to one of the health care professionals afterwards. The health care professionals that work with us say they're never as busy as the 45 minutes after a *Fix* screening." Wild, interviewed by Kubik.

⁵⁴ “About”, Citizenshift: Media for Social Change, <http://citizenshift.org/about> (accessed March 20 2011). Citizenshift is no longer produced by the NFB but remains in partnership with them. It is independently produced with support from Institut du Nouveau Monde and Canadian Heritage.

prompted by film and video during CFC/SN and in Wild's tour around Canada with *Fix*.

Our City Our Voices: Follow the Eagle and Slo-Pitch

Our City Our Voices is an NFB project that represents the Downtown Eastside but takes a very different approach to Wild's feature. *Our City* is an exercise in self-representation, where NFB filmmakers worked with aboriginal adults living in the neighbourhood so that they could make their own videos and tell the stories about the Downtown Eastside that they considered to be most important. The NFB training is reminiscent of CFC/SN projects and in a further step towards community control of filmmaking the Downtown Eastside participants are credited for creative roles, in contrast to CFC/SN films that tended to credit the NFB staff. The project's emphasis on storytelling suggests continuity with aboriginal oral traditions, in contrast to the colonial and ethnographic origins of documentary, a label John Grierson first applied to Robert Flaherty's film about the South Sea Islands, *Moana* (1926), and that is often associated with his earlier film about Canada's first peoples, *Nanook of the North* (1922).⁵⁵

The foregrounded role of storytelling also reflects the larger project behind *Our City*. It did not come out of a national NFB initiative like CFC/SN, but was proposed as part of Storyscapes, a multimedia initiative devised by the City of Vancouver Aboriginal Social Planner Kamala Todd. Todd is credited as the project director for *Our City* and is of Métis-Cree German heritage, born in

⁵⁵ There is no sign of the word documentary in promotional material for *Our City Our Voices*, although the credits end with the following statement: "Our City Our Voices, Downtown Eastside, is the result of a documentary workshop organized by the National Film Board in collaboration with the Aboriginal Front Door Society".

the Coast Salish territory of Vancouver where she continues to live and work. The aim of Storyscapes is to “increase the visibility and acknowledgement of Aboriginal presence in Vancouver”. Storyscapes commissioned public art to acknowledge the traditional Coastal Salish presence in Vancouver and facilitated story gathering and sharing in Gastown, Kitsilano and Chinatown (involving both First Nations and Chinese residents). Additionally, Storyscapes included two *Our City Our Voices* video and storytelling workshops in collaboration with professional film and television producers. The first is an oral history project where aboriginal youth were taught media skills so that they can interview and record elders from their community, and the second – the focus of this chapter – is a collaboration between the NFB and the Aboriginal Front Door to provide Downtown Eastside adults with “training in video production [and] story development, to create two videos about their community through their eyes”.⁵⁶ The metaphor “through their eyes” emphasises the situated perspective of the video stories and the idea that this is an interactive experience rather than a spectacle. We are invited to look through the eyes of participants – the cast and crew are from the same community and have devised the project together – instead of looking at the subjects of an outsider’s representation.

Instead of pursuing “that elusive thing called truth” through distance and balance, as Wild claims to do, *Our City Our Voices* offers an embodied perspective of residents on the Downtown Eastside. The project facilitates the articulation of local experiences, echoing Donna Haraway’s advocacy of “partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of

⁵⁶ “Multi-Media Art”, Vancouver Storyscapes, 2006, <http://www.storyscapes.ca/multimedia.htm> (accessed March 28 2011).

connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology”.⁵⁷ With analysis of these videos I turn towards self-representations of the neighbourhood, which are not widely distributed or associated with a relatively well-known authorial figure, but which I value in accordance with a feminist standpoint perspective that suggests,

knowledge articulated from the standpoint of those excluded from ruling relations of power is particularly important. Because of the exclusion, the knowledge that is offered from that excluded position is quite different to that current within the ethical and ideological systems of a society and its culture, and is therefore a source of assessment and potential change and renewal.⁵⁸

I argue that these self-representations work self-consciously to counter negative and “poornographic” images of the Downtown Eastside, provoking reassessment, change and renewal, in the case of *Our City Our Voices*, through aboriginal teachings and community support.

The facilitation of self-representation in marginalised communities demonstrated in *Our City Our Voices* might be compared with the earlier efforts of NFB CFC/SN filmmakers. Ezra Winton and Jason Garrison note that the NFB CFC/SN scheme (1967-1980) targeted aboriginal communities for film production, distribution and support. *Our City* bears resemblance to an NFB and Company of Young Canadians (CYC) initiative that ran from 1968 until 1971, the National Indian Training Program (NITP). Seven young aboriginal people were trained in filmmaking techniques so that they might make their own films, although Winton and Garrison suggest that there was a lack of guidance about negotiating funding structures of the National Film Board, which left them reliant on NFB staff to facilitate future projects,

⁵⁷ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”, 191.

⁵⁸ Lynette Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing: Situated Textualities in Science, Computing and the Arts*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 2.

particularly once the CYC funding ran out. Thus, there was no scope for unplanned film initiatives stemming from the indigenous crew, with one exception: when the NFB managed, at short notice, to mobilise the necessary crew and equipment to capture a blockade of a road linking Canada with the U.S. on the Akwesasne Mohawk reserve, prompted by a telephone call from young Mohawk activist and filmmaker Mike Mitchell. This footage was used to make *You Are on Indian Land* (1969.) Although one of the Squamish young people participating in the first *Our City* project suggests “I learned so much and I know I can take those skills and bring them back to my community”, it is unclear at this stage whether *Our City* has trained its participants in organising and facilitating future video projects.⁵⁹

In contrast to *Our City*, which credits community participants in creative and technical roles, non-aboriginal NFB staff members are the credited crew for most of the films made during the CFC/SN programme. Even *You Are on Indian Land*, which Winton and Garrison suggest should be recorded as a directorial collaboration between Mort Ransen and Mike Mitchell, is officially only attributed to Ransen, the NFB filmmaker, despite the centrality of Mitchell’s role in the creation and post-production of the film.⁶⁰ *You Are on Indian Land* was, even so, a seminal film in that the story was told from an aboriginal perspective and narrated by an aboriginal voice.⁶¹ Forty years on, there are a considerable number of successful and autonomous aboriginal filmmakers and production companies. Since 1991, Television Northern

⁵⁹ “Our City Our Voices: First Story Interview”, YouTube video file posted by DGA productions, March 11, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I05DCo6mtPE> (accessed March 18 2011).

⁶⁰ Winton and Garrison, 414.

⁶¹ The late sixties and early seventies proved important times for First Nations’ participation in film. After being employed as an adviser in 1967, Abenaki singer and storyteller Alanis Obomsawin made her first shorts for the NFB in 1971, the beginning of a lengthy filmmaking career making political documentaries focusing on aboriginal life in Canada.

Canada (TVNC) and its replacement, the more extensive Aboriginal Peoples Network Television (APTN, 1999), have provided a distribution outlet for indigenous television and film.⁶²

Nonetheless, First Nations remain underrepresented on film. Todd's development of the Storyscapes project suggests that in the forty years since CFC/SN and the NITP, despite development of smaller, simpler and cheaper digital devices for film and video production, there are still First Nations communities that lack access to media and communications training and equipment, and there remains a large imbalance in aboriginal visibility both in front of and behind the camera. John Grierson had been optimistic in 1972, suggesting "the cost of equipment now puts the 8mm revolution within the reach of most groups and associations – at least in North America".⁶³ However, pervasive poverty on reserves, and in urban areas often largely inhabited by First Peoples, means that that technological advances are still out of reach for many communities. The digital divide persists in Vancouver where, in the DTES, there are "about 10,000 residents who can afford no more than \$375 a month for rent, as well as about 700 homeless people".⁶⁴ These under-housed populations are unlikely to benefit from the democratising effects of the Internet individually. Neighbourhood communications and media infrastructure must be improved and collaboration encouraged, and while these are more

⁶² Doris Baltruschat, "Television and Canada's Aboriginal Communities: Seeking Opportunities through Traditional Storytelling and Digital Technologies" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 29, no.1 (2004), <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/viewArticle/1403/1495> (accessed June 4, 2011).

⁶³ Grierson, 65.

⁶⁴ Wendy Pedersen and Jean Swanson, "Pushed Out: Escalating Rents in the Downtown Eastside" Carnegie Community Action Project, September 2010, 1, <http://ccapvancouver.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/ccaphotelreportweb.pdf> (accessed June 4, 2011).

likely to engage the community if the impetus comes from within, outside government projects might play a crucial role.

The NFB *Our City* website has a page of resources for “Do It Yourself” storytellers, which perhaps encourages filmmaking activity independently of the organisation. However, while there are general links to funding bodies and guidelines for interviewing, gathering oral histories and documenting and presenting cultural knowledge, there is no comprehensive guide to video storytelling, and, of course, the use of the website for encouraging self-representation depends on Internet access, thus diminishing its reach to the most marginalised members of society. If these online resources are lacking, the involvement of Vancouver media organisations in *Our City Our Voices* potentially provides opportunities for involvement in future projects. Unlike the National Indian Training Program that left trainees dependent on distant NFB staff for future support, the *Our City* project involved locally-based staff with connections to Vancouver’s established indigenous video-arts community. Vancouver’s Indigenous Media Arts Group (IMAG) and its yearly Aboriginal Film and Video Festival, for instance, was founded in 1998.⁶⁵ T’Uty’Tanat-Cease Wyss, of the Squamish nation, was a camera mentor for *Our City*. She has been creating innovative video works in Vancouver since 1992 and is the subject of *Indigenous Plant Diva* (2008), a short NFB film made by Kamala Todd, project director of *Our City*. In 2005, Jayce Salloum, a video artist of Lebanese heritage, and Warren Wyss, brother of T’Uty’Tanat-Cease, were among the founding members of the Downtown Eastside-based collective

⁶⁵ For more information on the work of IMAG: Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, and Valerie Raoul *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 414; Malcolm Van Deist, “An Interview with Curator Cleo Reese” *First Nations Drum: Canada’s National Native Newspaper* April 2004, <http://firstnationsdrum.com/2004/04/an-interview-with-curator-cleo-reese/> (accessed March 18, 2011).

desmedia (downtown eastside media) that runs workshops in the neighbourhood for people to learn video and painting techniques.⁶⁶

In a video interview about *Our City*, Kamala Todd refers to an anonymous quotation: “I don’t know who I am, until I know what stories I belong to”. She goes on to add that the aim of the project is to help people find the stories they belong to and the “stories and oral histories of their land”.⁶⁷

Vancouver was built on land traditionally inhabited by the Coast Salish cultural group, and Storyscapes initiatives work with the Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam and Squamish nations on their reserves and in the city. *Follow the Eagle* and *Slo-Pitch*, however, focus on Vancouver’s urban aboriginal community, and highlight the Downtown Eastside as a place where diverse First Peoples live together.⁶⁸ Many of the people featured in the videos have come from other parts of the country but nonetheless stress the importance of affirming their connection to the Vancouver landscape through multimedia representations. Stories, identity, history and land are connected in this initiative. The name for the project, Storyscapes, unites the notion of telling stories with “scape”, a view of scenery. The website notes that seeing oneself reflected in the landscape helps create a stronger sense of place and belonging to one’s environment; the video initiatives imply that seeing oneself reflected in the *screenscape* is equally important.

⁶⁶ Mike Hoolboom, “From Lebanon to Kelowna: an interview with Jayce Salloum” Mike Hoolboom, under “Writings on Artists”, <http://www.mikehoolboom.com/r2/artist.php?artist=102> (accessed March 18, 2011). See also Jayce Salloum and T’Uty’Tanat-Cease Wyss, “Swimming Upstream / Fragments from a Conversation”, in *Damp: Contemporary Vancouver Media Arts*, Oliver Hockenholl and Alex Mckenzie, eds. (Vancouver: Anvil Press, 2008), 70.

⁶⁷ “Our City Our Voices: First Story Interview”, 1.25.

⁶⁸ The credits at the end of *Slo-Pitch* thank the host nations, using the Coast Salish word: “Hychka to the Coast Salish people of the Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam and Squamish nations for sharing their home with us”.

The screen-storyscapes created by Lorraine Fox, David Moosetail, Vera Wabegijig, Louise Lagimodiere and Mary Suchell in *Follow the Eagle* and *Slo-Pitch* make visible First Nations communities in the Downtown Eastside. Many representations have all but erased First Nations from Downtown Eastside screenscapes and storyscapes:

Anyone passing through inner-city Vancouver on foot, on a bus, or in a car cannot help but SEE, in a literal sense, the concentration of Aboriginal people here. For most urban Canadians, and visitors from elsewhere, this is an unusual and often surprising visual experience on which they feel compelled to remark. Even so, many representations of this and other inner-city neighborhoods in Western Canada are characterized by a marked invisibility of Aboriginal people, and women in particular.⁶⁹

Our City counters mainstream masking of First Nations presence and populates the screen with aboriginal men and women of all ages. Brian Arrance, the DTES resident whose story *Slo-Pitch* tells, suggests the slo-pitch team is ninety percent aboriginal: the percentage of people seen in the two *Our City* videos is comparable. *Follow the Eagle* and *Slo-Pitch* strengthen the links between aboriginal people and this neighbourhood by concentrating on locations of importance to the community. These include the Aboriginal Front Door, a drop-in centre and the location of the Elders-in-Training programme, Oppenheimer Park, where the slo-pitch league meets, and CRAB Park, where two elders are interviewed.

Follow the Eagle tells the story of the Aboriginal Front Door Elders-in-training project and three of the participants (all introduced by name, nation and role through subtitles): Donna Whonnock, Kwagiulth, Elder in Training; John Springstorm Thomas, Dene, Pipe Carrier and Oliver Munro, Lytton,

⁶⁹ Dara Culhane, "Their Spirits Live within Us: Aboriginal Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver Emerging into Visibility" *American Indian Quarterly* 27, no. 3 and 4 (Summer and Fall 2003): 593.

Elder. Aline LaFlamme, Métis, Elders Programme Facilitator is also interviewed. Aline LaFlamme explains what the Elders Programme involves, while Whonnock, Thomas and Munro talk about their own experiences in the programme and their past struggles with living on the streets, low self-esteem and substance abuse. Shots of the neighbourhood and images of activities occurring at the Aboriginal Front Door are interspersed with their personal stories of living in the DTES and engaging with the Aboriginal Front Door. The film subsequently addresses the role of the Elders in engaging First Nations young people of the Downtown Eastside. There are montages of portraits of aboriginal children and young adults either side of young artist, D J Norris, explaining what he has learnt from his participation at the Aboriginal Front Door. Thomas also talks about his experiences as the young people's pipe carrier. One by one, the four adults talk about their relationship with place, the Downtown Eastside, and the role of the Elders project in the community. The video closes with images of a First Nations celebration at Crab Park, then shots of the city, the street and finally, the entrance to the Aboriginal Front Door.

Slo-Pitch tells the story of Brian Arrance, a Cree man born in Winnipeg, Manitoba but a resident of the Downtown Eastside for thirty years, and involved with the Downtown Eastside slo-pitch league for approximately twenty-five years. Arrance talks about the importance of the slo-pitch league for both the community and his own personal well-being. The film begins with an establishing shot of the city, which zooms in on the red W sign of the former Woodward's department store before cutting to Brian in his apartment. In a voice-over, Arrance introduces himself as we see him leaving his apartment

and heading out to play baseball. Images of the league playing are juxtaposed with Arrance talking and walking around the Downtown Eastside. We are introduced to some of the other members of the league: each is shown alongside text telling us their name and role on the league, for instance, Norm Dennis, Coach and Umpire. Arrance talks about his diagnosis as HIV-positive and his subsequent “self-pity party”. It was at this point he began to take drugs and dropped out of the league. He tells us about how members of the league were like a family to him, helping him to come to terms with his diagnosis. He and other league members discuss a particularly close relationship between the Downtown Eastside league and a San Francisco league while the video reveals them playing slo-pitch and enjoying social time together. The film ends with Arrance talking about the league as his “field of dreams” and smiling.

The videos connect geographical scales of social life and place on several levels: the protagonists talk of the individual, the family, community and bands as well as the drop-in centre, the beach, the street, the neighbourhood and the city. Moreover, *Follow the Eagle* gestures towards a wider geographical collaboration. LaFlamme suggests, “We need our voice, we all have a song in us, and our own song is what we have to find and we have to sing it, individually, as a family, as a clan, as nations, as people together”. Although the videos are set entirely in the Downtown Eastside, trajectories in and out of the neighbourhood are described: in *Follow the Eagle*, Munro speaks of people coming to the Downtown Eastside from other parts of the country and of how the Aboriginal Front Door provides an opportunity for people to learn one another’s protocols so that they can visit with other bands and tribes with awareness of their particular customs. In *Slo-Pitch* the

relationship with the San Francisco league is foregrounded. The Downtown Eastside is represented as an important node in a web of communities rather than a “ghetto” which residents have little hope of leaving.⁷⁰

The videos emphasise that people choose to live and stay in the Downtown Eastside because of deep connections to the community and to the land on which it lies. Although the protagonists of both films talk about their earlier experiences of suffering, they also note that the Downtown Eastside was where they found the community that could help them heal. In *Follow the Eagle*, Whonnock suggests that on arrival, “I finally felt I’d found a place where people understood me because they were in a lot of pain too, same as I was”. Thomas states simply that the neighbourhood is “where our relatives live, where our people live”. Echoing this, LaFlamme points out that the Downtown Eastside “represents the largest unregistered reserve in Canada”. By this she means, presumably, that it is home to the largest First Nations population outside of a reserve. Indeed, of the 16 000 people living in the Downtown Eastside, “40 per cent are estimated to be aboriginal”.⁷¹ This has

⁷⁰ I use “ghetto” in the sense of “an isolated or segregated group, community, or area” rather than a racial ghetto. Although the percentage of aboriginal people in the neighbourhood is high, it is not a racial ghetto. There are people of many races living in this neighbourhood. However, some have suggested that the poor are ghettoized in the Downtown Eastside.

“ghetto, n.”, OED Online, March 2011, Oxford University Press, <http://oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/78056> (accessed June 04, 2011).

⁷¹ Leslie Robertson and Dara Culhane, *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2005), 16. I should note that Robertson and Culhane do not cite their source for this information and that different sources give divergent figures for the percentage of Downtown Eastside residents of aboriginal heritage. The same figure of 40% is suggested in Cecilia Benoit, Dena Carroll and Munaza Chaudhry, “In Search of a Healing Place: Aboriginal Women in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside” *Social Science and Medicine* 56 (2003): 821, <http://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~hallmanb/files/GEOG4290-readings-pdf/benoit-carroll-choudhry-2003.pdf> (accessed July 10, 2011). These authors cite a 1999 article in First Nations Newspaper *Katou News*. Pivot Legal Society, a legal advocacy organisation based in the neighbourhood, suggests 30% on its site, but does not cite a source: “Pivot Legal Society & Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside”, <http://www.pivotlegal.org/dtes.htm> (accessed March 19, 2011). Meanwhile, basing his estimates on the 2006 census in his 2009 article for the *Globe and Mail*, Patrick Brethour suggests only 14 % of the area’s residents are of aboriginal descent. The difference in estimates may be attributable to a number of factors: fluctuations in demographic since 1999, difficulties in estimating homeless or no fixed address

led to First Nations calling the Downtown Eastside an unofficial reserve, or “the urban rez”, as I noted in my first chapter.

In her explanation of the importance of the Elders Programme, Aline LaFlamme makes an important societal critique unacknowledged by *Fix*.⁷² Although reasons for using drugs are diverse and complex, substance abuse amongst First Nations might be connected with their experience as a colonised people in Canada. In *Follow the Eagle* LaFlamme explains the struggles of many First Nations in the Downtown Eastside through the historical context of colonial oppression: “We’re dealing with many attempts at genocide, and we’re staggering around under the load of multiple traumas”. A history of colonial hate and abuse has resulted in self-hatred among some First Nations. Whonnock speaks of how for a long time she did not like being First Nations because as a child she was called “a piece of garbage, darn Indian and I don’t want to say all the other names”. Coming to the Downtown Eastside and engaging with the Aboriginal Front Door taught her how to feel proud of her identity and accept her own people again.

Other than these verbal testimonies there are no representations of pain or suffering in *Our City* as there is in *Fix*, where the addicted body is a spectacle intended to shock. *Our City* focuses on healing processes rather than the damaged bodies of Downtown Eastside residents. Although in many ways it breaks down stereotypes about drug users, *Fix*’s explicit focus on the bodies of drug users might be seen as objectifying and exoticising addicts, which is

inhabitants, differences in criteria for judging aboriginal identification, i.e. status cards versus self-identification, and differences in the boundaries of the DTES. Patrick Brethour, “Exclusive demographic picture” *Globe and Mail* February 13, 2009,

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/archives/article971243.ece> (accessed March 19, 2011).

⁷² Like *Through a Blue Lens*, *Fix* elides criticism of colonialism by not foregrounding First Peoples’ substance abuse. Wild’s principle protagonist, Dean Wilson, is white, although Kara, who Wild interviews about her addiction, appears as though she might have a First Nations heritage.

particularly problematic when the featured drug users belong to a racial minority that is already subject to negative stereotyping. It might in turn encourage the formal and informal surveillance of professionals and the general public concerned about public health and crime. *Our City*, in contrast, recognises that First Peoples have been subjected to negative representations and their impact for too long. The ethos of the videos seems to be in common with that of video artist T’Uty’Tanat-Cease Wyss, who states,

I’m trying to resolve the way aboriginal people are seen [...] As aboriginal people we’ve been forced to accept the Hollywood Indian and everything in the newspapers about stealing the resources, we’re always represented as thieves and whores, we’re just trash [...] There’s just as much internal racism in native people today because of all the negative media stereotypes we’ve been forced to digest. My videowork could be seen as a big cup of healing tea, getting rid of all the crap you didn’t need to think about Indian People.⁷³

Our City has similar aims to counter negative stereotypes, challenging surveillance (in its broadest sense) by changing the way non-native viewers look at First Nations, and how First Nations look at themselves, in the Downtown Eastside. Such cultural products help non-native viewers to recognise First Nations in the DTES as friends, teammates (in *Slo-Pitch*) and cultural and community leaders (in *Follow the Eagle*).

The positive representations of family and community in the Downtown Eastside conversely suggest a notion of benevolent surveillance, as individuals such as Arrance have benefited from the community’s observation of, and intervention in, his life in times of need. Other league members talk about the slo-pitch league as a means of keeping young people “that could have gone astray [...] on a tight rein” so that they don’t get involved with crime or drugs. Moreover, *Follow the Eagle* invokes a benevolent mode of looking and

⁷³ Salloum and Wyss, 71-73.

monitoring as Elders are positioned as the caretakers of the community. LaFlamme explains the title of the video: “We have that teaching that tells us how the community has to be and it is following the eagle, really, and [the eagle] is the ones with the white hair, that’s the white hair of the elders. They have to lead the way: it is the eyes of the elders that can see a long way because of their long lives”. The metaphor emphasises the enhanced perception of the eagle and the elders. As eagles have a bird’s-eye view of the city and are renowned for their excellent eyesight, elders have watched and learnt from their own lives and the people in their community so that they can pass on instructions to younger generations about how to live. Their observation might be seen as a form of benevolent surveillance. Moreover, the eagle itself is sometimes seen as a creature that watches over the aboriginal population in the Downtown Eastside.⁷⁴

Formally, the videos emphasise the importance of looking and listening. As its title suggests, *Our City Our Voices* emphasises the spoken over the seen, despite the visual medium: the words of the participants are the primary storytelling strategy, rather than what we see. Nonetheless, the images that accompany the stories in *Follow the Eagle* and *Slo-Pitch* convey a message. Firstly, they locate the speaker in the “storyscape” through interviews in locations of personal significance: Arrance in Oppenheimer Park in *Slo-Pitch* and Whonnock in CRAB Park in *Follow the Eagle*. The films situate and map the DTES through recognisable intersections and buildings such as the

⁷⁴ For instance, the presence of eagles during the March for the Missing and Murdered Women of Vancouver is, according to Carlito Pueblo, seen as symbolic of the prayers of the community being transferred to the Gods. Carlito Pueblo, “Eagles Soar above Vancouver march for murdered and missing women” *The Georgia Straight* February 14, 2010, <http://www.straight.com/article-289757/vancouver/eagles-soar-above-vancouver-march-murdered-and-missing-women> (accessed March 19, 2010).

Carnegie Centre, or signs like that of the Balmoral Hotel. At the beginning of *Slo-Pitch* the camera zooms in on the Woodward's sign in a conventional establishing shot, contextualising the Downtown Eastside in the history and geography of the wider city. *Follow the Eagle* begins with Whonnock talking, rather than with an establishing shot, but ends with a series of shots that move out from the Aboriginal Front Door, to the street, and up to an eagle's-eye view of the neighbourhood, reversing the conventions of the usual establishing shot. This has the effect of emphasising the Aboriginal Front Door as at the centre of a larger healing process.

Secondly, the overall palette of *Our City* is bright and colourful, thus the visual form of the project is crucial for emphasising optimism. The films show a sunny summery Vancouver: green trees and parkland, deep blue skies and ocean views represent the beauty of the DTES and the presence of nature amongst the concrete. Even when Thomas talks about the "cement walls, cement floors" the video shows a large attractive mural and colourful shop fronts. *Our City* offers a deliberate counter to stereotypes of the inner city and particularly the Downtown Eastside. As Leslie Robertson and Dara Culhane suggest, many visual representations of the Downtown Eastside fail to show the positive, pleasant aspects of the neighbourhood: playgrounds, window boxes and murals "announce that the Downtown Eastside is home for many – sometimes briefly, sometimes for a lifetime". For instance, while *Da Vinci's Inquest* gestures towards the community spirit and political and social work that occurs in the neighbourhood, it more often than not focuses on crime and illness. Similarly, *Fix* shows activism, commitment and care for human life and

health, but the images of pain and suffering do not paint a picture of a pleasant place to be.

Our City, in contrast, shows some of the neighbourhood's best qualities, and represents its people, young and old, as vibrant, warm and committed to improving their own lives and the lives of others. It is not only the neighbourhood itself that is colourful but also the clothes and immediate surroundings of the film's subjects, the deep shades symbolising their emotional strength. In *Follow the Eagle*, purple flowers frame Whonnock as she talks to the camera and Munro wears a purple hat and royal blue lined jacket. Thomas wears a red bandana and LaFlamme wears a pink top. The sequences that show young people wearing various uniforms or traditional style native regalia (fancy dancer costumes or feathers) are also a particularly colourful part of the film. In *Slo-Pitch* red baseball jerseys and Arrance's blue cap continue the vivid aesthetic. In both films characters pass by the red lampposts and colourful shop fronts of Chinatown. Both Munro in *Follow the Eagle* and Arrance in *Slo-pitch* roll the ball in the mouth of the lions at the Chinatown gateway, an action that is said to bring good luck. This playful parallel between the two videos further emphasises the focus on positivity and hope that is symbolised by the bright colour palette. It also further expands the theme of cultural hybridity: the spirit of sharing traditions between various First Nations appears to extend to non-indigenous minority cultures living in the same area. The film represents the space of the Downtown Eastside as a cultural palimpsest.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ The intersection of Chinese and First Nations culture is further explored in another branch of the Storyscapes initiative, Storyscapes Chinatown. "Storyscapes Chinatown" Vancouver Storyscapes, 2006, <http://www.storyscapes.ca/chinatown.htm> (accessed April 20, 2011).

In *Follow the Eagle*, Thomas stresses the importance of nature in an urban environment of “cement walls, cement floors, cement ceilings. It’s hard to connect with your energies sometimes when you’re in the city”. He suggests that people must have access “to a place where it’s peaceful and natural so that they can deal with themselves, their inner selves, go deep down inside and let go of some of the things we carry with us. There’s no reason to carry so much baggage with us”. The parks and recreational places seen in this film are signalled as vital spaces for the well-being of neighbourhood residents. There is a narrative of ownership in the images of the Downtown Eastside that contrasts with narratives of ownership articulated in *Fix*, where Bryce Rositch and the Community Alliance, Chinatown residents, and VANDU members all assert their rights to the city and community through protest. *Our City* quietly asks viewers to listen and remember their claim and their priorities. It also shows the meaningful engagement and enjoyment that occurs in Downtown Eastside spaces such as Oppenheimer Park in *Slo-Pitch*, and CRAB Park at the end of *Follow the Eagle*.

Although it is not explicit in the videos, viewers familiar with the Downtown Eastside will recognise CRAB Park as a location that local residents fought hard to create and retain access to. CRAB is the local name for the recreational area – officially referred to as Portside Park – and stands for “Create a Real Available Beach”. This park was once a landfill site but activists in the early 1980s recognised the potential of this space as a park.⁷⁶ They fought to claim it as a local commons and develop a non-commercial park,

⁷⁶ Sean Condon and Kevin Hollett, “A People’s History of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside” *Megaphone* 51, March 15, 2010, http://www.megaphonemagazine.com/legacy/content/peoples_history_downtown_eastside.html 1 (accessed March 19, 2011).

often citing aboriginal entitlement to the land as a justification for their claim.

As Nick Blomley writes,

The Waterfront itself served as a native encampment in precolonial and early colonial times, and is presently claimed by at least two First Nations. It is not surprising, then, that the connections between historic native title and contemporary entitlements were clearly defined. One pro-CRAB article was headed with a sketch of “Native people encamped at proposed CRAB beach park site in 1896” juxtaposed with a photo of the Second Annual CRAB Beach Party.⁷⁷

Vancouver Port Corporation (VPC) eventually created the park as part of an agreement with the City of Vancouver. Working against assumptions that the park is misused – Blomley quotes a VPC employee who claims “the hookers take their johns down there at night” – *Follow the Eagle* shows that the contemporary First Nations population of the Downtown Eastside are making good use of the park for family and community events and that, in its quieter moments, it provides a vital space for contemplation and communion with nature for Downtown Eastside residents.⁷⁸

Like Wild, the directors of *Our City* include scenes of Downtown Eastside streets busy with people. Like the street scenes in *Da Vinci's Inquest* and *Fix*, this footage potentially operates as a form of surveillance, providing a document that fixes people in a certain place. Even though the film crew are residents, and thus more likely to be sensitive to the privacy of their neighbours, the project nonetheless adds to the number of film crews on the streets of the DTES, and to the images of its residents in distribution. Like any other footage taken without entirely clearing the streets, *Our City* risks capturing someone who does not want to appear on video. The chances of this are minimised by shooting from a distance or from behind, showing people's

⁷⁷ Nick Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 59.

⁷⁸ Blomley, 47.

backs but not revealing their faces. In *Slo-Pitch* a large number of baseball players and spectators are featured in the film but one presumes these are all informed of the camera's presence. Moreover, in contrast to the anonymous individuals caught by Wild's camera and the women in Lincoln Clarke's *Heroines*, *Slo-Pitch* makes a point of introducing seven of the people involved in the league by name and role, and has them tell their story of what the league means to them. This has the effect of legitimising each participant, emphasising that they are valuable members of their community and of society. Given pervasive negative stereotyping of the neighbourhood and aboriginal people, these introductions to individuals and families through the camera send an important message to viewers that the Downtown Eastside is about pride rather than shame and about presenting oneself on camera and celebrating personal and community stories rather than being caught by surveillance.

In *Our City* there is no representation of erratic behaviour – the twitching and turning of drug users – as there is in Wild's film. The only representation of drug use is a shot of syringes lying in an alleyway, as Arrance relates his period of drug use in *Slo-Pitch*. Crucially, Arrance is presented in good health, his body is not broken by drug use but in athletic condition: "Just last week, I went up to bat three times, hit a double, a home run and a triple. Not bad for 48 when you've got HIV". Arrance suggests that the slo-pitch league functions as harm reduction for him, suggesting the acceptance of the notion of harm reduction as a crucial element of drugs policy that has taken on its own meanings for drug users and former users living in the community. Harm reduction for Arrance goes beyond safe injection sites to social inclusion and support. Rather than dwelling on Brian's past and the pervasive problem of

substance abuse in the DTES, *Slo-Pitch* is concerned with how individuals can move on from drug use and live with HIV.

In stark contrast to Wild's montages of drug use set to the ironic soundtracks of big band jazz and the national anthem, *Follow the Eagle* features two montages accompanied by upbeat – non-ironic – instrumental music. These show children and young adults, respectively, in different uniforms and dress – police, army, and scouting uniforms, casual clothes, First Nations designs and fancy dancer costume. These images serve to counter reductive stereotypes, emphasising that families live in the Downtown Eastside and that aboriginal residents participate in society in a multitude of ways. The portrait compilations perhaps reference colonial portraits of noble savages, which were often staged to remove any evidence of contact and thus preserve an image of the past.⁷⁹ Moreover, as Wyss notes, the purpose of photographers such as Edward Curtis “was to photograph all the native people before we disappeared, but we didn't [...] we just keep coming back, we keep re-emerging”.⁸⁰ *Follow the Eagle* parodies such images and reclaims the portrait – significantly in moving, rather than still, pictures – for self-representation of First Nations re-emergence. The video shows how aboriginal people in the city are constantly evolving and adapting their traditional teachings to life in the twenty-first century.

In contrast to *Fix*, *Our City* had no theatrical release. However, the aims of the project were very different from Wild's, focusing on local development and empowerment rather than a national campaign. *Our City* arguably followed

⁷⁹ Shamoan Zamir writes of how Edward S. Curtis staged many of his images. Shamoan Zamir, “Native Agency and the Making of The North American Indian: Alexander B. Upshaw and Edward S. Curtis” *The American Indian Quarterly*, 31, no. 4, Fall 2007, 630.

⁸⁰ Salloum and Wyss, 74.

an NFB model pioneered by CFC/SN, where films were made for use within a particular community rather than seen solely as a medium for mass distribution.⁸¹ Thus, rather than being kept out of distribution until a theatrical or television release was organised, George Stoney, head of the CFC/SN, arranged for *You Are on Indian Land* to be released for grassroots screenings. It thus aided communication within the community before being released to the general public.⁸² Similarly, *Follow the Eagle* and *Slo-Pitch* were previewed in the Downtown Eastside at the 2004 Heart of the City Festival.⁸³ They subsequently reached a wider audience through event screenings and DVD circulation. Vancouver weekly newspaper *The Georgia Straight* notes that *Our City* was “world premiered” at Vancouver’s Aboriginal film and video festival, *IMAGEnation*, in 2006. The *Our City* project was also introduced during an indigenous media panel on “Picturing Ourselves: Video as Tool for Defining Community” when the World Urban Forum was held in Vancouver in 2006.

At this event, Kamala Todd also introduced her *Indigenous City* initiative, which appears to have overlapping aims with Storyscapes in its intention to “affirm the important place of Aboriginal people in the city”.⁸⁴ Todd’s short video introducing *Indigenous City* to the World Urban Forum contains the message: “The teachings and knowledge of how to live sustainably

⁸¹ Deirdre Boyle, “O, Canada! George Stoney’s Challenge” in *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada*, eds Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker and Ezra Winton, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), 316-317.

⁸² Winton and Garrison write that the film was subsequently one of Challenge for Change’s most popular films: “it was booked 1, 199 times across Canada and had been on TV a total of forty-five times [before 1999], more than all but three other CFC/SN films”, 419.

⁸³ “Multi-Media Art”; Heart of the City is a festival for the arts, social action and cultural diversity and has been held annually in the neighbourhood since 2004, for more information, see: <http://www.heartofthecityfestival.com/> (accessed May 19, 2011).

⁸⁴ Johnny Darrel, “Indigenous City”, 4th Portal Design blog, entry posted on Monday, June 05, 2006, <http://4ourthportaldesign.blogspot.com/2006/04/indigenous-city.html> (accessed June 4, 2011).

in the city are already here. They have always been here”.⁸⁵ The implication of this message shown at this international event is that the world might learn from aboriginal teachings. This reason for paying attention to the Downtown Eastside is an important contrast to the usual scrutiny in relation to health issues and crime. Such opportunities for screenings enable global cross-community conversation about what can be learnt from Vancouver’s aboriginal people. The availability of *Our City* from Goodminds – “a Native-owned and operated business located on the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory in Ontario” which specialises in aboriginal educational resources – in addition to the National Film Board store, suggests that the video is also circulated in educational institutions and indigenous organisations.⁸⁶ Moreover, high-profile event screenings like that of the World Urban Forum potentially attract audiences that did not know they were looking for these screen stories.

It is unclear whether the Storyscapes and *Our City* initiatives are ongoing funded projects. The Storyscapes website has not been updated since 2006, lacking any record of the completed *Our City* DVD. It is possible, however, that the work of Storyscapes may continue through, or as part of, new projects such as Indigenous City and Aboriginal Media Lab (AML), both initiated in 2006.⁸⁷ The Aboriginal Media Lab is the brainchild of Kamala Todd’s mother and acclaimed filmmaker, Loretta Sarah Todd, and is funded by a number of academic bodies. However, this too has an unfinished website. The incomplete documentation of these media projects tells a story of

⁸⁵ Darrel.

⁸⁶ “Good Minds: First Nations, Inuit and Metis Educational Resources”, <http://www.goodminds.com/homepage.htm> (accessed May 19, 2011); “*Our City Our Voices: Follow the Eagle and Slo-Pitch*” NFB: *Our Collection* <http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=51713> (accessed May 19, 2011).

⁸⁷ See Darrel and “Demonstration Projects: Storyscapes” Aboriginal Media Lab, <http://www.aboriginalmedialab.com/web/> (accessed July 9, 2011).

inadequate or inconsistent funding that is all too common in the arts today. Angela Piccini's research suggests that Kamala Todd failed to gain funding for an aboriginal project during the Olympics, despite applying to participate in two initiatives. Piccini observes the invisibility of Vancouver-specific aboriginal art in the Cultural Olympiad and City of Vancouver initiatives during this period.⁸⁸ Given the high-profile participation of the Four Host First Nations (FHFN) in the Olympic preparations and the use of indigenous symbols as mascots, one might wonder if VANOC were really committed to First Nations involvement or whether liaison with the FHFN was merely a token gesture. With the controversial art cuts by the British Columbia provincial government prior to and since the Olympics, the May 2011 election of a majority Conservative federal government, and with the ongoing impact of the global recession, it is doubtful what funding will be available for aboriginal arts initiatives in the near future.

Conclusion

In order to conclude this chapter, it is useful to return to the term “poornography”, developed by a poverty worker in Vancouver and used in a Downtown Eastside newsletter to describe the documentary film *Through a Blue Lens*. *Fix* and *Our City* seem to be aware of discourse around “poornographic”, or otherwise voyeuristic or exploitative representations: Wild declares her determination not to make another film about “how God-awful the Downtown Eastside is”, and *Our City* features an overwhelmingly positive representation of the neighbourhood. *Fix* risks voyeurism by representing drug

⁸⁸ Angela Piccini, “Screening the City: Vancouver 2010 and Documentary Practice”, (lecture, Vivo Media Arts, Vancouver, Monday February 15, 2010).

users and dealers in vulnerable moments. It highlights the connections between poverty and drug use in the neighbourhood, yet avoids “poornography” by foregrounding the activism, rather than the victimhood, of residents. *Our City* avoids “poornography” by not focusing on the poverty so infamously associated with the neighbourhood. Instead it focuses on the riches of the community: the supportive environments of the Aboriginal Front Door and the slo-pitch league, the beauty of the neighbourhood’s parks and the diversity of cultures and age groups living in the neighbourhood.

Both *Fix* and *Our City*, while focusing on the Downtown Eastside, link the neighbourhood with larger histories and geographies, emphasising that the location should not be seen as contained or isolated but always connected with actions outside the neighbourhood, and as an important part of larger communities and cultures. In this respect neither *Fix* nor *Our City* imply that the neighbourhood requires charity from outside as is usually requested in “poornography”. Indeed, these screen stories complicate the notion of inside and outside and begin conversations that might be continued within the locality and further afield, in cinema and festival settings and potentially online.

The strategies used to avoid a “poornographic” representation of the Downtown Eastside also work to challenge surveillance of the neighbourhood. By encouraging us to listen to various stories of the Downtown Eastside, rather than making judgements based purely on what we see, both texts refute suggestions that increased monitoring and control of the neighbourhood is necessary, and challenge us to consider the consequences of media scrutiny. Moreover, *Our City* represents an alternative of caring community surveillance. *Our City* uses screen stories to represent cultural renewal in the Downtown

Eastside community, and the continual re-emergence of aboriginal people. Participant stories suggest an ongoing process of living and nurturing new life in the Downtown Eastside despite historical trauma and contemporary pressures. The emphasis on place in the two short films narrates aboriginal belonging in the landscape, storyscape and screenscape.

Concepts of self-representation and standpoint theory's articulation of subjugated knowledges emerge in this chapter and will be further developed in the next. *Fix* does not facilitate self-representation in that Wild made creative decisions throughout the filmmaking process, yet her participants nonetheless tell their own stories and, once the film was complete, Owen, Wilson and Livingston integrated *Fix*, with Wild's collaboration, into their campaign for a safe injection sites and harm reduction in the Downtown Eastside. *Our City* demonstrates how metropolitan and national organisations might collaborate with local groups to facilitate self-representation, yet it remains to be seen whether participants made any lasting changes to aboriginal people's access to media technologies and abilities to self-represent.

The NFB's tradition of social documentary is a useful context within which to analyse contemporary NFB initiatives and Canadian independent filmmaking. Innovations and theoretical debates about "breaking the goldfish bowl" – an analogy for complicating the dynamics of looking and challenging documentary surveillance and voyeurism – were developed at the NFB and it continues to play a central role in facilitating documentary production and distribution. Although Wild's film is not an NFB production, they distribute and promote her films and she has used Citizenshift (formerly an NFB initiative) extensively. Both *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* and *Our City*

Our Voices: Follow the Eagle and Slo-Pitch have an online presence but the possibilities of this for securing additional audiences and encouraging debate are all too dependent on access, funding, and an audience with the time and energy to engage in intelligent political debate online. However, as my next chapter demonstrates, Downtown Eastside organisations are attempting to overcome barriers to digital media democracy and facilitate collaborative self-representation independently and in partnership with independent filmmakers and an NFB “filmmaker in residence”. As I will demonstrate, these organisations offer another means of countering surveillance and “poornographic” media representations.

Chapter 4

The Digital Downtown Eastside: Grassroots Representation?

Camera phones are omnipresent and ever ready, Little Brother emulating Big Brother.

Paula Geyh

In affording all people to be simultaneously master and subject of the gaze, wearable computing devices offer a new voice in the usually one-sided dialogue of surveillance.

Steve Mann, Jason Nolan and Barry Wellman¹

This chapter argues that the self-representation of Downtown Eastside residents through digital screen stories both reveals and resists the often divisive and exclusionary consequences of surveillance and mainstream media representations. Projects facilitating the production and distribution of digital screen stories in the Downtown Eastside – news reports, short films, live streams, remixes and mash-ups – create inclusive spaces for conversation and collaboration both online and offline.² In a neighbourhood where the average income is considerably lower than national averages, digital infrastructure and equipment is not something to be taken for granted, and recognition of this has

¹ Epigraphs from: Paula Geyh, *Cities, Citizens and Technologies: Urban Life and Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 119; Steve Mann, Jason Nolan, and Barry Wellman, “Sousveillance: Inventing and Using Wearable Computing Devices for Data Collection in Surveillance Environments” *Surveillance & Society* 1, no. 3 (2003): 348, [http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/articles1\(3\)/sousveillance.pdf](http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/articles1(3)/sousveillance.pdf) (accessed May 30, 2011).

² Remixes and mash-ups are forms of user-generated content in which pre-existing sounds and images are appropriated, reshaped, and shared: a mash-up takes two or more existing recordings and blends them; a remix is a new version of a recording in which the separate instrumental or vocal tracks are rebalanced or recombined. I have attended events where W2, Fearless City Mobile and AHA Media created mash-ups and remixes of existing images into new formations, although often the images were their own, avoiding the copyright issues that often accompany this form of digital media. A recent NFB film explored Remix/Mash-up culture and the implications for copyright: *RIP: A Remix Manifesto* Dir. Brett Gaylor (Canada: National Film Board, 2009), High Definition video file, <http://films.nfb.ca/rip-a-remix-manifesto/> (accessed June 4, 2011).

led to innovative and communal uses of technology. The possibilities for conversation and collaboration are potentially restricted by resident fears of surveillance and visibility, and by lack of time, funds, equipment and skills. Although Downtown Eastside organisations have made important inroads into eliminating the latter of these barriers by providing stipends, equipment and training, their most significant challenge is creating inclusive and safe spaces for the production of digital screen stories. In order to do this, digital screen stories and related offline activities must build bridges between cyberspace and city space, between global and local communities and between people with differing relationships to the Downtown Eastside: local residents and those from elsewhere; current and incoming residents; artists and non-artists; technophiles and technophobes; those with homes and income and those without.

Digital media from the Downtown Eastside provides a useful case study for examining how representation in the digital age can facilitate interaction between potentially isolated individuals and communities. Increased production and storage of digital images need not lead to the replacement of reality with simulation, as suggested by Jean Baudrillard, but instead to new ways of experiencing reality, and, moreover, reflexivity in the production and consumption of images.³ Digital media need not only lead to visibility without face-to-face encounter, as feared by Paul Virilio, but can also complement and create new impetus for physical conversations.⁴ While there is

³ “There are no more media in the literal sense of the word (I’m speaking particularly of electronic mass media) – that is, of a mediating power between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another”. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 83.

⁴ “On the other hand, with the screen interface of computers, television and teleconferences, the surface of inscription, hitherto devoid of depth, becomes a kind of ‘distance’, a depth of

a danger that the inequalities of society will be replicated in the image world and digital world,⁵ there is also potential for what Lynette Hunter calls “bridgework”:

Articulating the knowledge of those excluded from ruling relations of power; or:
Articulating the knowledge of the enfranchised but still disempowered.⁶

In this sense, digital media might be used to challenge the traditional asymmetries of power in media production.

The availability of low-cost digital devices has given a large number of people experience in media-making and greater appreciation of how representation mediates reality.⁷ The proliferation of digital technologies has led to an ease of use: as John Tomlinson suggests, in an era of keypads, interactive screens and movement sensors, a mere *legerdemain* or a sleight of hand can have immediate and extensive effects.⁸ As people become at ease with their interactions with digital technology there is the risk of complacency but also a new impetus for responsibility and awareness of the power of our extended connection to the world. Rather than fearing the increasingly blurred boundaries between humans and machines, I follow Donna Haraway and subsequent theorists such as William J. Mitchell in adopting a cyborg sensibility, acknowledging electronic devices as extensions of the human body

field of a new kind of representation, a visibility without any face-to-face encounter in which the *vis-à-vis* of the ancient streets disappears and is erased”. Paul Virilio, “The Overexposed City”, trans. Daniel Moshenberg, in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 2009), 382.

⁵ For additional information on the privatization of cyberspace see Geyh, *Cities, Citizens and Technologies*, 110-114 and Mark Andrejevic, “The webcam subculture and digital enclosure” in *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*, eds. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (Routledge: London, 2004), 193-208.

⁶ Lynette Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing: Situated Textualities in Science, Computing and the Arts*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 139.

⁷ John Ellis, “The Digitally Enhanced Audience: New Attitudes to Factual Footage” in *Relocating Television: Television in the Digital Context* ed. Jostein Gripsrud (London: Routledge, 2010), 184.

⁸ John Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed* (London: Sage, 2007), 80-81.

which impact upon our day-to-day lives.⁹ This is particularly crucial in cities where digital technologies are increasingly built into the environment and where the concentration of people and resources provides opportunities for experimental investigations into the relationships between the body, media and public space.

I adopt a critical optimism, taking into account the irony that technologies which might improve the quality of life for marginalised populations also depend on the structural inequalities of power and wealth that are all too evident in Vancouver and the DTES. The organisations I study in this chapter are likely aware that increased digital inclusion in the global north is fueled by low wages and bad working conditions in the global south, potentially adding to resource extraction and product disposal that damages the habitats of disempowered populations elsewhere.¹⁰ Downtown Eastside organisation Fearless City Mobile attempted to reduce the waste of technology consumption by recycling discarded and donated devices such as mobile camera phones, but the donated devices were often close to obsolete.

Moreover, the “Phones for Fearless” campaign begs the question: why should

⁹ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-18; William J. Mitchell *Me++: The Cyborg Self and the Networked City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 19-21. To a greater extent than Mitchell, Haraway remains keenly critical of technology despite her Cyborgian acceptance of it. I follow her critical approach.

¹⁰ All three organisations discussed in this chapter have held events, participated in collaborations, or created media that engaged with issues of global inequality, environmental damage and Canadian complicity in these issues. For instance, see W2’s event “The Ugly Canadian: Our Pensions and the Impact of Canadian Mining Companies in Latin America”, W2 Community Media Arts, post added by W2 Woodward, July 5, 2011, <http://www.creativetechnology.org/events/cafe-rebelde-the-ugly-canadian> (accessed July 5, 2011) or Fearless and W2’s collaboration with Mobile Voices, an organisation working with immigrant or low-paid workers in California, “Please welcome our Mobile Voices guests”, W2 Community Media Arts, post added by April, February 19, 2009, <http://www.creativetechnology.org/profiles/blogs/please-welcome-our-mobile> (accessed July 5, 2011). As hyper local reporters, AHA Media deal less with global issues, although one finds a few articles about ecological initiatives on their website under the category “Sustainability 2.0”. AHA Media, <http://ahamedia.ca/category/sustainability-20/> (accessed July 5, 2011).

it be left to marginalised communities to reuse and recycle the rest of society's cast offs when all users should take responsibility for where their equipment comes from and where it ends up? The guilty truth is, of course, that the majority of us consume technology without considering the inequalities that technological progress depends upon and the impacts upon, for instance, Coltan miners in the Congo, janitors in Silicon Valley or iPhone factory workers in China.¹¹ Digital representations of the Downtown Eastside might articulate the stories of one exploited group, whilst subtly problematising global inclusions and exclusions.

Central to my inclusion of a chapter on what I refer to as digital “grassroots” representations of the Downtown Eastside is my adoption of a feminist standpoint, as described in the previous chapter and encapsulated in Lynette Hunter's explanation of bridgework.¹² Rather than focus on digital representations of the Downtown Eastside by established and well-known artists, it is my desire to participate in and engage with the articulation of the knowledge of people often excluded from media and arts production, and thus from academic analysis of these media, due to economic reasons – lack of

¹¹ Examples from: Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy “Introduction”, *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age* eds. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2004), 2; Donna Haraway, interviewed by Lisa Nakamura, “Prospects for a Materialist Informatics: An Interview with Donna Haraway” *Electronic Book Review*, under “Technocapitalism”, August 30, 2003, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/technocapitalism/interview> (accessed April 8, 2011); and Joel Johnson, “Gadget Guilt” *Wired*, April 2011.

¹² The scare quotes are necessary for this first reference to grassroots representations because of ambiguities about who constitutes the grassroots in the Downtown Eastside (hence also the question mark in the title of this chapter). This ambiguity is not easily resolved: “grassroots” connotes a movement driven by the community but who the community is and who can speak for it remains open to interpretation. Complex micropolitics exist in the Downtown Eastside, as in other communities, and while many residents of the neighbourhood support the work of the media projects discussed in this chapter as having the same aims as broader grassroots movements in the Downtown Eastside, others have different priorities. There is an ongoing argument about W2's choice of location, the class-identity of its clientele, and alleged courting of corporate interests leading to censorship. A debate on these issues was prompted by a blog post by Stimulator, “The Problem with W2: Co-option through capital” Vancouver Media Co-op, entry posted on February 13, 2011, <http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/blog/stimulator/6246> (accessed May 30, 2011).

access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), cameras and space/time to use them – and/or prejudices against poverty, race, mental illness. Hunter suggests that “strategies of narrative” can be used to “communicate and to train people in ‘empathetic knowledge’”.¹³ I follow this suggestion in telling a story of community media in the Downtown Eastside which in turn advocates an emphasis on storytelling as a means of encouraging empathetic engagement, or bridgework, between people living within and outside of the Downtown Eastside. Instead of replicating or complying with mainstream media representations of the neighbourhood which stereotype and “Other” the location and its residents, grassroots media-makers and artists have offered their own perspectives in a manner that encourages the sharing of knowledge and intersubjectivity. Collaborative storytelling is advocated as a creative and empathy-building media strategy. Furthermore, the intersection of online and physical spaces is crucial in this sharing process, permitting representation that is situated amongst ongoing off- and online conversations.

Fearless City, W2 and AHA Media are three Downtown Eastside projects which participate in multimodal bridgework. Whereas Hunter uses the term bridgework to refer to the articulation of the knowledge of the disempowered, I extend it to encompass the associated bridgework of connecting the DTES with the rest of Vancouver and with other urban localities around the world, physical space with electronic media space, and the body with technology. In February and March 2009 and February 2010, I attended meetings and events organised by and involving members of these organisations. The digital images produced by these organisations and their use

¹³ Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing*, 139.

of online and physical space for representation constitute the primary texts for this chapter. My reading of these texts necessarily differs from the analysis in previous chapters, as these texts are more collaborative and experimental than my other texts and are, in some cases, ephemeral. I propose that the innovation is largely in the process and the presentation rather than the end product. The texts in this chapter are interconnected and, in my reading, refer to each other as well as additional intertexts.

Since I visited Vancouver in February 2009, the three organisations have evolved considerably and continue to do so. In order to understand the role of these organisations as bridgework one must be familiar with the origins of the three groups and their intersections. Downtown Eastside resident, artist and curator Irwin Oostindie conceived W2 in 2004 as a community media arts centre that would occupy an extensive three-floor space in the Woodward's development on West Hastings Street. Several years of planning ensued before the W2 online community at www.creativetechnology.org was created in late 2008. The completion of W2's physical home was initially scheduled for September 2009, but this has been repeatedly delayed. W2 has meanwhile operated from rented premises in adjacent streets to the Woodward's site. During the Olympic period it opened as W2 Culture and Media House in a four-floor rented building directly across the street from the Woodward's development to the south. From April 10th 2010, it operated from a location one street away from Woodward's to the north, a site called "W2 Storyeum", appropriating the name of the failed historical tourist attraction "Storyeum"

which formerly occupied the site.¹⁴ In April 2011 W2 moved out of W2 Storyeum and in late May began to work from the Woodward's site.

Fearless is a W2 project, but this smaller initiative was up and running in advance of public promotion for W2.¹⁵ Oostindie began the Fearless Media project as a newsletter in 2007. This had a circulation of 10,000 and ran for two issues. The magazine subsequently ran online before Fearless City Mobile was conceived and initiated with the support of the Downtown Eastside Community Arts Network. Fearless City Mobile organised training sessions and equipment loans and encouraged residents to employ mobile video cameras and wireless internet as a means of self-representation, human rights documentation and artistic expression.¹⁶ The online platform for this initiative was www.fearlesscity.ca, but it was subsequently abandoned in late 2009 due to the difficulty and expense of maintaining the multifunctional purpose-built Drupal site.¹⁷ Fearless' work was then transferred to the active W2 site and members were encouraged to use this platform for their communications.¹⁸

AHA Media is the third initiative on which I will focus. It developed in conjunction with Fearless and W2, but exists independently and is the creation of April Smith, Hendrik Beune and Al, three DTES residents who met at a

¹⁴ During their time at Storyeum, W2 had an arrangement with the City to use Storyeum's rather large space for "Festival, Exhibition and Conferences", so their focus temporarily shifted from the community broadcasting, storytelling and live audiovisual production that they intend to focus on now that they have their premises in Woodward's. Irwin Oostindie, interviewed by Get Grounded TV, in "W2 Community Media Arts Feature", Lowpass TV 6, YouTube video file, 6.45, posted on May 13, 2011, <http://getgrounded.tv/2011/05/13/lowpass-tv-6-w2-community-media-arts-feature/>, (accessed May 16, 2011).

¹⁵ I came across Fearless City Mobile's online community in 2008, and learned about plans for W2 when I arrived in Vancouver in February 2009 and attended Fearless' weekly public meetings.

¹⁶ The project was funded with an initial \$12,000 grant from the BC Arts Council to advance the community communication infrastructure of web, radio, print, mobile training, with a further \$150,000 from Heritage Canada's Mobile Muse 3 initiative (managed by New Media BC) for Fearless City mobile. Irwin Oostindie, e-mail message to author, May 18, 2010.

¹⁷ Drupal is an open source software package that can be used to build and maintain websites. "About", Drupal, <http://drupal.org/about> (accessed June 10, 2010).

¹⁸ Irwin Oostindie, e-mail message to author, May 18, 2010.

Fearless event.¹⁹ With an expanding team of contributors from the Downtown Eastside, AHA Media publish regular local news reports and photographic and video documentation of events on their website at www.ahamedia.ca and advertise their services as live-streaming and social-networking experts to prospective employers. They also collaborate with artists and community groups to produce multimedia art projects and made their first short film, *12 Days of Olympics*, in early 2010. April of AHA Media is also project coordinator of Fearless City Mobile, and there is considerable overlap between the organisations. Fearless and AHA have become trusted media outlets in the Downtown Eastside, invited to cover community events when other media are not.²⁰ Fearless and AHA have operated out of various Downtown Eastside locations including the spaces used by W2. All three projects have had to be as mobile as their media as they wait for W2 Woodward's to be completed.

W2, Fearless and AHA Media are primarily concerned with diversifying the representation of the Downtown Eastside and ensuring that neighbourhood perspectives often ignored by mainstream media are narrated. The pursuit of increased participation in the imageworld and storyscape of the Downtown Eastside is crucially interwoven with the larger ambition of retaining access to the physical landscape. The prospective space of W2 Woodward's is contested by DTES residents and organisations: some boycott the development because they anticipate that its success will be used to justify the gentrification of the neighbourhood. From this perspective, building

¹⁹ On the AHA Media website AI is identified by only his first name, while April and Hendrik use their full names. About, AHA Media, <http://ahamedia.ca/about/> (accessed July 5, 2011).

²⁰ For instance, the HomeGround festival for homeless and underhoused residents of the Downtown Eastside. Michael Lithgow, "Olympic festival for the homeless: mainstream media keep out!" *Art Threat: Culture and Politics*, February 22, 2010, <http://artthreat.net/2010/02/homeground/> (accessed July 21, 2011).

bridges is dangerous as it may contribute to the success of Woodward's mixed-income housing model, therefore justifying the further gentrification of the neighbourhood when social housing would be of greater benefit to low-income residents.²¹ Questions have been raised about how inclusive W2's space will be, given its media arts focus and the need for private funding to keep such an ambitious project running. Will all residents feel welcome and comfortable within the space? Are media arts of interest to people other than the Downtown Eastside residents already involved with Fearless and AHA Media? Will existing and low-income residents have to compete with incoming artists/technologists to use the facilities? What compromises on ownership of the space will have to be made in order to gain sponsorship?²²

In the following sections, I outline a theoretical framework for exploring spatial and media practices that integrate digital representations/communications and architectural space, or, to borrow Manuel Castell's terminology, the space of flows and the space of place.²³ I then focus upon works by W2, Fearless and AHA Media in turn. I begin my first case study of W2 by contextualising the importance of Woodward's in the

²¹ As Wendy Pedersen suggests, "It's unfortunate that W2 is in there, because we don't want to make that model work". Jessica Barrett, "Free Speech" *Westender: Vancouver's Urban Weekly*, March 23 2011, <http://www.westender.com/articles/entry/cover-story-free-speech/news-and-views/> (accessed May 30, 2011).

²² The Woodward's development attracted even more controversy when W2's neighbour, the Simon Fraser University (SFU) School of Arts, accepted a \$10 million donation from Goldcorp mining company, and changed its name to the Goldcorp School of Arts. W2 reasserts its independence from SFU and Goldcorp, and its decision to accept Cultural Olympiad funds, in the comments section of this blog post: Dawn, "The Goldcorp Arts Centre in the Woodward's [sic] building: Site of Displacement and Shame", Vancouver Media Coop, entry posted on September 23, 2010, <http://vancouver.mediacoop.ca/blog/dawn/4695> (accessed April 22, 2011). The extensive debate within this comment section encapsulates the divided opinions in the Downtown Eastside over how best to provide arts facilities and spaces of resistance.

²³ Manuel Castells, "The Culture of Cities in the Information Age" in *The Castells Reader on Cities and Social Theory* ed. Ida Susser (Malden, MA: Blackwells, 2002), 315. I should note that Castells' term "space of flows" refers to more than just the Internet and digital media, but to all "social practices without territorial contiguity". See Manuel Castells, "Grassrooting the Space of Flows" *Urban Geography* 20, no. 4 (1999), 295.

Downtown Eastside and W2's role in facilitating access and inclusiveness in this physical space, before turning to analyse digital representations of other Downtown Eastside spaces by Fearless and AHA Media. Throughout this chapter I will explore how digital media practices impact upon access to and movement within physical spaces, potentially resisting and reinforcing exclusions associated with surveillance.

Screen Stories, Space and Place

In this chapter, I pay particular attention to the ways in which my primary texts intersect with place, movement and modes of communication in the Downtown Eastside. I address these concerns under the headings "Architectural Screens", "Mobile Screens" and "Translocal Screens". These divisions are somewhat artificial: each of the screen stories examined in this chapter might in some way be read as architectural, mobile and translocal. However, the headings function to foreground the role of space, place and mobility in creating innovative digital screen stories. The representation of the former Woodward's department store and the symbolic use of shopping carts across my primary texts are important symbols of the role of consumer economies in shaping the contemporary Downtown Eastside and the increasing exclusion of residents who are not "creditable subjects", to borrow Sheryl N. Hamilton's phrase, prompting their adaptation of the spaces and tools of consumer society in order to survive on the margins of the market.²⁴

²⁴ Sheryl N. Hamilton, "Identity Theft and the Construction of Creditable Subjects" *Surveillance: Power, Problems, and Politics* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 118. Hamilton argues a person's capacity for credit, and the digital records that prove this, are increasingly important for the "recognition of social subjects" in the contemporary era. This is a worrying prospect for people who do not have credit as it means they are increasingly ignored and excluded, and for creditable subjects who are at risk of having their identity stolen or erased.

The advent of the digital age has prompted concerns about the atomisation of society and the ascendance of mediated communication over place-based interaction. Castells suggests, “communication in our societies is breaking down between their components, through a juxtaposition between an electronic hypertext and the fragmented existence of secluded communes and self-centred individuals”.²⁵ Neighbourhoods such as the Downtown Eastside have a rather different problem: the digital divide is evident and place-based interaction predominates. Many residents have limited movement beyond their locale due to poverty and have inadequate private space for seclusion. Low-income residents are thus excluded from the advantages offered by participation in the electronic hypertext and from the increasing opportunity for civic participation that is facilitated online. In the Downtown Eastside, the process of overcoming the digital divide is in its early stages. There is consequently an opportunity to encourage Internet practices that are complementary to place-based interactions and to ensure that the online social movement addresses concerns in the physical world.

In his essay “The City in the Information Age”, Castells does not address the paradoxical existence of communities that are only just starting to participate in the electronic hypertext, that feel the impact of the information age primarily through their exclusion from it. However, he notably emphasises the importance of “not-for-profit, local computer / media networks, connecting the local experience to the electronic hypertext, thus providing a material

²⁵ Castells, “Culture of Cities”, 382. For more on hypertexts, see John Gerstner, “The other side of cyberspace - interview with professor Manuel Castells” *Communication World*, March 1999, 5, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m4422/is_4_16/ai_54260069/ (accessed July 24, 2010) and Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing*, 109.

bridge for interaction between the two sources of information and meaning”.²⁶ Elsewhere, he comments on the importance of the use of the Internet for networking in social mobilization and social challenges.²⁷ There is evidence that Castells’ hopes for “the grassrooting of the space of flows” are being realised: Greg Hearn, Jo Tacchi, Marcus Foth and June Lennie note “a noticeable trend toward using the global network for *local* interaction [...] and *social* interaction”.²⁸ Although the Internet and other pervasive global media such as television are often associated with globalisation and the deterritorialization of space, numerous projects across the global north and south, in urban and non-urban locations, are using online platforms for community organisation and digital storytelling for creative collaboration and *reterritorialization* – “to make themselves ‘at home’ in the world of global modernity, to live with its transformations and to generate new identities and narratives of personal meaning out of them” – according to John Tomlinson’s definition.²⁹ I suggest Tomlinson’s conception of reterritorialization is useful for understanding how the Internet might be used to strengthen local connections in a global context. For people whose home in the physical world is threatened, narratives of reterritorialization are particularly important.

Architectural Screen Stories: W2 and Woodward’s

In 2009, Animal Mother Films released a trailer for their production in progress, *With Glowing Hearts* (Andrew Lavigne, 2011), a documentary about

²⁶ Castells, “Culture of Cities”, 383-384.

²⁷ Manuel Castells, “Conclusion: Urban Sociology in the Twenty-first Century” in *The Castells Reader on Cities and Social Theory* ed. Ida Susser (Malden, MA: Blackwells, 2002), 402.

²⁸ Greg Hearn, Jo Tacchi, Marcus Foth, June Lennie, *Action Research and New Media* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2002), 104.

²⁹ John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 149.

social media in Olympic-era Vancouver with a significant focus on the Downtown Eastside and media arts projects W2 and AHA Media.³⁰ The significance of the physical space of this neighbourhood to the narrative of the film is demonstrated by the digital superimposition of the film's protagonists on the walls of the Woodward's building. This building has great symbolic importance in the neighbourhood, a building whose past, present and future are strongly intertwined with that of the Downtown Eastside and with media arts projects invested in its future. The simulated architectural screens of the *With Glowing Hearts* trailer demonstrate this crucial relationship between the architectural environment of the Downtown Eastside and the media arts practices of W2, and echoes W2's actual employment of architectural screens as a means of reterritorialization and of inserting themselves into an ongoing narrative about Woodward's and the Downtown Eastside.

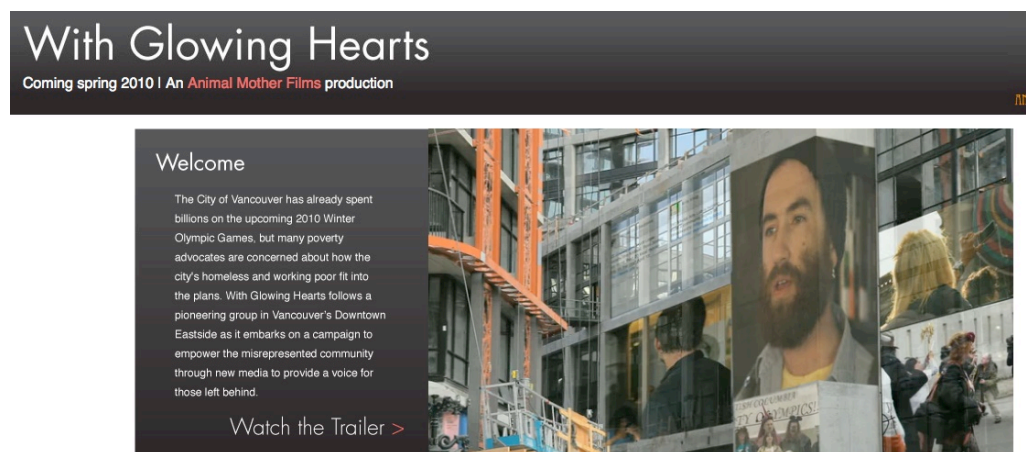


Figure 1. Screen capture from *With Glowing Hearts* (Canada: Andrew Lavigne, 2011).

³⁰ Andrew Lavigne, dir. *With Glowing Hearts*, DVD, (Canada: Animal Mother Films, 2011.) The trailer I refer to is: Andrew Lavigne, dir. "With Glowing Hearts", Vimeo video file posted by Andrew Lavigne, June 2009, <http://vimeo.com/5401993> (accessed May 30, 2011).

W2 Woodward's Community Media Arts occupies a 14,395 square foot space within the Woodward's development. This space is part of the 31,500 square foot space retained by the City of Vancouver. The City bought the property in 2003 and in 2004 chose Westbank Projects/Peterson Investment Group as developers with Henriquez Partners as architects.³¹ W2 thus coordinates a significant proportion of the public space within the predominantly private development, sharing this space with a number of partners who will potentially ensure broad access and services for Downtown Eastside residents.³²

Throughout the history of Woodward's as a department store, then as a vacant and squatted building, and in its present reinvented state, residents have shaped the space of the Woodward's building through everyday use, protest and participation in consultations about the development. In the new development, low-income Downtown Eastside residents reside in Woodward's two hundred social housing apartments, yet there is evidence that since new private tenants moved in to Woodward's, the building and surrounding area no longer feels like part of the neighbourhood. As Charles Demers suggests:

³¹ "The City of Vancouver will keep this parcel of space as a 'capital asset'. This means that the City will be able to charge non-profit organizations \$1 per year for their lease. However, non-profit organizations will be required to pay for all operating and maintenance costs, which are estimated to be approximately \$7 - \$9 per square foot. In addition, organizations will be expected to pay for all operating costs associated with programs and services as well as any capital upgrades required in their space." "Background documents", City of Vancouver, <http://vancouver.ca/bps/realestate/woodwards/pdf/WoodwardsNPQuestionsandAns.pdf> (accessed June 10, 2010).

³² Proposed partners to share the W2 space with W2 Community Media arts were: CHAKRAS/teaspace Society; Gallery Gachet Society; IMAGENation/Indigenous Media Arts Group Society; Kootenay School of Writing Society; CJSF (SFU); Vancouver Co-operative Radio (CFRO); Redwire Native Youth Media Society; S4DAC; Independent Community Television (ICTV) – ICTV will lead the Community Television Cluster that will include: ACCESS TV, Fearless TV (DTES Community Arts Network), Independent Community Television (ICTV), and Vancouver Community Television Association; Vancouver Community Network. "W2 Business Plan", W2 Community Media Arts, September 2008 edition, 7-8, <http://www.creativetechnology.org/page/publications-1> (accessed June 10, 2010).

The notoriously obnoxious marketing line for the new Woodward's development – 'Be Bold or Move to Suburbia' – managed to be simultaneously contemptuous of both the suburbanites priced out of Vancouver proper by real estate speculation as well as the neighbourhood's existing, low-income residents, who were reduced to some kind of safari that had to be faced boldly. Of course, the Vancouver Police Department will act as game wardens at any such safari, with patrols, harassment, and arrests playing a decisive role in managing the excitement, making sure nobody has to be *too* bold.³³

There are fears that Woodward's DTES neighbours (and even those living in Woodward's social housing, who allegedly have elevator access and shared spaces separate from those occupying market housing) will be prevented from full access by this discriminatory security.

Testaments to Downtown Eastside resident exclusion from Woodward's are found in Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) reports and a newsletter published by the Olympic Tent Village.³⁴ The Olympic Tent Village was an occupation of an empty lot in the Downtown Eastside that took place during the Olympics to protest condominium development in the neighbourhood and the criminalisation of the poor, and to campaign for ending homelessness. The lot was designated as a temporary Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) parking lot during the 2010 games, and is owned by Concord Pacific, the developer and real estate investment firm that converted the Expo 86 site into luxury condominiums. Fears of condominium development in the Downtown Eastside and the subsequent out-pricing of the poor have existed for some time, but were intensified with the success of the

³³ Charles Demers, *Vancouver Special* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2009), 142.

³⁴ "Back in 2002, in the Woodward's squat, it was scary when the police came in with riot guns and sticks and pepper spray, and they dragged me by the legs down the stairs. It was scary because I'm handicapped. My head got sliced going down the stairs, and I had to go to the hospital. The new Woodward's development turned out terrible. They've got that new shopping mall. When it opened, I went in there to look around, and got roughed up by security. They told me to go, and if I didn't they would throw me out on my face". Ricky L., Olympic Tent Village resident, *Tent Village Voice* February 22, 2010. See also: Carnegie Community Action Project, "Our Place and Our Worlds", 12.

announcement of the success of the Olympic bid in 2003 and the redevelopment of Woodward's. Commentators suggest that the attention brought to Vancouver during the Olympics will contribute to Vancouver's transformation into a resort city, a haven of natural beauty and leisure facilities for tourists and multiple home-owners with rents rising higher than many existing residents can afford. As Downtown Eastside activists warned against this, real estate mogul Bob Rennie proposed that it was inevitable.³⁵ Indeed, housing prices continue to rise in Vancouver – perhaps, in part, fuelled by the discourse around the notion of the “resort city” – although many suggest this is unsustainable inflation and predict an eventual drop in real estate values by as much as twenty-five per cent.³⁶ The Downtown Eastside continues to feel the threat of increased luxury housing and many residents recently campaigned against a proposed change to development height restrictions in Chinatown. The Vancouver City Council approved this change despite opposition, allowing high-rise condominium buildings to be built in the neighbourhood, and potentially bringing a new influx of high-income residents with different needs and priorities to the existing low-income population.³⁷

Although the new Woodward's development was seen as a model for community consultation and mixed use (of retail, community space, SFU

³⁵ CCAP attribute this quotation to real estate and art marketer Bob Rennie: “Vancouver has become a resort city where rich foreigners live a few months per year...It's a trend, whether you like it or not, the Olympics is likely to accelerate”. “Bob Rennie, DTES condo king, connects Olympics and real estate”, Carnegie Community Action Project, entry posted on March 24, 2010, <http://ccapvancouver.wordpress.com/2010/03/24/bob-rennie-dtes-condo-king-connects-olympics-and-real-estate/> (accessed April 9, 2011).

³⁶ Joe Castaldo suggests people are buying at prices higher than they can afford and inflating values because of social pressure and media buzz. “Housing: Real Insanity”, *Canadian Business* April 7, 2011, http://www.canadianbusiness.com/managing/strategy/article.jsp?content=20110425_10021_10021 (accessed April 9, 2011).

³⁷ “Vancouver City Council votes to gentrify Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside”, Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Council, entry posted on April 19, 2011, <http://dnchome.wordpress.com/2011/04/19/hahrvot/> (accessed April 22, 2011).

Contemporary arts, private housing and social housing), the quick sale of its expensive private units shows that there is demand for luxury housing despite the stigma of the Downtown Eastside. Thus Woodward's has become a focus for some activists and community workers, who fear it is the herald of a wave of condo development in the neighbourhood and the displacement of low-income residents. As Vancouver geared up for the Olympics, anti-poverty worker Jean Swanson commented:

Enter Woodward's, [sic] two huge towers, over 500 condos, a luxury "amenity" room with a "W" shaped hot tub for owners. Enter new condos coming into the neighbourhood at three times the rate of new social housing. Yes, the geographical area may be improving. Property values escalate. The city subsidizes new chain stores. The Carrall St. Greenway opens for tourists. But what about the 70% of DTES residents who have low incomes?³⁸

Swanson and Wendy Pedersen of the Carnegie Community Action Project have conducted community mapping ("Our place and our words") and visioning projects ("Seeing it our way" and "Nothing about us without us"), collecting opinions and ideas from two hundred low-income residents about how they see their neighbourhood as it is in the present and how it might be in the future. During the community mapping exercise, "the new Woodward's and condos were mentioned often as unsafe and unwelcoming places".³⁹ The fear of harassment from police and security guards cited by participants suggests that Woodward's might no longer be an accessible or inclusive space for the Downtown Eastside community. It has allegedly become a place where the poor are the subjects of surveillance, monitored by security personnel who

³⁸ Jean Swanson, "How will Woodward's affect the low-income people who live in the Downtown Eastside?" *Vancouver Sun*, January 6, 2010, <http://communities.canada.com/vancouver/vancouver/print.aspx?postid=607255> (accessed June 4, 2011).

³⁹ Wendy Pedersen and Jean Swanson, "Our Place and Our Worlds: Mapping Downtown Eastside Assets and Challenges", Carnegie Community Action Project, under "CCAP Reports", July 2009, <http://ccapvancouver.wordpress.com/ccap-reports/> (accessed June 4, 2011).

ensure low-income residents do not infringe upon the lifestyles of wealthy tenants.

The creators of W2 hope that it will act as a bridge between the rest of the development and the existing residents of the neighbourhood.⁴⁰ The site provided for W2 by the City of Vancouver is a crucial space for low-income interests in Woodward's, but it faces the challenge of being an inclusive space in a development from which many already feel excluded. It remains to be seen how W2 will negotiate actual and perceived surveillance and exclusion of the poor by security apparatus. Although for the most part I argue that W2 is capable of multimodal bridgework, the following questions, largely unanswerable at this stage, should be posed: Can W2 encourage wealthier tenants to live, work and play with their low-income neighbours and to enter into the spirit of acceptance often associated with the Downtown Eastside?⁴¹ Will W2 teach residents how to counter negative representation of the area and the uneven surveillance strategies employed by the City and business interests? Or will W2 exacerbate surveillance and exclusion by inviting new residents to share the space with old, with the danger of new residents dominating the space? Will W2's strategy of international collaboration, which often requires events to be filmed and live-streamed online, intensify the impression that Woodward's is a site of surveillance? It is tempting to assume that the creation of a community media arts space is unquestionably a positive addition to the

⁴⁰ Irwin Oostindie suggests this in Fearless City Mobile, "W Stories: Building a Community Legacy at Woodward's", W2 Community Media Arts, YouTube video file, 8.15, posted by Lani Russwurm, March 11, 2009, <http://www.creativetechnology.org/video/w-stories-building-a-community> (accessed June 10, 2010). The video was made in the summer of 2008: Irwin Oostindie, e-mail message to author, May 18, 2010.

⁴¹ Narratives and statements from Downtown Eastside residents often emphasise the inclusive community spirit and non-judgemental attitude of residents. For examples, see Larry Campbell, Neil Boyd and Lori Culbert, *A Thousand Dreams: Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and the Fight for its Future* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2009), 289-291 and "Our Place and Our Worlds", 10-12.

neighbourhood, increasing the potential for communication, creativity and learning new skills, but a more critical perspective should perhaps be considered. It is important to note that similar questions have been topics for debate by key actors in W2, Fearless City Mobile and AHA Media.⁴² My intention, then, is to anticipate and unpick concerns about the intersection of digital representation and surveillance in the DTES but also to explore how digital screen stories created by W2 demonstrate forms of bridgework that potentially alleviate concerns about representation and surveillance.

W2's initiatives echo the narratives of ownership enacted through the NFB screen story *Follow the Eagle*, as discussed in the last chapter, although the focus broadens from aboriginal ownership, challenging colonial displacements and erasures, to the attachment of a wider marginalised community to Downtown Eastside sites in the face of capitalist redevelopment. Once again Nick Blomley's writing on property claims in the DTES is instructive. Blomley describes how

in 1995, a group of area residents and antipoverty activists gathered on the street outside the Woodward's building, and started to sweep the streets and clear up litter...at a subsequent demonstration, people painted pictures and slogans on the window glass, using water soluble paint. Some of these messages were overtly political, with calls for affordable housing, yet many others painted mountains, rainbows, and flowers.⁴³

The events Blomley described occurred when Woodward's was still a large, red-brick building, the relic of a large department store that until 1993 served

⁴² There is little public record of the content of these discussions but, for instance, Hendrik Beune, of Fearless City and AHA Media, participated in a discussion about issues of access, representation, surveillance and control in mobile media at the 2009 Northern Voice conference. "Mobile Tracks", under "Northern Voice – Moosecamp Mobile Track Sessions", <http://2009.northernvoice.ca/moosecamp-mobile> (accessed June 10, 2010). Also, Irwin Oostindie, director of W2, participated in a discussion about the role of art in the Downtown Eastside in 2005. Clint Burnham writes about this discussion in Clint Burnham, "No Art After Pickton" *Filip* 1 (2006), <http://fillip.ca/content/no-art-after-pickton> (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁴³ Nick Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 39.

the Downtown Eastside community and residents from all over Vancouver. Blomley suggests that in cleaning and painting the vacant Woodward's building, DTES residents showed that they had not abandoned it. Instead, they claimed ownership of the building by acting upon it.

On February 17th, 2010, at the same location on West Hastings, residents made their mark upon the new Woodward's building. The medium used for marking the building, however, was even more temporary than the water soluble paints used by activists in 1995: Woodward's became a temporary architectural screen rather than a canvas, as coloured light was projected on to the side of the building. If this event was a demonstration, it was more obviously a demonstration of "graffiti, projection and interactive technologies" than a political demonstration.⁴⁴ The demonstrators were NeoGrafik, a group of media artists who brought their interactive screen and projector to a number of locations in Vancouver during the 2010 Winter Olympics as part of CODE, the Cultural Olympiad Digital Edition. The screen was positioned near the West Hastings entrance of Woodward's, immediately opposite W2 Media and Culture House (who had organised the event) at approximately 9 pm. Invited artists and members of the public had the opportunity to use the screen to create their own works of art, simultaneously visible on both the interactive screen and the architectural screen of the Woodward's building.

⁴⁴ "NeoGrafik" Graffiti Research Lab, entry posted by admin, March 16, 2008, <http://graffitiresearchlab.ca/?p=8> (accessed June 4, 2010). For more information see NeoGrafik, <http://www.neografik.ca/> (accessed June 4, 2011).



Figure 2. NeoGrafik, Woodward's, Vancouver. February 17, 2010. Photograph taken by author.

NeoGrafik's stated intention of integrating digital art with the urban environment has political potential, although on this occasion it was admittedly

not used as such.⁴⁵ The use of the Woodward's building as a screen might be read as part of a political narrative about inclusion in the Downtown Eastside, and specifically about W2 Community Media Arts, their future space in the Woodward's building and what this means for the neighbourhood. NeoGrafik's interactive touchscreen and projector, set up to transmit participants' inscriptions from the screen onto the Woodward's building, offered the potential for Downtown Eastside residents to express ownership of Woodward's, writ large. The NeoGrafik projector significantly increases the proportions of the message or image created on the touchscreen, making it visible to people at considerable distance. This is a literal manifestation of Tomlinson's *legerdemain* – a sleight of hand that has big results. However, the NeoGrafik inscriptions were ephemeral; NeoGrafik's light projection left no permanent mark on the space of Woodward's and the technology necessary for making these marks was only in place for a few hours. This was a safe form of graffiti as the original surface of the architectural structure was left intact and notably unmarked. Any mark of ownership of the space was fleeting as an even lighter touch cleared the screen and removed all trace of expression from Woodward's. Moreover, although the incorporation of the exterior of Woodward's as architectural screen for community media arts practices could have had significant symbolic meaning, given W2's inability to use the interior space during the Olympics, participants did not explicitly use the architectural screen to lay claim to Woodward's on this occasion. Unrelated drawings and writing dominated the screen as participants explored how the technology worked, rather than considering its potential for communication or political

⁴⁵ "NeoGrafik Event Details". W2 Community Media Arts, under "All Events", entry posted by Indigo, February 15, 2010, <http://www.creativetechnology.org/events/neografik-1> (accessed June 10, 2010).

statement. Thus the significance of the location was masked by the technology, although the temporary use of the wall in itself enacted a claim to ownership.

A more permanent narrative of ownership might be the creation of the digital screen story *W Stories* by Fearless City Mobile members with assistance from National Film Board (NFB) filmmaker-in-residence Moira Simpson during the summer of 2008, posted on www.creativetechnology.org and on YouTube. A remixed version of *W Stories* was exhibited on the architectural screen of Woodward's on February 20th 2009 (projected from W2's temporary home across the street, known as the W2 Launch Pad).⁴⁶ Again this symbolic mark of ownership was ephemeral, lasting only for an evening, yet the digital film's ongoing online presence is a valuable demonstration of connections between W2, Woodward's and the neighbourhood, and of the links between electronic media and physical space. *W Stories* is a narrative about old and new Woodward's, narrating the neighbourhood's ongoing participation in and production of the space. For the video *W Stories*, Fearless City members collected memories of the old Woodward's and hopes for the new Woodward's from existing community members (including Fearless members themselves) and from new stakeholders in Woodward's, filming interviews on Nokia N77 mobile phones and combining them in short film form.⁴⁷

The video is promotional in that all participants express high hopes for W2 as an inclusive organisation. Consequently, *W Stories* performs a valuable function in recording a) the hopes of DTES residents for access to specific

⁴⁶ "W Stories Projection", W2 Community Media Arts, under "All Events", entry posted by Gavin Schaefer, February 2009, <http://www.creativetechnology.org/events/w-stories-projection> (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁴⁷ "W Stories: Building a Community Legacy at Woodward's", W2 Community Media Arts, YouTube video file posted by Lani Russwurm, March 11, 2009, <http://www.creativetechnology.org/video/w-stories-building-a-community> (accessed June 10, 2010).

facilities (performance space, technology, etc.) and b) the promises of new stakeholders to support W2 in creating an inclusive space. The words “connect”, “mixed-use”, and “social experiment” are reiterated by Woodward’s architect Gregory Henriquez and Associate Director of Simon Fraser University’s Contemporary Arts, Owen Underhill, emphasising the intended bridging role of Woodward’s between high- and low-income residents of the neighbourhood. CCAP’s community research suggests that this is empty rhetoric: such social experiments usually result in the exclusion of low-income residents from newly desirable city space, and this is already happening at Woodward’s. In this case, *W Stories* might potentially be used as a document to remind stakeholders of their commitments to inclusion.⁴⁸

If digital media can be a useful record of public promises of inclusivity made by W2’s institutional partners, it might also be used to prevent or document the physical exclusion of Downtown Eastside residents from public space. The potential of digital media as a tool for supporting civil liberties was explored during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games by W2 videographers, independent citizen journalists and members of the Legal Observer team who were based within W2 Culture and Media house, across the street from Woodward’s for the duration of the Games. The Legal Observers were coordinated by Downtown Eastside legal advocacy organisation, Pivot Legal, and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA), and they monitored security forces during protests and other large gatherings of people.

⁴⁸ Similarly, a W2 video touring the W2 Media Café weeks before it was due to be open records its architect, Hazen Sise, guaranteeing the completion of the Café by early May. Such videos are a record of promises made and lend transparency to the process of creating W2, although those without access to the Internet must rely on other forms of communication for information. “W2 Media Café construction update April 19”, YouTube video file, W2 Community Media Arts, posted by Irwin Oostindie, April 19, 2011, <http://www.creativetechnology.org/video/w2-media-cafe-construction-1> (accessed April 22 2011).

It was most common for Legal Observers to monitor the crowd with their eyes, occasionally using digital photography and videography for the purposes of documentation.⁴⁹ W2 TV crews and other independent citizen journalists based at W2 Culture and Media House were also on hand at protests and gatherings to film events, creating news stories, but also acting as human rights documenters. Meanwhile, police forces also used digital cameras to record events, perched on rooftops with cameras and employing cell phones in tense situations.

This brings us to the question raised by my epigraphs: do mobile cameras, like Steve Mann's wearable cameras, enable people to be simultaneously masters and subjects of the gaze, offering a new voice in the usually one-sided dialogue of surveillance?⁵⁰ Or do they mimic and even perpetuate top-down surveillance, as Paula Geyh suggests, with little brother emulating big brother?⁵¹ Geyh fails to explicate her statement: camera phones are listed with other examples of how surveillance has proliferated in recent years and are not differentiated, although camera phones are the only listed instance used by individuals, usually for personal reasons – although personal surveillance is, it seems, increasingly common.⁵² She does not acknowledge

⁴⁹ Ten videos taken by the Legal Observer Team are available to view online. One video shows Vancouver Police and Canadian Border Service Agents insist on entering private office space at W2 without giving reason or seeking permission. "CBSA and VPD visit media centre uninvited", Vimeo video file, posted February 2010, <http://vimeo.com/observers2010/videos> (accessed June 4, 2011).

⁵⁰ Mann et al, "Sousveillance", 348.

⁵¹ Geyh, *Cities, Citizens and Technologies*, 119. Cory Doctorow's novel *Little Brother* employs a similar metaphor: his teenage protagonist uses his proficiency with technology to counter and subvert surveillance devices employed by his school, San Francisco police and even the Department of Homeland Security. Cory Doctorow, *Little Brother* (New York: Tor Books, 2008).

⁵² "We are increasingly encouraged to watch each other – spouses, children, colleagues, rival businesses etc. – or at least to pay someone else to do it for us, and care is only a minor motivation here". David Wood, "Editorial. People Watching People" *Surveillance and Society* 2, no.4 (2004): 475, [http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/articles2\(4\)/editorial.pdf](http://www.surveillance-and-society.org/articles2(4)/editorial.pdf) (accessed April 20, 2011).

the possibility that camera phones might be used to challenge the predominantly unidirectional vision of surveillance. Mann, Nolan and Wellman do not draw the parallel between their wearable cameras and camera phones used to challenge or monitor security forces, but I argue this is a helpful comparison. I should note, however, that wearable cameras designed by Mann and his colleagues often resemble surveillance cameras and are sometimes controlled remotely, allowing camera wearers to deflect responsibility with the same arguments as employees of businesses using surveillance cameras (“I am not in charge of the camera; I do not have the authority to turn it off”). Conversely, camera phones used as counter-surveillance devices are clearly operated by the physically present individual.

Further intersections between surveillance and digital media were evident at W2 during the Olympics through the practice of filming the crowds at W2 parties and projecting the image on the wall. However, this practice subverts the usually covert nature of surveillance by sharing the live image, potentially drawing attention to the issue of surveillance and encouraging awareness and dialogue. Also, it is a representation of inclusivity and attachment of the people in the image to the physical space. Once again, an architectural screen performs the connection of the space of flows to the space of place; digital screen stories are created in conjunction with a face-to-face social gathering. These images, live streamed online, allow people to connect to the event at a distance, promoting the activities of W2 and encouraging dialogue about the sorts of face-to-face events being held. Yet this might seem a rather unnecessary layer of mediation. Do we need the affirmation of the image to confirm what is already happening? As Marie Fraser suggests, “it is

as though we in the West today needed to create media images of the body in order to make it more real and readable than reality”.⁵³ More crucially, in drawing attention to the bodies of those who are often marginalised, does this quasi-surveillant practice exclude some Downtown Eastside residents? Is little brother as daunting as Big Brother for vulnerable Downtown Eastside residents, even if little brother is actively trying to create space and opportunities for such residents?

It is important to note that some social events held at W2 functioned as fundraisers to maintain W2’s space and provision of community media arts facilities. They were likely aimed at young party-goers and arts professionals from other parts of the city who could pay an entrance fee, while Downtown Eastside residents were also encouraged to come with a reduced fee for low-income residents. Other events – talks, press conferences, and debates often about the Downtown Eastside or issues of importance to the Downtown Eastside – had a greater proportion of local crowds. A debate about Diversity of Tactics in the anti-Olympic protests drew a particularly large and diverse audience.⁵⁴ For an evening of conversation, poetry and music by people with experiences of poverty and homelessness, as part of the North American-wide Homeless Marathon, W2 provided food and drink as an added gesture of hospitality to homeless neighbours and attracted a moderate audience.⁵⁵ Many

⁵³ Marie Fraser, “Media Image, Public Space, and the Body: Around Krzysztof Wodiczko’s *Alien Staff*” in *Precarious Visualities: New Perspectives on Identification in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture* eds. Oliver Asselin, Johanne Lamoureux, Christine Ross (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2008), 250.

⁵⁴ “A Diversity of Tactics – A Diversity of Opinions: Panel discussion co-hosted by rabble.ca and working TV, Saturday February 20, 2010 at W2 Community Media Arts Centre, Vancouver”, Vimeo video file, posted by working TV, <http://vimeo.com/9705341> (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁵⁵ “Homeless Marathon: Live from W2 February 23, 2010 Presented by CJSF Radio 90.1 FM, Hosted by Ryan Fletcher and Jay Peachy”, YouTube video file, posted by W2CommunityTV on February 27, 2010,

of these events were also filmed, with the images fed back onto television screens rather than the wall of the room. They were also live streamed, via Ustream, onto www.creativetechnology.org so that those unable to travel to W2 could watch online.⁵⁶

Audience members in the physical space were informed about the filming and advised to sit at the back if they wanted to avoid the camera's gaze, restricting movement in the space of W2 and potentially limiting participation. Indeed, one man I spoke to at the Homeless Marathon had agreed to participate with the discussion onstage, but had presumed that only the audio would be recorded for radio transmission. When he saw that the events were being filmed, he became hesitant to participate. In this instance the creation of digital screen stories and documentation shaped space and restricted access in a similar way to surveillance. Nonetheless, in filming the events occurring in the physical space of W2 Culture and Media House, W2 created screen stories and extended the space of discussion to the online platform. These screen stories transcended the architectural capacity of W2 and created a bridge between the locality of the Downtown Eastside and other localities that might learn from and participate in the conversations occurring at W2. A comment function alongside the UStream window permitted viewers to offer comments and questions as the event occurred which could then be introduced to the physical discussion that was taking place. An electronic hypertext was thus synchronised with the space of place, amplifying the voices of participants whose stories are often marginalised in mainstream media: the poor, the

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrvIravY6ao&feature=player_embedded# (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁵⁶ UStream is the platform W2 used to broadcast their events online. See <http://www.ustream.tv/> for more details.

homeless, those informed by mental health issues, First Nations and young people.



Figure 3. Diversity of Tactics discussion, W2 Community Media Arts, Vancouver. February 20, 2010. Photograph by author.

Mobile Screen Stories: Fearless City Mobile, *Mobile Swarm*

I turn now to analyse an early Fearless City Mobile media arts intervention and the online video documentation of it by NFB filmmaker-in-residence at Fearless and W2, Moira Simpson.⁵⁷ I should note that I did not witness this intervention first-hand; thus, my reading of it is shaped primarily by the video and secondarily by contextual knowledge of the participants and locations derived from my research trips to Vancouver in February 2009 and 2010 and subsequent online conversations with Fearless City Mobile participants. I value this text as an instance of collaborative storytelling and multimodal bridgework that encourages dialogue about the digital divide and urban mobility.

⁵⁷ Fearless City Mobile, “Mobile Swarm”, YouTube video file posted by laniwurm, December 18, 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP9RZoYfJOQ> (accessed July 27, 2011).

In October 2008, Fearless City Mobile participants pushed a large screen attached to a shopping trolley between art galleries in the Downtown Eastside. The screen, powered by battery and wireless enabled, was equipped with Vancouver-developed software Sift, which aggregated messages sent from mobile telephones and live streamed footage transmitted to the screen by Fearless participants from their mobile video cameras.⁵⁸ Fearless called this performance *Mobile Swarm*. It supplemented the Vancouver-wide event *Swarm* where artist-run centres in a neighbourhood open simultaneously, encouraging visitors to move from one to the next. Taking place annually in three Vancouver neighbourhoods on three different nights, the second night of *Swarm* involved Downtown Eastside artist-run centres with *Mobile Swarm* moving between these sites.⁵⁹

Mobile Swarm's mobile screen reached diverse audiences and encouraged conversation about urban mobility and the digital divide as it circulated through the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood visiting artist-run centres participating in *Swarm*. The event gained further audiences through the video documentation, posted online. Members of the general public going about other business encountered *Mobile Swarm* as it moved from one location to another, the art-viewing public attended *Swarm* in the Downtown Eastside, and the potentially international online public, including this author, were able

⁵⁸ Sift was developed by Vancouver's Raincity Studios, a company which has collaborated with Fearless and other non-profit organisations. Further information about Sift can be found in this podcast: Dave Olson and Roland Tanglao, "Mobile Non-Profit Campaigns and Projects" Raincity Radio, audio file posted on December 24, 2008 <http://raincitystudios.com/raincity-radio/mobile-non-profit-campaigns-and-projects> (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁵⁹ In the video documentation of *Mobile Swarm*, the opening text states: "Tonight, *Swarm* comes to Gastown". According to the City of Vancouver, Gastown is part of a larger Downtown Eastside. The three artist-run centres shown in the video *Mobile Swarm* are Artspeak, Gallery Gachet, InterUrban, and 221A, the locations of which are beyond the area usually known as Gastown. One presumes that Gastown was used in promotion for the event to avoid the negative connotations of Downtown Eastside (this naming strategy also occurs on tourist maps and in lists of filming locations).

to view *Mobile Swarm* on YouTube or www.creativetechnology.org. The general public encountered on the street are more likely to be living or working in the neighbourhood. The art-viewing public that attended *Swarm* might be from the neighbourhood or might have travelled there purely to look at the art. Online viewers might come across *Mobile Swarm* at random, but are most likely to be part of W2 or Fearless' online communities, or a wider digital media or Vancouver arts community.



Figure 4. Screen capture from *Mobile Swarm* (Fearless City Mobile, 2008).

The distinctive physical presence of the shopping cart screen disrupts everyday street activities, attracts the attention of diverse publics and encourages interaction and discussion. It is an intervention in the public space of the streets and destabilises conventional notions about screens, mobility and space. Mobile screens are usually portable and unobtrusive, but the shopping cart screen is a considerable physical presence. It thus subverts expectations of mobile screens and shopping carts. The novelty of this hi-tech shopping cart attracts attention where a normal shopping cart would be ignored or resented

despite, or because of, the space it takes up. Online documentation of *Mobile Swarm* is a less effective intervention than the offline performance, yet the online presence extends the potential audience and is a resource for future conversations.

The shopping cart screen used in *Mobile Swarm* brings together two very different symbols of mobility: wireless Internet (a space of flows manifested on the screen) and the shopping cart. The use of a wireless, mobile device is pertinent to Fearless City Mobile's interest in improving access to information and communication technologies for Downtown Eastside residents by increasing access to wireless connectivity and wireless devices and appropriate training. The shopping cart suggests solidarity with those in the Downtown Eastside who depend on this basic mobility and storage device. In the video of *Mobile Swarm*, one Fearless participant suggests the shopping cart screen is "so East end", referring to the frequent visibility of carts in the Downtown Eastside where a significant population rely on carts to carry their belongings due to lack of permanent residence, and/or use carts to collect recyclable materials to be exchanged for cash at can/bottle depots or traded elsewhere.⁶⁰ This function of the shopping cart contrasts with the initial purpose of the device as it was, after all, invented to increase consumption at grocery stores. This function might be associated with the former Woodward's store, once a premier Vancouver shopping destination, or perhaps with its decline, as larger stores opened and shoppers with cars – another capacity-increasing mobility device – began to travel outside the Downtown core to shop. Similarly, the symbolism of the cart persists in online shopping, which

⁶⁰ The United We Can Bottle Depot at 39 East Hastings Street has enabled many to earn from the collection of recyclable materials in the Downtown Eastside and beyond since 1995. "The United We Can Story", United We Can, <http://www.unitedwecan.ca/> (accessed June 10, 2010).

takes increased modes and capacity of consumption to new extremes, unconstrained by the consumer's capacity for transportation.⁶¹ However, for those whose consumption practices are fundamentally limited by lack of income, address, and transportation, the shopping cart is necessarily adapted to assist earning and to be a mobile kind of home.

Despite the strange juxtaposition of hi-tech and low-tech (noted by a Fearless participant in the video), parallels can be drawn between shopping carts, as they usually function, and the wireless devices in which mobile screens are more usually found (e.g. cell phones, smart phones, tablet computers, netbooks, laptops). Both are containers and labour-saving devices. A wireless device contains useful information in one convenient lightweight package: one no longer has to carry an address book, a diary, a Walkman. A cart contains the user's possessions, and its wheels and volume increase the amount of goods that can be transported by one individual and reduces the effort required. While the shopping cart is supported by a strong infrastructure of roads, pathways and wide doorways, the wireless device relies on access to cell phone networks or wifi infrastructure – pathways for radio waves. The shopping cart and the wireless device thus connect us to urban infrastructures.

However, the connection of the shopping cart to the road or path is physically experienced while wireless connection (or exclusion) is usually intangible. William J. Mitchell, in his book *Me++*, tracks how the body has meshed with the city through different devices throughout history – walking

⁶¹ The magazine *Wired* included the shopping cart in its column "Events That Shaped the Wired World" although they failed to explicitly connect this technology with "the wired world". Kerstin Sjoden, "This Day in Tech: Events that Shaped the Wired World. June 4, 1937: Humpty Dumpty and the Shopping Cart" *Wired* June 4, 2009. http://www.wired.com/thisdayintech/2009/06/dayintech_0604/?intcid=postnav#ixzz0qCbYcWvI (accessed June 10, 2010).

sticks, wheels, carts, powered vehicles, power grids, cell phone and wireless networks – and writes of the first roads as “early forms of network infrastructure”.⁶² *Mobile Swarm*, however, raises a question of inequality that Mitchell fails to foreground; the “progress” from walking sticks and carts to exoskeletons and smart phones has not been unidirectional. As more people acquire electronic devices, an increasing number experience unemployment, rising house prices and welfare cuts resulting from neoliberal policies, and are forced to rely on more and more basic machines and infrastructures to survive.

The screen cart draws attention to the contrast between wireless mobility and shopping cart mobility and to the increasing economic polarisation and digital divide of contemporary cities. Many of us are able to make the consumer choice to become more mobile. We purchase wireless devices and can consequently work, access entertainment and socialise whilst in transit. Employees are compelled to work in transit when employers supply equipment, such as Blackberries, that allow their workforce to be flexible and on call wherever and whenever they are needed. Many individuals listen to music, watch television and film, and play games whilst on the move. People socialise while in transit using social networks and telephone calls. These media might be used to plan face-to-face social activities, to facilitate interaction that could otherwise not occur because of distance or, increasingly, as social environments in their own right.

Although wireless devices permit virtual travel and diminish the necessity of movement, people often incorporate virtual activity into a physically mobile lifestyle, avoiding the sedentary existence that theorist

⁶² Mitchell, 19-21.

Virilio suggested would result from the proliferation of digital technologies.⁶³ Instead, we are still relatively active and, as Tomlinson notes, we often carry our digital technologies with us. Our conception of mobility and travel has shifted and Tomlinson considers this using the notion of the terminal: A terminal is no longer merely a location where machine-assisted physical movement ends, but also a starting point for machine-assisted virtual movement. Tomlinson suggests we carry the latter form of terminals around with us, “maybe soon, *within* us”. Terminals thus

cease to be fixed points in a physical space which organise our patterns of mobility. And so, in a certain sense, some of the constraints of human embodiment itself are overcome – at least to the extent that the ‘presence’ of the world now seems to move along with us – indeed, experientially, with us at its centre.⁶⁴

Tomlinson’s analysis depends on the shift from a terminal as “situated at the end of a line of railway” to “a device for feeding data into a computer or receiving its output; *esp.* one that can be used by a person as a means of two-way communication with a computer”.⁶⁵ A third meaning, that of approaching death, remains unmentioned yet looms large over my consideration of Vancouver’s context of homelessness. Often named “Terminal City” because the city emerged around the end point of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Vancouver is, poignantly, the end of the line for many homeless people. Once homeless, mobility beyond the city (or even the neighbourhood) often ceases. Individuals are bound to their immediate locale by lack of access to transport or communication devices.

⁶³ Paul Virilio, *Open Sky* (London: Verso, 1997), 25, 33, and 56.

⁶⁴ Tomlinson, *Culture of Speed*, 105.

⁶⁵ “terminal, adj. and n.”, OED Online, March 2011, Oxford University Press, <http://oed.com/view/Entry/199419?redirectedFrom=terminal> (accessed June 04, 2011).

The shopping cart screen of *Mobile Swarm*, while on one hand demonstrating the latest technology for organising mobile media, also reminds us that digital mobility is far from ubiquitous and human embodiment is all too evident in low-income neighbourhoods like the Downtown Eastside. The cumbersome nature of the shopping cart screen, the necessity of considerable physical effort to transport this communication device, is simultaneously a reminder of the dependence on, and burden of, physicality and materiality for the non-digitally enabled urban poor. Without the Internet, one must visit the bank rather than make transactions online, visit the grocery store rather than order online and have food delivered. One must increasingly stand in line or wait in telephone queues to do tasks that the Internet performs with the touch of the button. Moreover, for those with no fixed address, credit to partake in such consumer activities is unlikely. And for those without a home in which to keep possessions, mobility is enforced but limited as uneven terrain and narrow paths, entrances and interior spaces prevent the circulation and access of the person pushing a shopping trolley. It is clear that concerns about detrimental effects – deterritorialization, derealization, sedentary life – of increasingly portable information and communication technologies described by theorists such as Virilio are complicated by inequality. In the Downtown Eastside and in many other deprived localities, not everyone is liberated from place by digital technologies; not everyone has the luxury of private space in which to retreat.

Fearless City Media's *Mobile Swarm* draws attention to the digital divide and facilitates self-expression for those without access to information and communication technologies. For the event, Fearless participants were on hand with cell phones to text on behalf of those without their own device or

data plan (in contrast to other instances of “interactive” media that invite text messages, such as television votes, competitions, or public art on urban screens, but where interaction is limited to those who can afford phones and the price of the text). As artist Krzysztof Wodiczko has suggested, for homeless people the “contradiction of their existence [...] is that while they are physically confined to public spaces they are politically excluded from public space constituted as a space for communication”.⁶⁶ *Mobile Swarm* and Fearless City Mobile recognize this contradiction and take steps to help disenfranchised people participate in the civic sphere using digital technologies. Moreover, the shopping cart screen creates an opportunity for collaboration between publics that might not normally meet and converse. Arts enthusiasts from throughout Vancouver and beyond, people on the streets of the Downtown Eastside and the low-income Downtown Eastside residents that are members of Fearless interact and exchange stories that break down stereotypes about people who push carts or live in the Downtown Eastside, thus building empathetic bridges. The documentation of the event in the video online adds a further layer of empathetic narrative that reaches even more diverse and geographically distributed publics.

The video *Mobile Swarm* represents the mobile screen and is simultaneously an extension of it, a mobile-screen story which can be resituated in different locations within the electronic hypertext and viewed on numerous screens in diverse contexts. This raises a question about how changing contexts impact upon the reception of the screen story: I acknowledge the potential loss of intended meaning as the screen story travels,

⁶⁶ Cited in Neil Smith, “Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographical Scale” *Social Text* 33 (1992): 59.

but embrace the resituation of the screen story as it stimulates new conversations, new readings, new ideas which might be adapted to suit other sites. Moreover, Fearless City Mobile actively encourages and experiments with the remixing of screen stories, the recombination of images and sounds to produce new works of art for different situations. For instance, VJ Electrabelle remixed *W Stories* as it was projected upon the exterior of Woodward's and at Techforms, a fundraising event for Woodward's occurring several days later: she thus transformed a documentary style promotional text for use as entertainment in a party context.

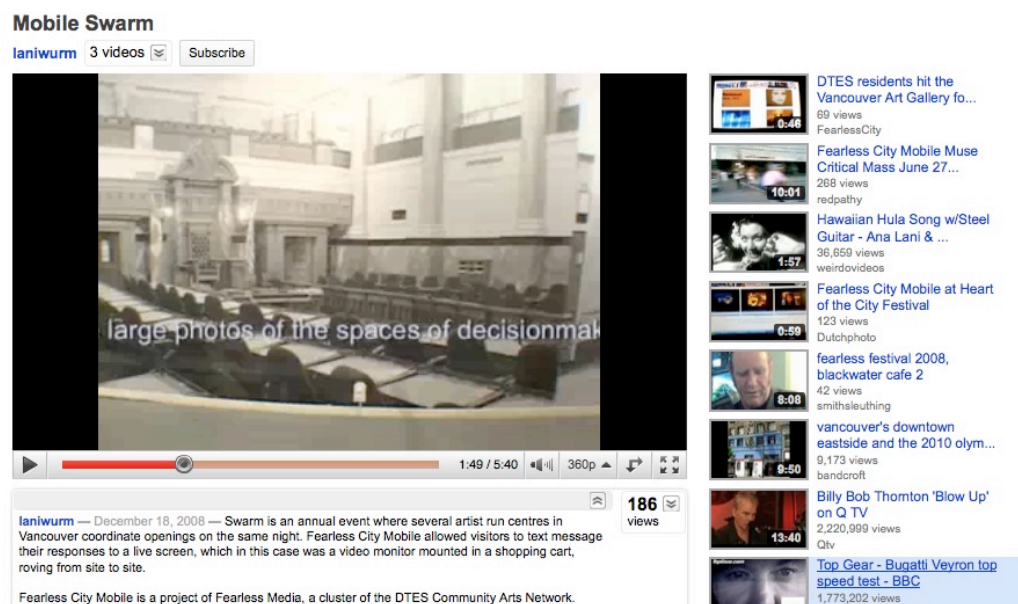


Figure 5. Screen capture from *Mobile Swarm* (Fearless City Mobile, 2008).

A significant intertext of *Mobile Swarm*, which parallels Fearless City Mobile's experiments with remixed and resituated images, is Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber's "We Declare – Spaces of Housing", a collection of large photographic images briefly represented by the *Mobile Swarm* video. "We Declare" was "an exhibition that addresses the sites and institutions where

decisions and declarations regarding housing are made (ranging from local communities, to the Provincial capital, and up to the United Nations)”.⁶⁷

Images of the meeting places of the federal government and that of the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre Power of Women group stand alongside one another. These large black and white photographs of empty rooms cover the height of the walls of Gallery Gachet and are a stark contrast with the mobility and interactivity of the shopping cart screen. However, the photographs did not stand alone as static objects, but were accompanied by a programme of discursive events through the newly-initiated platform of The Flying University.

The Flying University brought Downtown Eastside community workers, activists and artists together with international participants in a de-institutionalised setting to “consider the current context of gentrification and economic distortion of Vancouver’s inner city in the lead up to the Olympics”.⁶⁸ “We Declare” and Mobile Swarm, by extension, consequently exist as part of an assemblage of several interrelated and notably mobile events. The Flying University has no permanent location (it takes its name from a necessarily mobile underground educational enterprise in nineteenth-century Warsaw under Russian rule). Although “We Declare” was a one-off exhibition, made specifically for and through Gallery Gachet, it subsequently became mobile when Bitter and Weber circulated their images online, encouraging bloggers to remix and represent photographic representations of space from “We Declare” and two other projects. A zip file of photographs was

⁶⁷ Helmut Weber and Sabine Bitter, “‘We Declare’: Spaces of Housing”, Vancouver, 2008 http://www.lot.at/projects/WE_DECLARE/index.html (accessed June 10 2010).

⁶⁸ “We Declare: Spaces of Housing”, Gallery Gachet, under “Past Exhibitions”, September 5 - 27, 2008, <http://gachet.org/exhibitions/we-declare-spaces-of-housing/> (accessed June 4, 2011).

provided to participants with accompanying text entitled “Notes Toward an Open Project”. London artist David Berridge took up the challenge on his blog *More Milk Yvette*, and commented:

This project is not about documentation. I am interested in what happens when these projects appear on the *More Milk Yvette* blogspot. How does this space continue each project? Is it a way of disseminating ideas and continuing conversations more widely? Or is it, instead, closing down such debates, removing them of the specificity and context they need to be politically effective?⁶⁹

Berridge’s unanswered question might be applied to the video of *Mobile Swarm* and other online digital screen stories, such as *W Stories*, that specifically address the location in which they were made. What do the various re-presentations of Downtown Eastside spaces online contribute to constructive conversation and/or political action when read outside of their original context?⁷⁰ Or, are they put to new uses?

I have already suggested that the mobility of screen stories on the Internet has its benefits: shifting contexts create ongoing conversations and understanding. The notion of hypertext, or hypermedia texts, as analysed by Lynette Hunter, might be used to elaborate on this potential. She writes,

Unlike other earlier computer tools which concentrated on organising, defining, categorising or reducing already available written or socio-historical literary texts in order to make analysis easier and more efficient, hypermedia procedures encourage people to add to existing structures working within systems of knowledge.⁷¹

Downtown Eastside screen stories might lose their original context when posted online, yet this encourages the participation of online viewers in

⁶⁹ “Artist’s Project: Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber”, *More Milky Yvette* blog, entry posted on March 5, 2009. <http://moremilkyvette.blogspot.com/2009/03/artists-project-sabine-bitter-and.html> (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁷⁰ Moreover, what happens to these texts when articulated and analysed in the work of an English academic? As Berridge recombines the works of Bitter and Weber and removes them from their site-specific context, I recombine and remove the works of Fearless, W2, AHA Media and their additional intertexts, although the crucial difference is that I intentionally provide certain contexts and attempt to situate the texts in a political narrative.

⁷¹ Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing*, 106.

assembling their own contexts, using existing knowledge and following links to add supplementary knowledge. However, Hunter goes on to stress that what hypertexts “do not automatically do, and what there is an urgent need for the applications to attempt, is a social assessment of the methodology or the provision of context”.⁷² It seems necessary, then, that projects using digital screen stories with political aims situated in a specific physical location, like the Downtown Eastside, whilst encouraging re-presentation, should highlight this process and seek to educate participants to engage critically with the technologies they are using. Since Fearless and W2 participants have participated in a number of events addressing such issues, it might be said that the work is underway.

Translocal Screen Stories: AHA Media, *12 Days of Olympics* Premiere

In this section I focus on the translocal premiere of AHA Media’s pair of short films *12 Days of Olympics*. I am influenced here by Colin MacFarlane’s notion of translocal assemblages as a means of conceiving relationships between social movements, and suggest that this term is useful for understanding the strategies of recent Downtown Eastside media arts projects.⁷³ MacFarlane writes,

First, [translocal assemblages] are composites of place-based social movements which exchange ideas, knowledge, practices, materials and resources across sites. Second, translocal assemblage is an attempt to emphasise that translocal social movements are more than just the connections between sites. Sites in translocal assemblages have more depth than the notion of ‘node’ or ‘point’ suggests (as connoted by network) in terms of their histories, the labour required to produce them, and their inevitable capacity to exceed the connections between other groups or places in the movement. Third, they are not simply a

⁷² Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing*, 106.

⁷³ I thank Julie Rak for introducing me to the term “translocal” and referencing MacFarlane’s article.

spatial category, output, or resultant formation, but signify doing, performance and events.⁷⁴

On the evening of the premiere of *12 Days of Olympics*, a number of sites were assembled for the exchange of ideas about urban transformation and the Olympics: Centre A on East Hastings Street in the Downtown Eastside and various arts and housing organisations in the Kotobuki district of Yokohama Japan.⁷⁵ Due to the limitations of technology, Centre A could only connect with one Yokohama organisation at a time, so only Yokohama Hostel Village shared in the premiere of AHA Media's film. *12 Days of Olympics* was shown after more than an hour of conversation about urban revitalisation between those gathered at Centre A and representatives of a number of Yokohama arts organisations. Although the differences in political, cultural and social contexts were acknowledged, it was suggested that Vancouver and Yokohama might learn from one another's experiences.

Translocal is an appropriate term, rather than international or transnational, because the mediated exchange is focused on local practices even though national borders are transcended. This assertion comes with a caveat: I do not mean to oversimplify the local, which is continually shaped by national, provincial and municipal decision making, the logic of global markets and the movement of populations. Indeed MacFarlane's intention is to use the term translocal to "blur, if not bypass the scalar distinction between local and global".⁷⁶ Moreover, his pairing of the term with "assemblage" gestures to the

⁷⁴ Colin McFarlane, "Translocal assemblages: space, power and social movements" *Geoforum* 40, no. 4 (2009), 562.

⁷⁵ For a list and hyperlinks to the sites of these organisations and a recording of the Skype conversation, see "Jun Oenoki: Skype with Yokohama", text and UStream video file, World Tea Party, entry posted February 18, 2010, <http://www.worldteaparty.com/jun-oenoki-skype-with-yokohama> (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁷⁶ MacFarlane, 562.

shifting, uneven and emergent nature of relationships between topographies.⁷⁷

The connections between Vancouver and Yokohama are subject to change as each locality is shaped by wider contexts. Significantly, two of the participants at the Yokohama Hostel Village were from Mexico and were travelling recreationally in the neighbourhood. Their interest in commenting on their own country's experience of Olympic legacy adds another dimension to the translocal exchange between the neighbourhoods of Kotobuki and the Downtown Eastside. Nonetheless, the discussion at the premiere of *12 Days of Olympics* privileges local or neighbourhood experiences as the filmmakers and the Yokohama organisations participating in the discussion are primarily focused on making change in their immediate environment.

The location of Yokohama was considered a useful site for translocal exchange because the Japanese city has been twinned with Vancouver as a sister port city since 1981, and, because the Kotobuki neighbourhood is recognised as having similarities to the Downtown Eastside: proximity to the port, and social issues of alcohol addiction, poverty and poor housing. Moreover, Centre A, on the edge of Chinatown and not far from the area once known as Japantown, is the Vancouver Centre for Contemporary Asian Arts. The existence of this centre is a symbol of the ongoing translocal exchanges that occur within the Downtown Eastside (incorporating Chinatown and Japantown) as a result of migrant populations or descendants of migrants who maintain various links with their own or their relatives' country of origin. *12*

⁷⁷ One might consider whether it is useful to consider the surveillance assemblage (Haggerty and Ericson, 4) as also translocal, or whether the distinctions between local, regional, national and global are more defined and/or relevant to the operation of surveillance.

Days of Olympics was part of an exhibition called World Tea Party.⁷⁸ The curators of World Tea Party suggested that drinking tea is a communal act shared by communities in localities around the world, and Centre A artists performed Chinese, Japanese and First Nations tea rituals during the exhibition which ran for the duration of the Olympic period.

12 Days of Olympics was projected on two screens within Centre A to participants and audience (who paid \$5 or whatever they could afford to attend), and on two screens facing through the glass walls of Centre A out into Hastings Street for passersby to see. The *12 Days of Olympics* premiere thus occurred on a screen that was translocal and architectural, as the physical landscape functioned as temporary media-space facilitating the overflow of art centre activities into city space.⁷⁹ The internal exhibition was extended to those who happened to pass by or to any individuals who did not feel comfortable entering the exhibition space. It should be noted, however, that the resultant transformation of the public space of the street into a quasi-auditorium is potentially problematic in that the screen dominates and directs interactions occurring in that space for the duration of the screening.

During the event, the Downtown Eastside was represented to Yokohama by AHA Media and Centre A curators, and the street-facing screens lent this process a transparency by opening up the resulting discussion to those

⁷⁸ For more information about Centre A and an incisive critique of the role of art centres in fostering cultural diversity, see Sadira Rodrigues, "Dealing (with) Cultural Diversity: Vancouver Art, Race and Economies", in *Vancouver Art and Economies* ed. Melanie Brian (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), 165-185.

⁷⁹ I note Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy's broad conception of MediaSpace as a term that "at once defines the artefactual existence of media forms within social space, the links that media objects forge *between* spaces, and the (no less real) cultural visions of a physical space transcended by technology and emergent virtual pathways of communication". However, I use "media-space" in a simpler and more specific sense, to mean a very literal and evident intersection of the two. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy "Introduction", in *MediaSpace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age* eds. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2004), 2.

in the street. If passersby were dissatisfied with this representation they had the opportunity to intervene. The performance was predominantly improvised. While the sharing of certain information was planned (such as the premiere of *12 Days of Olympics*), the structure left room for unexpected participants. This potential was borne out when a woman entered Centre A and asked to use the microphone to speak. She spoke about a recent robbery that had left her penniless, and made a request for financial assistance. This moment of inclusivity prompted nervous laughter from the Yokohama correspondents, before they quickly returned to the topic of Olympic legacies. The woman's contribution might have been contextualised and developed within the general discussion of the particularities of the Downtown Eastside locality in contrast with the Yokohama neighbourhood, but participants did not address the incident.

12 Days of Olympics was presented in partnership with the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad and part of the City of Vancouver's Olympic and Paralympic Public Art Series Bright Light, yet despite the official sponsorship, the performance articulated criticisms of the Olympics and their detrimental effect on the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood and other Vancouver communities. *12 Days of Olympics* is one of many Cultural Olympiad-funded initiatives that incorporated a critical perspective of the Games. While officially sanctioned television broadcasts tended to present a fairly singular positive image of the city, the Cultural Olympiad funding during the Olympics and Paralympics arguably funded diverse local storytelling and artistic expression that opened up discursive space around the advantages and disadvantages of hosting the Olympic Games. Of course, one might argue that

the power of the globally recognisable Olympic brand and its promotional mechanisms automatically recuperate all criticism and fuel the notion that the Olympics is a force for democratic expression. Nonetheless, as an instance of collaborative self-representation, premiered at an event planned to facilitate translocal communication, *12 Days of Olympics* might be considered as alternative media practice and a counter-narrative to mainstream media.

AHA Media reinvented the well-known Christmas song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” as a framework in which to express conflicting opinions about the Olympics. The pairing of two films permits the ambiguity of AHA Media’s opinions about the Olympics to be expressed: despite excitement about the sports, the vast Cultural Olympiad programme and Vancouver’s involvement in an internationally renowned event, the filmmakers are all too aware of the problems the Olympics cause them and the inequality the Games perpetuate. The first film was consequently celebratory and comical, with DTES residents gathered around a shopping cart to sing about how “Vancouver got to see” “skiers skiing”, “skaters skating”, “shiny medals”, “native nations”,⁸⁰ “five Olympic rings”, and “a lifetime legacy”. The second film was subtitled, “Our lives in the Downtown Eastside during the Winter Olympic Games” and contained footage and sound-bites of anti-Olympic protests while the same DTES choir sang of how “VANOC gave to me” “blocked off roads” (to the detriment of local businesses), “stolen mascots” (the appropriated First Nations figures/legends incorporated into the official mascots), slashed budgets (for arts, education and other services), “armies marching” (presumably a reference to the security forces used during the Games), “athletes doping”,

⁸⁰ Presumably a reference to the Four Host Nations (Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh) of the Olympic Games.

“children coping”, “homeless dying”, and “companies lying”. Each verse concluded with the refrain “and a deficit ’til 2023”. The final year of the deficit was postponed by ten years with every verse, satirising the ever-expanding Olympic budget.⁸¹

12 Days of Olympics uses a more traditional format than AHA Media’s usual screen stories. The media collective predominantly use cell phone cameras to report neighbourhood news and showcase neighbourhood talent – documenting cultural events and interviewing local artists, for instance – through an online multimedia-publishing platform. For *12 Days of Olympics* they adapt the narrative and imaging skills they have learnt using recent technologies to an older form of screen story: *12 Days of Olympics* echoes the aesthetic of oppositional community documentaries. For instance, the ironic use of a celebratory song to structure the film is reminiscent of Kim Tomczak’s *Vancouver, Canada, or They Chant Fed Up* (1980) where the song “Beautiful British Columbia” jars with the imagery of poverty in the city.⁸² However, the collaborative production of *12 Days of Olympics* and the self-representation of the filmmakers, facilitated by new digital equipment distinguishes it from earlier examples of this aesthetic. The filmmakers interweave their own appearance into the images of Olympic and anti-Olympic activity, singing the soundtrack as a choir, which emphasises the collective nature of the project and the tongue-in-cheek DIY aesthetic. Footage shot with a borrowed lightweight digital camera and camera kit is combined with found footage, using digital

⁸¹ AHA Media offer their own concise explanation of *12 Days of Olympics* on their mobile platform:

“AHA MEDIA is very proud to attend 5 Zeros” AHA Media, March 9, 2010, <http://ahamedia.ca/2010/03/09/aha-media-is-very-proud-to-attend-5-zeros-a-screening-of-new-video-works-by-lifeskills-collective-at-7pm-on-thurs-march-11-2010-in-pigeon-park-vancouver-downtown-eastside-dtes/> (accessed June 10, 2010).

⁸² Kim Tomczak, “Vancouver Canada Or They Chant Fed Up”, VHS, (Canada: Pumps Video, 1980). Thanks to Angela Piccini for alerting me to the existence of this video.

video editing software. The collaborative team of filmmakers are present for the interactive premiere, shared with Japan via video conferencing.

What is notable about the content of the film is that it is not entirely oppositional but represents two perspectives on the Olympics. It is thus a valuable example of bridgework, appealing to individuals with mixed and contrasting feelings about the Games. In Vancouver during February 2010, Vancouver and Canadian mainstream press outlets were largely celebratory. Some “cheerleaders” for the Olympics condemned anti-Olympic commentators for spoiling the fun of others. Yet it is likely that most Vancouverites had mixed sympathies and AHA Media’s film represents this possibility, even within the Downtown Eastside where much anti-Olympic action was focused. AHA Media’s humorous presentation potentially maintained the attention of audiences who were more favourable towards the Olympics by presenting the celebratory part of the film first. This ended with a dedication to “Robert Milton, our Olympic torch bearer”, showing community solidarity with the First Nations Downtown Eastside resident who had been chosen to run with the torch and represent the neighbourhood in the official proceedings. Milton’s leg of the torch relay had to be diverted along a different route through the Downtown Eastside, because of the anti-Olympic protests largely located in the neighbourhood.⁸³ The second part of the film summarises many of the reasons for anti-Olympic protest concisely and powerfully, demonstrating that support of Milton and the Olympic spirit of athleticism and camaraderie is not necessarily incompatible with criticism of the Olympic corporation.

⁸³ Arshy Mann, “Torchbearer cites amazing experience” *The Ubyyssey* March 1, 2010, <http://ubyssey.ca/olympic-experiences/> (accessed June 4, 2011).



Figure 6. *12 Days of Olympics* premiere, Vancouver. February 20, 2011. Photograph by author.

Amongst these criticisms of VANOC was a complaint about the “millions spying” on Vancouver (and particularly the Downtown Eastside) during the Olympics games. Combined with AHA Media’s chosen imagery and soundbites, *12 Days of Olympics* offers a critique of media and surveillance using digital video technology. A tight crowd of media representatives are pictured thrusting microphones and cameras at an individual during the line “11 million spying”.⁸⁴ Images of security forces are also shown during this line, implying similarities between intrusive media and police or military surveillance: both seem to be accused of spying on the Downtown Eastside, gathering information about the neighbourhood to be used against them. Although this is hyperbolic, it perhaps speaks of how intelligence

⁸⁴ The numbers of the song are not representative whether they are referring to the numbers of surveillance/security forces, to journalists, or to media viewers – ten thousand media representatives were expected to come to Vancouver for the Olympics and estimates suggested three billion would watch the Olympics via media coverage. Nonetheless, AHA Media’s ambiguity is usefully provocative. “Media FAQ”, Canadian Tourism Commission Media, under “Site Map”, <http://mediacentre.canada.travel/media-faq> (accessed June 4, 2011).

officers visited individuals involved in the Downtown Eastside-based anti-Olympic movement in the run up to the games.⁸⁵ With regards to the media “spying”, it has been known for reporters and documentary-makers to go undercover in order to “expose” how people live in the Downtown Eastside.⁸⁶ Moreover, journalists who do not respect the privacy of poor and vulnerable Downtown Eastside residents and take photographs without permission might also be accused of spying.⁸⁷ Residents anticipated this sort of irresponsible representation during the Olympics due to the increased number of journalists attending the games. In contrast, AHA Media’s practice is embedded in the Downtown Eastside and represents the neighbourhood sensitively and with full consent of those who appear on film, many of who actively participate rather than merely appearing in an image.

AHA Media can also be seen to adopt an approach in keeping with the idea of sousveillance. Their use of media holds VANOC to account, using cameras to monitor and record the negative impact of its actions upon the

⁸⁵ “RCMP using intimidation to silence Olympic protest, group says” CBC, under “News”, June 24, 2009.

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/british-columbia/story/2009/06/24/bc-olympic-protest-lawsuit.html#ixzz0msHI70Lc> (accessed June 10, 2010).

Matthew Burrows, “Vancouver cops decide to visit anti-Olympic activist Franklin López” *Georgia Straight* February 4, 2010.

<http://www.straight.com/article-284394/vancouver/cops-decide-visit-antiolympic-activist> (accessed April 22, 2011).

⁸⁶ For examples, see: Cory Ogilvie, dir. *Streets of Plenty* (Canada: Kleider Studios and Ogilvie Film, 2010), YouTube video files, <http://streetsofplenty.com/pages/movie.html> (accessed April 22, 2011); Peter Valing, “Vancouver: Not So Down. The Appeal of the Downtown Eastside” *The Walrus* January/February, 2008 <http://www.walrusmagazine.com/articles/2008.02-cities-vancouver-downtown-eastside-hastings/> (accessed April 22, 2011); “Base Logic” *The Dependant* November 3, 2010, <http://thependent.ca/featured/base-logic-part-one-introductions/> (accessed April 22, 2011).

⁸⁷ Hendrik of Fearless City Mobile and AHA Media pointed me towards a Facebook conversation where Downtown Eastside residents discuss Fearless Mobile’s interview with Global TV (a commercial national TV network): “The Fearlessmobile project gives our citizens a chance to respond to inaccurate reporting by the big media. It is a way to re-establish dignity for our street brothers and sisters. Fearless-media did not shoot the pictures that were used by GlobalTV as cutaways, even though they insinuated that we did!” Hendrik, comment on “Fearless on Global National”, video file posted by Lani Russwurm, December 6, 2009 <http://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=133728535205> (accessed June 10, 2010).

Downtown Eastside. The creative manner of this “holding to account” differs from Steve Mann’s notion of “reflectionism”, where the individual mirrors the surveillance activities and bureaucratisation of surveillance “and asks the question: ‘Do you like what you see?’ If you do not, then you will know that other approaches by which we integrate society and technology must be considered”.⁸⁸ Rather than mirroring, AHA Media offer a playful critique of VANOC, the Olympics, and resultant representation and surveillance practices while simultaneously demonstrating a counter to institutional surveillance. Sousveillance is, however, a useful concept for emphasising the practice of monitoring from below that occurs in the Downtown Eastside, particularly during the Olympics, and the relation of digital media to sousveillance.

An important intertext of *12 Days of Olympics* is the Poverty Olympics. This event similarly monitors the promises and effects of the Olympics and the intersections between *12 Days of Olympics* and the Poverty Olympics demonstrate local strategies of resistance within the Downtown Eastside, which have translocal value for connecting with different localities affected by the Olympics or other mega events. Much of the footage used in this second part of *12 Days of Olympics* was taken from AHA Media’s coverage of the 2010 Poverty Olympics, which occurred on February 7, 2010. The Poverty Olympics has been held annually since 2008 to critique the Games with satire and a sense of fun, encouraging the participation of young and old. The Poverty Olympic Organising Committee, comprised of representatives from six DTES organisations, hold a day where families can

watch the Games (Welfare Hurdles, Skating around Poverty, and more), cheer the Mascots (Itchy the Bedbug, Creepy the Cockroach and

⁸⁸ Mann et al, “Sousveillance”, 333.

Chewy the Rat), boo the Bad Guys (Mr. Bid and Mr. Con Dough), sing along with the Poverty Anthem, eat cake and be merry!⁸⁹

The family fun is part of a larger campaign to educate people about the levels of poverty in British Columbia, the broken promises made by VANOC, and to suggest a plan of action for the government to end homelessness – a cheaper option, it is argued, than maintaining homelessness.⁹⁰

AHA Media's film has much in common with the Poverty Olympics approach. Indeed, Hendrik of AHA Media praises the Poverty Olympics approach as a successful political strategy and representative of the spirit of the community as a whole:

If something doesn't work, go about it in a dignified and playful manner, like the Poverty Olympics, for example. I think that's another of the fantastic things to come out of the DTES. With a sense of humour, we're pointing out what the politicians are doing wrong.⁹¹

Hendrik identifies this approach as local to the DTES, and again it is clear that the aim is to monitor government from below. Additionally, AHA Media adopt a similar strategy of culture jamming (a term often associated with Vancouver and the magazine *Adbusters*) to that used by the Poverty Olympics: the subverting of official Olympic symbols to undermine the brand and critique the values of the organisation. In singing about and using the image of five Olympic rings, AHA Media appropriate an Olympic symbol without permission, risking censorship by their sponsors.⁹² *12 Days of Olympics* is an

⁸⁹ "The Games", Poverty Olympics, http://povertyolympics.ca/?page_id=6 (accessed April 22, 2011).

⁹⁰ "Land of Plenty", Poverty Olympics, http://povertyolympics.ca/?page_id=3 (accessed April 22, 2011).

⁹¹ Hendrik Beune, interview by author, Vancouver, March 4, 2009.

⁹² Censorship is a very real risk considering the cease and desist letter sent to those using Olympic images without permission during previous Games, and the local censorship of a mural of the five Olympic rings, four with sad faces and one with a happy face. Charlie Smith, "Geoff Meggs calls removal of Olympic mural at Crying Room 'regrettable'" *The Georgia Straight* December 11, 2009, <http://www.straight.com/article-274930/vancouver/geoff-meggs-calls-removal-olympic-mural-crying-room-regrettable> (accessed July 22, 2011).

example of how media arts can be used to challenge corporate control of images and hold VANOC and municipal, provincial and national governments accountable for their broken promises and failure to deal with poverty. The translocal storytelling that occurred on February 20th, 2010 shared this approach with the Kotobuki locality, who in exchange shared their own media arts approaches, potentially leading to the adoption and adaptation of creative methods of resistance and means of improving their respective neighbourhoods at a grassroots level.

In addition to the footage of the Poverty Olympics, the film incorporates found footage and purpose-filmed sequences of the choir gathered at Princess Avenue in the Downtown Eastside. The shopping cart around which the choir gathers might be read as a continuation of the trope employed in *Mobile Swarm*, playing on associations with and assumptions about the poverty of Downtown Eastside residents and the mobile but embedded perspective of the filmmakers.⁹³ AHA Media are connected to the street life and grassroots movements of the Downtown Eastside yet embrace the mobility of digital devices as trained mobile telephone videographers and experts in live streaming events. To return to Castells' terminology, the "space of flows" intersects with the "space of place" in AHA Media's work, as it did during the live-streamed premiere of *12 Days of Olympics*. Moreover, this is an instance of what Castells calls "'the grassrooting of the space of flows,' that is, the use of the Internet for networking in social mobilisation and social challenges".⁹⁴

The Internet connection between Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and

⁹³ AHA Media founder Hendrik was involved in both *Mobile Swarm* and *12 Days of Olympics*. Hendrik has employed shopping carts in a number of other artistic interventions during his time in the Downtown Eastside. Hendrik Beune, interview by author, Vancouver, March 4, 2009.

⁹⁴ Castells, "Conclusion: Urban Sociology", 402.

Yokohama's Kotobuki district allowed Downtown Eastside residents to articulate their grassroots concerns about how the Olympics affected them and learn about creative projects addressing urban revitalisation in Yokohama.

The subtitle of *12 Days of Olympics: Our Lives in the Downtown Eastside* emphasises the standpoint of these films. For all the media reports and films made about the Downtown Eastside, few can use the term “our”. The use of the possessive adjective is also noticeable in the CCAP publications: “Seeing it our way”, “Nothing about us without us”, “Our Place and Our Words”.⁹⁵ These texts might be read as contributions to a larger narrative of ownership in the neighbourhood, a narrative that relates to physical spaces such as Woodward's and a more nebulous ownership of the neighbourhood's future. AHA Media's work and the CCAP reports articulate the knowledge of the people living in the Downtown Eastside as the most valuable resource for making future plans for the neighbourhood: a response, perhaps, to the many outsider attempts to “fix” the problems of the Downtown Eastside.⁹⁶ Of course, one must remember that the population of the DTES is heterogeneous and AHA Media and CCAP cannot speak for everyone. Their use of plural possessive pronouns totalises experience and one must always ask whom, exactly, “we” and “our” represent. It should be noted that both AHA Media and CCAP are very open about who has contributed to these representations: in acknowledging participant groups and individuals the plural possessive perspective is clearly situated.

⁹⁵ “CCAP Reports” Carnegie Community Action Project <http://ccapvancouver.wordpress.com/ccap-reports/> (accessed April 22, 2011).

⁹⁶ In early 2009 national newspaper *The Globe and Mail* and Vancouver tabloid *The Province* both began a series addressing the problems affecting the Downtown Eastside. The titles of both these series imply that these media investigations could be part of the solution: “Canada's Slum: The Fix” *Globe and Mail*, January 2009, <http://v1.theglobeandmail.com/thefix/> (accessed June 10, 2010) and “Operation Phoenix” *The Province*, February 2009, <http://www.theprovince.com/news/operation-phoenix/index.html> (accessed June 10, 2010).

Many of the choir members performing in *12 Days of Olympics* were from LifeSkills Centre, which “offers peer counselling, life skills development, prevocational skills training, and literacy rich programming, as well as educational classes, services, and support to street-involved adults with multiple barriers”.⁹⁷ Many of LifeSkills’ programmes are specifically aimed at Vancouver’s most marginalised individuals, discriminated against as a result of their economic disadvantage, addictions, illnesses, race and/or gender. AHA Media members also live with one or more of these “barriers”. All face the perceived stigma of living in the Downtown Eastside, a stigma imposed by the superficial gaze of outsiders and perpetuated in the media. Few outsiders recognise that people in the community have a better understanding of issues of representation, surveillance, colonialism, racism, disability, poverty and mental health issues, and the particular ways they interlink in the location of the Downtown Eastside, than those living outside the neighbourhood. AHA Media’s *12 Days of Olympics* demonstrates this. Residents represent themselves and write personal and collective narratives of ownership, belonging and rights. Furthermore, they use locally and collectively devised cultural approaches to hold VANOC and the government to account, and to challenge the stereotypes relied upon by those who misrepresent residents and/or are agents of surveillance. Their work is used to make translocal connections, often in collaboration with Fearless City Mobile and W2, through online dissemination of Downtown Eastside screen stories.

⁹⁷ “LifeSkills Centre” Vancouver Public Library Information
<http://www2.vpl.vancouver.bc.ca/dbs/redbook/orgpgs/9/9649.html> (accessed June 10, 2010).

Conclusion

To conclude, I return to my epigraphs and consider whether the proliferation of digital cameras emulates oppressive state surveillance or adds “a new voice to the usually one-sided dialogue of surveillance”. To consider surveillance as a dialogue is an oxymoron and a mixed but nonetheless useful metaphor. While this thesis as a whole has shown that in the Downtown Eastside surveillance and representation are often unilateral, this chapter shows that residents are beginning to look back, and that a number of organisations are helping to facilitate the multimedia visibility of resident perspectives. This has the consequence of transforming static images of the DTES, often considered as objective despite manipulation, into partial, subjective perspectives, open to modification by a response or counter-image. The creation and distribution of diverse images opens up discursive space and initiates critically engaged conversation.

The fear of oppressive surveillance from the state or other hegemonic actors in the surveillance assemblage remains pertinent and the power relationship between the dominant producers of representation and surveillance images and more marginalised, emerging contributors remains largely imbalanced. Marginalised populations might be concerned about contributing to their own representation/surveillance in case it is subsequently used against them, or they might be physically prevented from presenting in Woodward’s or other mediaspaces by the existence of, or perception of, discrimination from security staff or more privileged incoming residents or facility users. Although one can make a convincing theoretical case for building bridges between different communities and virtual and physical spaces, one might easily neglect

the actual impact on everyday lives and one must keep returning to the basic question “is this beneficial for the community whose needs are most urgent?” As community members have noted, the success of social mixing in Woodward’s might be used as an excuse to introduce more market housing in the neighbourhood. This is an awkward contradiction with the ideal of bridgework and of media arts initiatives: to articulate the voices of the disempowered so that other communities might question the current systems that depend on inequality, and seek to find ways of redressing the balance.

It is clear that grassroots voices have been amplified as a result of the training and facilities initially provided by W2 and Fearless and developed by AHA Media, although those involved are as yet only a minority of Downtown Eastside residents. To return to Castells’ phrase, “the grassrooting of the space of flows” is evident in the collaborative, bottom-up initiative of AHA Media, with their frequent news reports and their first short film *12 Days of Olympics*. Their self-representational screen stories respond to misrepresentation in mainstream media and offer an alternative narrative and a form of quasi-surveillance: a ground-level perspective of the Olympic committee that critiques and holds to account those in power. The online correspondence with Japan demonstrates the potential of translocal sharing and solidarity, yet it should be remembered that such possibilities are dependent on access to the Internet, which is far from guaranteed in the Downtown Eastside. Fearless City’s *Mobile Swarm* provided a mobile meeting place for different publics, online and offline, while highlighting the gulf between wireless-enabled mobility and poverty-enforced mobility, between uncritical consumer lifestyles and between socio-economic exclusion. The intertext “*We Declare*”: *Spaces of*

Housing” raises pertinent questions about how different texts interlink and complement one another, and how their meaning is changed when removed from context online or when described and summarised for the purposes of academic criticism. W2’s work embeds the possibilities of the electronic space into a physical place, narrates ownership of the new Woodward’s development with a view to including the low-income Downtown Eastside community, and records the promises of stakeholders and the hopes of residents. As W2 have now moved into the Woodward’s space, the theoretical possibilities of screen stories and bridgework for articulating grassroots voices and overcoming fears of surveillance and exclusion, whilst resisting gentrification and further marginalisation, are being put to the test.

Conclusion

Stories, Images and Strategies for Resistance

Formal freedoms abound
bound under bonds
of better boundaries. What part of “kiss
my unmanned aerial drone” don’t you understand?

Jeff Derksen

Sing your song, friend.
Tell your story.
The map we inherited
isn't any good.
The old roads mislead.
We need a new map.

Sandy Cameron¹

“Take the cotton out of your ears, put it in your mouth & listen, listen, listen”²

As noted in my first chapter, Timothy Taylor’s novel *Story House* opens with architecture students Deirdre and Riley conducting research in the Downtown Eastside. Deirdre interviews boxing coach Pogey Nealon about the unusual structure he lives in, and Taylor describes Pogey’s discomfort in answering her questions, many of which are articulated in abstract academic language, disconnected from his daily experience, and others of which he would prefer not to answer. Riley is impatient and disrespectful, suggesting that a project about the transient living structures of people living in Stanley Park would earn

¹ Jeff Derksen, “The Perfect Pure Pop Moment”, in *Transnational Muscle Cars* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2003), 122-123; Sandy Cameron, “We Need a New Map” *Being True to Ourselves: Downtown Eastside Poems of Resistance* (Vancouver: Swancam, 2004), 18-20.

² Humanities 101 students “Take the cotton out of your ears, put it in your mouth & listen, listen, listen” <http://learningtools.arts.ubc.ca/hum/> (accessed June 3, 2011). This was one of twelve exhibits included in *WE: VANCOUVER 12 Manifestos for the City* presented at the Vancouver Art Gallery from February to May, 2011, http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/publications/We_Vancouver/ (accessed June 3, 2011).

them greater credit with their tutors.³ Riley's observation harks back to Taylor's previous novel, *Stanley Park*, in which a professor of anthropology lives in Stanley Park while conducting research on its homeless populations.⁴ Taylor's novels thus reveal the author's fascination with people living on the margins of society and with those who carry out research on them. His fictions highlight the role of researcher (for academic and creative works) as surveiller – observing behaviour and collecting data – and the probability of power imbalance when a privileged individual chooses to focus on subjugated populations. I thus begin this conclusion by reflecting on my own research relationships and the ethics of carrying out academic work in the Downtown Eastside, a popular destination for students and researchers from many disciplines.

The relocation of Simon Fraser University's School for Contemporary Arts into the new Woodward's development in September 2010 prompted concerns about the influx of students into the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. Although Woodward's stakeholders anticipated that the student presence would revitalise the area, there were fears that SFU's presence might contribute to gentrification. While SFU hoped a downtown presence would help increase understanding of the university's work amongst the general public, SFU architect Lee Gavel admits that many middle-class students have a distorted perception of the neighbourhood as dangerous.⁵ In my own visits to SFU Harbour Centre in 2009, I spoke to a postgraduate student and a research staff member who were similarly afraid of venturing into the

³ Timothy Taylor, *Story House* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2006), 33.

⁴ Timothy Taylor, *Stanley Park* (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 2002).

⁵ Lee Gavel, "Deal-braker, Deal-maker" (sic) in *Body Heat: The Story of the Woodward's Redevelopment* ed. Robert Enright (Vancouver: Blueimprint Books, 2010), 277-281.

nearby Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. The postgraduate told me how, when he first arrived in Vancouver, friends insisted on driving him to look around the neighbourhood in a car with locked doors. The researcher explained how he avoided walking through the Downtown Eastside and expressed amazement at my decision to spend time there.

A presentation by Margot Leigh Butler, Academic Director of Humanities 101, a not-for-credit community education programme run at the University of British Columbia and in the Downtown Eastside, highlighted reasons for concern about increased student and researcher presence in the neighbourhood. While Humanities 101 depends on research students and staff volunteering to teach low-income participants, volunteers are carefully selected and prepared, and much of the teaching occurs on the UBC Point Grey campus rather than in the limited community spaces of the Downtown Eastside. In contrast, Butler criticised a North American trend of higher education institutions sending unprepared students into marginalised neighbourhoods to volunteer in exchange for university credits. Student misconceptions potentially lead to social tensions and, especially when the primary motivation is credit accumulation, students might be a greater burden than they are of assistance. Furthermore, the practice perpetuates a stereotype of low-income neighbourhoods as dependent on assistance from privileged, charitable or self-interested outsiders when talented, experienced and capable individuals reside within the community and already contribute to systems of social care and political advocacy. Indeed, the expansion of volunteering programmes often

accompanies neoliberal cuts to public services that might have employed local residents in strengthening their own community.⁶

As one of many students and researchers to choose the Downtown Eastside as subject material for an academic project, I am keen to reflect on the implications of observing Downtown Eastside organisations and requesting information and understanding from busy residents in order to advance my research. I was encouraged to reflect by Hendrik Beune of AHA Media, who kindly let me interview him for my research, before reversing the gaze by enlisting me as a subject for interview. He asked me pertinent questions about why I had chosen the DTES as a research subject, how I perceived the DTES before and after my research trips and how I aligned the expectations of my peers and mentors at the University of Nottingham with my experiences in Vancouver. This reflexive and reciprocal relationship both echoes the dynamic of surveillance and counter-surveillance and demonstrates how outsider and grassroots research and representation might interact to produce dialogic forms of building and articulating knowledge.

Despite advocating the self-representation of residents and drawing attention to collaborative grassroots initiatives, I have not directly articulated the stories of Downtown Eastside residents. My disciplinary background and

⁶ A recent Vancouver publication, responding to the changes wrought by the Olympics and other mega-events, contains an article which addresses the broader complicity of universities in neoliberal urban strategy: "Following the global neoliberal currents, UBC is transforming from public educational institute to property developer and landlord. Globally, there are plenty of examples of the university as a tool for the contemporary neoliberal project: New York University professors do their tour of duty on its Abu Dhabi campus, Canadian and US schools increasingly turn to private recruitment companies to lure international students and international student fees, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development creates an Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes, and an educational standard 'valid for all cultures and languages.'" Myka Tucker-Abramson, "Spectacle Capitalism: Expo 86, the Olympics and Public Education" in *Momentarily: Learning from Mega-Events* by Bik Van der Pol, Alissa Firth-England and Urban Subjects, eds. (Vancouver: Western Front, 2011), 61 <http://front.bc.ca/momentarily/momentarily.pdf> (accessed July 5, 2011).

chosen study of representations mean that formal qualitative research was inappropriate. As a result, I have not reproduced stories told by residents in their own words, although I have been inspired by scholars, such as Leslie Robertson and Dara Culhane, who skilfully and sensitively facilitate the articulation of local experience.⁷ Another admirable project has recently developed out of the Humanities 101 programme at UBC: resident stories, essays and opinions are captured in writing and sound files under the title: “Take the cotton out of your ears, put it in your mouth & listen, listen, listen”. One of the sound files is called “Powerful Voices Project an Image of Us Which Drowns Us Out”, and while I am wary that I might be categorised alongside these powerful voices as a relatively privileged academic, I have endeavoured to listen to, and have been influenced by, the wisdom of many people I met in the Downtown Eastside. Drawing on this, I recommend that future researchers consult with organisations in the neighbourhood about the potential of collaborative projects and/or action research that satisfies the needs of all involved, in advance of finalising a project plan.⁸ Whilst I have been amazed at the generosity and interest of people living and working in the Downtown Eastside, the sheer number of researchers, students, journalists and filmmakers that come to the neighbourhood looking for resources, and the increasing number of higher education facilities within the neighbourhood, have rightly led organisations to call for reciprocity in research relationships and a higher standard of ethics.

⁷ Leslie A. Robertson and Dara Culhane, eds. *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2005).

⁸ Greg Hearn, Jo Tacchi, Marcus Foth, June Lennie, *Action Research and New Media* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2002) is a useful guide for those considering action research projects with community media organisations.

“Prising possibility from sleepy hegemony”⁹

I have suggested that surveillance and media representation increase the visibility of the city in asymmetrical ways and often contribute to neoliberal urban governance that protects business interests at the expense of citizens. For instance, positive media visibility of the city as a whole attracts tourists and investors, and negative media visibility of the Downtown Eastside justifies urban revitalisation and privatisation, increased security and surveillance, and the further marginalisation of the city’s poorest people who find themselves pushed out with nowhere to go. Additionally, corporate monopolies and reduced public spending are characteristic of neoliberalism, contributing to a shrinking public sphere as arts and culture are increasingly owned by a limited number of powerful interests, minimising meaningful diversity and suffocating experimentation and creativity as competition for funding intensifies. Jean Baudrillard’s suggestion that the logic of global capitalism and consumer culture permeates all interactions, rendering them meaningless – a choice between predefined alternatives rather than genuine self-determination – becomes increasingly pertinent.

Although my first two chapters reveal a widespread fascination with simulation and imply that there is increased blurring between perceptions of reality and representation, my interest in Baudrillard is not to prove his theory true but rather to show that there are modes of resistance to simulation and the complete consumerisation of all communication. I read Baudrillard as ever hopeful that meaningful interaction will triumph over simulation. Although Baudrillard insists that the democratisation of the media only extends “the

⁹ Jeff Derksen, “Art and Cities During Mega-Events. On the Intersection of Culture, Everyday Life, and the Olympics in Vancouver and Beyond. Part III” *Camera Austria* 110 (2010): 60.

monopoly of speech”, I am in favour of increased access to the tools and skills required to make screen stories: as I have suggested, this occasionally results in innovations of content and form.¹⁰ As my analysis of *Our City Our Voices* and digital representations made in the Downtown Eastside has shown, extending media technologies and training to non-ruling groups produces the responses to surveillance and mass media that Baudrillard seems to desire, although not in his idealised form – the graffiti on the streets of Paris in 1968.¹¹ Moreover, in the case of *Our City Our Voices* and the work of W2, Fearless City Mobile and AHA Media, democratisation of the media facilitates direct communication as each work is built around collaboration and community events. In this respect we see a redirecting of electronic media towards more reciprocal forms of communication than those imagined by Baudrillard, although as examples from this study have shown, the participatory tools of Web 2.0 do not always facilitate productive conversation. Baudrillard would suggest that Internet conversations are only the illusion of communication; however, many would argue the Internet enables meaningful, even life-saving, community, and reciprocal exchanges between individuals who might otherwise be isolated.¹²

The digital divide and increasing commercial control over communications limit the potential of the Internet for free expression and democratic representation. My first epigraph, taken from Jeff Derksen’s poem

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, “Requiem for the Media” (1972) in Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, eds. *The New Media Reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 281.

¹¹ Baudrillard writes: “Graffiti is transgressive, not because it substitutes another content, another discourse, but simply because it responds, there, on the spot, and breaches the fundamental role of non-response enunciated by all the media. Does it oppose one code to another? I don’t think so: it simply smashes the code”. Baudrillard, “Requiem for the Media”, 287.

¹² See, for instance, Maria Bakardjieva, “Dimensions of Empowerment: Identity Politics on the Internet” in *How Canadians Communicate II: Media, Globalization and Identity* eds. David Taras, Maria Bakardjieva and Frits Pannekoek (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 107-122.

“The Pure Pop Moment”, has a similar implication to Baudrillard’s suggestions of simulated choice: boundedness masquerades as freedom and, consciously or not, we are coerced into embracing the technologies that contribute to our own oppression. The subheading of this section once again borrows from Derksen, this time from an article referring to the “marvellous catalogue of events” occurring during the Vancouver Olympics that demonstrated active resistance and belief that “another world is possible”, to borrow the motto of the World Social Forum. Derksen chooses different, and perhaps clearer, examples of resistance for his four-part article than the often-contradictory screen stories I have discussed in this thesis. The three instances of effective actions he highlights were all physically located in the Downtown Eastside: the 19th Women’s Memorial March for missing and murdered women as an event that “illuminated the unevenness of justice and access in the city and clashed against every official representation of Vancouver beamed globally”, Vancouver Media Cooperative as a “space of representation of all anti-Olympic actions” and the Olympic tent village as a tactic of “*autogestion* or self-management”. His narrative of arts and resistance events during the Olympic period and my account of screen stories over a longer period might be read as complementary examinations of Vancouver in a period of heightened visibility.

This thesis has found stories of critique and resistance in fiction, television and feature-length documentary as well as collaborative self-representational videos and digital media. Audiences largely associate *Story House*, *Blood Sports*, *Da Vinci’s Inquest* and *Fix: The Story of a Addicted City* with the vision of one author, authors who, while local to Vancouver, are not

Downtown Eastside residents. These outsider representations might therefore be seen as exploitative of the neighbourhood – as might this thesis – in that the people involved in producing these works stand to gain more than the neighbourhood itself. Nonetheless, each of these texts includes stories that critique and potentially open up discourse about representation and surveillance amongst the various audiences that engage with them. Consequently, these works might also be considered as bridgework, preparing the way for further, more direct exchange between Downtown Eastside representatives and audiences elsewhere, as demonstrated in the case of *Fix* where post-screening discussions followed screenings across Canada.

This thesis also shows that diversity of screen stories is often reliant on public funding, with Canada Council for the Arts and Ontario Arts Council supporting Robinson's publisher, the CBC broadcasting *Da Vinci's Inquest*, the NFB funding *Our City Our Voices* and Telefilm and Health Canada among the public funders for *Fix*. Although W2, Fearless City Mobile and AHA Media experiment with social enterprise to support themselves rather than relying on public funding, Fearless received grants from BC Arts Council and Heritage Canada and W2 has been supported by the City of Vancouver. The provision for arts funding has become a high-profile issue in recent years, particularly after the Conservative federal government cut the culture budget by \$45 million in 2008.¹³ In 2009, British Columbia cut Direct Access Gaming funds

¹³ Stefan Christoff, "Imagine & Canada's Conservative nightmare" *Art Threat: Culture and Politics* April 6, 2011 <http://artthreat.net/2011/04/imagine-harper-aragon/> (accessed May 29, 2011).

to arts and other community and charitable groups, leaving the province with the most underfunded arts sector in Canada by a considerable margin.¹⁴

Some Vancouverites associated reduced arts funding with the costs of hosting the Olympics and resented the unelected body – VANOC – chosen to “determine infrastructure project priorities” in the hasty preparations for the Olympic bid. Some felt that funding flagship cultural events, aimed to attract tourist and business investment and thus liable to increase gentrification, were prioritised over small community organisations, although Duncan Low and Peter Hall suggest that local organisations who received Cultural Olympiad funding concentrated on developing their service for local clients rather than trying to attract global attention.¹⁵ All in all, the recent history of cultural funding is characteristic of neoliberal governance. Given the recent election of a majority Conservative federal government we might anticipate an intensification of such strategies. However, the multi-faceted resistance to these developments – from the Stop the BC Arts Cuts to the Olympic programmes of Vancouver arts groups including Downtown Eastside media arts organisations – challenges the actions of the ruling regime.

A few years prior to these cuts, Clint Burnham wrote that an analysis of cultural production in the Downtown Eastside would reveal a healthy economic balance sheet.¹⁶ His comment speaks of the sheer volume of cultural representations of the neighbourhood that first attracted my attention, and the

¹⁴ “British Columbia – the Last Place on Earth... to fund culture!” Stop B.C. Arts Cuts and Increase Funding to the National Average, entry posted on November 30, 2010, <http://stopbcartscuts.wordpress.com/2010/11/30/british-columbia-the-last-place-on-earth-to-fund-culture/> (accessed May 29, 2011). The British Columbia provincial government provides \$6.54 per capita in comparison to \$20.91 in Alberta and Ontario, the next lowest contributors.

¹⁵ Duncan Low, Peter V. Hall, “The 2010 Cultural Olympiad: playing for the global or local stage?” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (2011), 4.

¹⁶ Clint Burnham, “No Art After Pickton” *Fillip* 1 (Summer 2006) <http://fillip.ca/content/no-art-after-pickton> (accessed May 21, 2011).

profitability of many of these endeavours. Responding to a panel discussion that was held as part of the exhibition *Picturing the Downtown Eastside*, Burnham's brief article touches on a broad range of cultural works in and about the DTES, from photo-conceptualism to *Da Vinci's Inquest* and *Fix* to community art projects. As my thesis has identified, representations of the Downtown Eastside are made for diverse reasons with complicated political objectives and might variously be construed as supporting or challenging the status quo. Without being able to go into such detail, Burnham suggests the wealth of cultural capital in the neighbourhood demands a reconsideration of "what art is" and "what is it about art – or if it is art – that's doing the social therapeutic work".¹⁷ Although I have not explored these questions directly, they intersect with my interests in surveillance and representation and point to avenues of future research. While advocating for democratisation of the arts and increased government funding, one might encourage a critical, self-conscious perspective. While Burnham focuses on the therapeutic element of DTES arts, he is sceptical about how much they might work. I have been cautiously optimistic about the potential of media arts for community building, self-empowerment and political resistance, advocating access for all and positing that arts and media opportunities for marginalised populations are especially crucial, due to a persistent lack of recognition and a standpoint belief that "vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful".¹⁸ Nonetheless, it is essential to ask whom visions of the Downtown Eastside include and what function they have.

¹⁷ Burnham.

¹⁸ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 190-191.

“Imagine there’s no Harper”¹⁹

As I write, Canadians are anticipating the impact of a Conservative majority in parliament with Stephen Harper at the helm. During his previous term as Prime Minister of a minority government, Harper’s decision to hold the June 2010 G20 summit meeting in Toronto resulted in a surveillance/security operation and media event with similarities to the 2010 Olympics: the same use of visibility for neoliberal restrictions of free speech and public space.²⁰ While security forces at the Olympics were present in large numbers but were relatively peaceful, the Toronto G20 demonstrated excessively repressive tactics. The mass arrest of 900 protesters was unprecedented in Canadian history with many protesters complaining of unlawful and arbitrary arrest and unorganised and inhumane detainment.²¹ Michael Byers suggests that the decision to hold the summit in downtown Toronto, rather than a smaller place like Huntsville, Ontario, where the G8 previously met and where the one billion dollar security mobilisations would have been avoided, was a calculated decision: the media coverage of protestors and policing was desirable as it

¹⁹ After Stephen Harper played and sang “Imagine” on the piano alongside young singer Maria Aragon in March 2011, a parodic website and song soon emerged, beginning with a criticism of his military spending: “Imagine there’s no Harper / It’s easy if you try / No F-35’s on order / Above us only sky” Mitch D Krol and James Junkin Jr, “Imagine there’s no Harper”, video file, <http://imaginetheresnoharper.ca/> (accessed June 29, 2011).

²⁰ Michael Byers, “The G20 Protests: Is This What Harper Wanted?” *The Tyee* June 28, 2010, <http://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2010/06/28/G20Protests/> (accessed May 21, 2011.) This trend of police mistreatment of protesters is becoming worryingly common in western democratic nations, no matter the protesters’ cause or the party in power, as seen, for instance, in UK controversy over police violence and kettling during the 2009 G20 protests and more recent student marches, and the Barcelona city council’s attempt to vacate protestors on May 27, 2011.

²¹ See, for instance: Stephen Hui, “G20 arrests surpass 900, making Toronto site of largest mass arrest in Canadian history” *The Georgia Straight* June 28, 2010, <http://www.straight.com/article-331305/vancouver/g20-arrests-surpass-900-making-toronto-site-largest-mass-arrests-canadian-history> (accessed May 29, 2011); and Dana Holtby, “An account of my arrest and detainment at the G20 summit” Toronto Media Co-operative, June 29, 2010, <http://toronto.mediacoop.ca/blog/dana-holtby/3948> (accessed May 29, 2011).

deflected attention from the negotiations of the G20. The G20 summit, Byers suggests, failed to achieve anything other than a consensus of less government rather than more, with Harper rallying leaders against Barack Obama's attempts to seek "agreement on ending fossil fuel subsidies, on continuing stimulus spending, and on a global bank tax". Moreover, as many of the comments on Byer's article suggests, the conflict between police and protestors not only distracted from the summit but justified large security budgets and control of public space at this event and more generally. It helped divert blame and media attention onto crime-committing individuals, whose acts dominated media coverage, masking the peaceful protest of thousands of others, or implicating them in criminality by association (and as a result of unjust arrests).

The violence of just a few protestors was convenient for the Harper government and was perhaps exacerbated by Harper's decisions: comments on Byer's article go so far as to imply that police violence (or infiltration) were to blame for the clashes: "They [the government] learned from the Olympics that you have to have tighter security to get real hardcore violence".²² Derksen notes that the public were told to stay at home during the G20. As a consequence, the government set a scene where it is the people who exercise their right to be in public that cause disruption by not adhering to guidelines, rather than the government's own actions of hosting the G20 in Toronto and ordering heavy security. These security and surveillance measures, coupled with mainstream media reports that tend to focus on the violence of a few protestors rather than the peaceful solidarity of the many, demonstrate the

²² Bury Alone, "The Violence helped Harper", comment posted on Michael Byers, "The G20 Protests: Is This What Harper Wanted?" *The Tyee* June 28, 2010, <http://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2010/06/28/G20Protests/> (accessed May 21, 2011.)

neoliberal strategy of engineering heightened but asymmetric visibility in order to restrict public space and expression.

A very recent event raises more difficult questions about conflict in public space, police management, and the role of media and surveillance in exacerbating conflict and identifying criminals. An evening of drunken disorder, riots, vandalism and looting occurred after the defeat of the Vancouver Canucks hockey team in the final game of the Stanley Cup playoffs on June 15, 2011. This was followed by a frenzy of social media activity, as rioters boasted about their acts of violence and looted luxury items and as critics of the rioters sought to name and shame those who committed crimes, ignoring police advice to submit evidence privately using official channels.²³ Journalists and academics were quick to engage with the implications of these phenomena. Mark Leiren-Young suggested that violent acts were driven by “a lust for digital attention”, while Alexandra Samuel initiated a complex online debate about whether using social media to identify those committing crimes was a worrying trend of citizen surveillance or a useful demonstration of citizen witnessing.²⁴

²³ Ironically, during Vancouver’s last Stanley Cup riot in 1994, police initiated the use of multimedia for enlisting public assistance in finding offenders, using television and interactive video portals placed in shopping malls. In the age of the Internet, citizens need not wait for police before using multimedia outlets to pass judgement. See Aaron Doyle “Television and the Policing of Vancouver’s Stanley Cup Riot” in Aaron Doyle, *Arresting Images: Crime and Policing in front of the Television Camera* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003) 84-110.

²⁴ Mark Leiren-Young, “A Social Media Riot Made for TV” *The Tyee* June 16, 2011, <http://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2011/06/16/SocialMediaRiot/index.html> (accessed June 18, 2011); Alexandra Samuel, “After a Loss in Vancouver, Troubling Signals of Citizen Surveillance” *Harvard Business Review* June 16, 2011, <http://blogs.hbr.org/samuel/2011/06/in-vancouver-troubling-signals.html> (accessed June 18, 2011); Alexandra Samuel, “On the dangers of crowdsourced surveillance” Alexandra Samuel blog, entry posted on June 16, 2011, <http://www.alexandrasamuel.com/world/on-the-dangers-of-crowdsourced-surveillance> (accessed June 18, 2011); Jenny Uechi, “Judged in the Court of Facebook” *The Vancouver Observer* June 19, 2011, <http://thetyee.ca/Mediacheck/2011/06/19/CourtofFacebook/> (accessed June 20, 2011).

The 2011 Stanley Cup riots can be used to justify surveillance and security measures: from bag searches of those entering organised viewing areas (which allegedly were meticulously carried out on the nights of pre-final matches but not on the night of the final) to the preparation of highly trained riot squads.²⁵ But while such events might play into the hands of governments and business interests that prefer high security and restricted public space, it is difficult to argue that these events were instigated by top-down decisions – although we might blame the long-term collusions between government and big business indirectly for creating a commoditised, superficial society of individuals eager for instant gratification and five minutes of fame. Sadly, the riots make a mockery of public gatherings that are motivated by political dissatisfaction. As in the media coverage of the Toronto G20, “anarchists” become a convenient scapegoat:²⁶ Vancouver police chief Jim Chu “called those who incited the riot ‘criminals and anarchists’ and said officers identified some in the crowd as the same people who smashed windows and caused trouble through the same streets the day after the 2010 Winter Olympics opened”.²⁷ While there may be some truth in this claim, any notion of constructive, progressive and peaceful political anarchism is obscured in the desire to label and blame a portion of society for this unfortunate incident.

Instead of apportioning blame, public officials, journalists and academics alike might seize upon events such as the Vancouver riots as a lens through which to analyse and reflect upon contemporary society and the large,

²⁵ Leiren-Young.

²⁶ See, for instance, “Anarchists Leave a Trail of Destruction” *Toronto Sun* June 26, 2010, <http://www.torontosun.com/news/g20/2010/06/26/14526566.html> (accessed June 20, 2011).

²⁷ Dominic Rushe and Harron Siddique, “Vancouver kiss couple ‘were knocked down by riot police’” *The Guardian* June 17, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/17/vancouver-kiss-couple-riot-police> (accessed June 18, 2011).

complex trends that contribute to both “pointless” rioting and political protest, including the role of media and surveillance visibility. The recent events prompted considered debate in left-wing online periodicals, blogs and their comments sections, but less so in the mainstream media. Prior to the riots, perhaps inspired by media and surveillance preparations for the Olympic games, Timothy Taylor’s third novel, *The Blue Light Project* (2011), explored the escalation of a media event, the nature of public protest, and surveillance and security tactics for management and control of public space and the protesting populations.²⁸ The character Loftin, an award-winning journalist, realises that the beliefs and desires of the various groups that gather in a city square to await the release of child hostages is the “real story”, the story that reveals most about the order of society. Meanwhile, street artists based in the city’s Stofton neighbourhood (which Taylor claims is based on Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside) devise art works aimed, in one instance, to stimulate critical conversation about the hostage-taking, and, in the case of the titular Blue Light Project, unite, awaken and inspire citizens through the wonder of a city-wide art installation. Taylor’s artist protagonist, Rabbit, is motivated by filmmaker Werner Herzog’s suggestion that “we do need to develop an adequate language for our state of civilization, and we do have to create adequate pictures – images for our civilization. If we do not do that, we die out like dinosaurs”, a quotation Taylor uses as an epigraph.

Although Taylor’s vision of art as saving grace is romantic and oversimplified, his and Herzog’s message complements my second epigraph, Downtown Eastside poet Sandy Cameron’s suggestion that “[w]e need a new

²⁸ Timothy Taylor, *The Blue Light Project* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2011).

map”. Cameron’s call for new forms of representation intersects with Baudrillard’s call for a new kind of communication that “radically checkmates the dominant form” and Haraway’s suggestion that we need to recode.²⁹ It seems that the need for new stories, new images and new strategies to explain, counter, rework and resist the new forms of visibility that exacerbate social, political and economic divides in contemporary society is increasingly urgent. Moreover, it is necessary to revisit stories, images and strategies with a critical ear, eye and mind. As demonstrated in this thesis, citizens, activists, artists, organisers and academics living or working in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver are already actively demonstrating this critical and creative resistance and opening up discourse around surveillance and representation. Finally, this thesis follows standpoint theorists and Downtown Eastside Humanities 101 students in proposing that society’s most powerful and privileged should listen to its quietest voices.

²⁹ Baudrillard, “Requiem for the Media”, 287; Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 181.

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