Investigating the Geographies of Community-based Public Art and Gentrification in Downtown Eastside, Vancouver

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ABSTRACT

INVESTIGATION THE GEOGRAPHIES OF COMMUNITY-BASED PUBLIC ART AND GENTRIFICATION IN DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE, VANCOUVER

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Infamous as Canada’s poorest postal code, Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES) is considered a blank slate fertile for urban redevelopment. In response to this narrative, visually expressive demonstrations and community-based public art (CBPA) actively reclaim urban space for its inhabitants, and boldly resist gentrification. This thesis advances scholarly understandings of the impact of CBPA by exploring artists’ intended impacts of CBPA projects and how they are interpreted in the minds of the public. Through semi-structured interviews and two consecutive circle discussions, I identified three significant social functions of CBPA in the DTES. The 301 surveys completed by passersby at three CBPA sites revealed that CBPA projects act as both a barrier and a conduit for gentrification. Key concepts that emerged throughout this thesis include: therapeutic landscapes and visual democracy. This research seeks to challenge dominant discourses that construct the DTES as a passive community subject to externally-prescribed solutions to local issues.
Land Acknowledgement

It is with honour and gratitude that I acknowledge that this research has taken place on the traditional territories of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), selilwitulh (Tsliel-waututh, People of the Inlet), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam, People of the River Grass) Nations.

Figure 1: Indigenous Street Art in the DTES (Photos by Teréz Szöke. 2014)

I acknowledge that it was through histories of violence and dispossession that Vancouver exists on the unceded lands of the Coast Salish Peoples. Today, social injustice and colonialism remain embedded in the structures of our society. Through this project I have aspired to remain accountable to this reality by conducting research in consultation with community leaders and Indigenous elders and by maintaining a reflexive awareness of my research presence, impacts, and practice.
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Although this thesis holds my name on the cover it is truly the result of a great collective effort. I could not have completed this project if it were not for the support and involvement of those organizations and individuals mentioned above and many more left unnamed.
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List of Abbreviations

BIA    Business Improvement Association
CBPA   Community-based Public Art
CCAP   Carnegie Community Action Project
CACV   Community Arts Council of Vancouver
CES    Community Engaged Scholarship
DTES   Downtown Eastside
HxBIA  Hastings Crossing Business Improvement Association
LAP    Local Area Plan
NGPA   New Genre Public Art
PSDP   Private Sector Development Program
SRO    Single Room Occupancy (units)
VPSN   Vancouver Public Spaces Network
Chapter One: Introduction

Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside neighbourhood (DTES), known as Canada’s poorest and most crime-ridden postal code, is located on prime real estate steps away from the city’s business centre. The DTES, once considered to be a ‘skid-row’, is increasingly recognized by its residents and supporting community as a socially accepting, multi-cultural, and art-rich neighbourhood. This shift in reputation, ostensibly, a potential sign of urban regeneration, is also indicative of a staunch resident-led effort to reframe the DTES as an invaluable community with strong social support networks. However, encroaching gentrification continues to juxtapose new housing developments, exclusive boutiques, and high-end cafés upon the DTES’ previous social fabric. Social and physical displacement in the DTES poses a serious threat to the well-being of the many marginalized, low-income residents (including drug-users, sex workers, new immigrants, those suffering from mental trauma or abuse, etc.) currently living in the DTES. Artists, often regarded as congruous with gentrification, are also dedicated community organizers who contribute their creativity and organizational capacity to the DTES’ fight for social justice. Community arts play an important role in the social geographies of the DTES in establishing a community narrative, claiming urban space for its residents and creating a political arena.

This research project investigates the cultural geographies of community-based public art (CBPA) in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside neighbourhood in relation to urban change and social justice. It explores the DTES’ illustrative cultural landscapes and its past and unfolding narratives through artful modes of inquiry, community engagement, and the semiotic deconstruction of the landscape (see Appendix B for a map of public art in the DTES). Cultural geography is a suitable lens with which to investigate public art in the city because it strives to
“deconstruct power/knowledge, high-light and celebrate marginality, and envision alternative social and cultural worlds” (Larsen & Johnson, 2012, p. 4).

1.1 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research project is to investigate community artists' and the street audience's perceptions of the sociospatial impacts of community-based public art (CBPA) on the changing urban geographies of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The subsidiary objectives, which guide the research towards its aim, are as follows:

1. To unearth the motivations, intentions and intended impacts of public art, as defined by community artists and key informants;

2. To understand how community-based public art can transform urban space based on audience perceptions;

3. To investigate the relationship between community-based public art and well-being; and

4. To investigate the complex social, political, and spatial relationship between CBPA and urban change.

This project seeks to advance scholarly understandings of the impact of public art by exploring what artists’ intended impacts of CBPA projects are and how these projects are interpreted in the minds of the public (as inspired by: Hall, 2007; Sholette, 1997).

1.2 Thesis Outline

I will begin by introducing the literature on the urban cultural geographies of public art in Vancouver’s DTES. My literature review (Chapter Two) provides context for Vancouver DTES’ past and present and introduces some of the existing literature on public art. The methodological chapter (Chapter Three) presents a detailed description of the research design and the theoretical framework used to approach the aim and objectives outlined above. Chapter Four investigates
the social functions of CBPA in the DTES from the perspective of the interviewed artists and key informants. Chapter Five presents the social and spatial impacts that emerged from 301 street-level surveys collected at three distinct sites of community-based public art. Chapter Six situates the research findings within the context and discourse of urban change in the DTES. My thesis concludes with a thematic summary of key findings and a list of recommendations for future study.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Study Site Description: Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside

The present dynamics of the Downtown Eastside can be best understood by revisiting the histories that have defined the neighbourhood’s social and physical characteristics. The following section offers a brief overview of the neighbourhood's history to reveal how the modern state of inequality, racialization, and waves of dispossession came to be. This is not a totalizing overview, but presents important signposts that elucidate current social tensions in Vancouver’s DTES.

2.1.1 A Short History of The Downtown Eastside

The history of the Downtown Eastside is a history of the struggle for human rights. First Nations people have fought for a just land claims settlement for over one hundred years, and we take inspiration from their example, especially in these dark days when we feel we are losing control of our lives to global economic wars, or mega-projects that overwhelm our neighbourhoods.

-From Sandy Cameron’s poem One Hundred Years of Struggle

As one of the oldest districts of Vancouver, the Downtown Eastside holds a long history of social and spatial conflict and rebellion (Newnham, 2005; Ley, 1994; Mason, 2007). Figure 2 illustrates Vancouver in 1886, and demonstrates that the DTES was the fist settled area in Vancouver. The residents of the DTES have been deeply impacted by multiple waves of
displacement and racialized discrimination. The first wave of racialized displacement was the colonial settlement of the unceded traditional lands of Coast Salish Peoples. Prior to this territorial and cultural dispossession in the mid-1800s, the Pacific Northwestern coast had traditionally served as a food-gathering place by the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), selilwitulh (Tsliel-waututh) and Xwméthkwyiem (Musqueam) First Nations peoples for time immemorial (City of Vancouver, 2014b).

*Figure 2: Map of Vancouver, 1886 (Mathews & Moore, 1946)*

Largely due to its geographic proximity to the Burrard Inlet, the neighbourhood served as an intersection for transient resource workers (Masuda & Crabtree 2010; Dale & Newman 2009; Ley, 1994). The ethnic diversity of residents and the fleeting presence of labourers are two reasons why historically the DTES has had difficulty establishing a neighbourhood identity (McDonald, 1996).
With a high level of industrial pollutants, the DTES has served as an affordable starting point for new immigrants (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010; Dale & Newman 2009). The early 20th century influx of Japanese newcomers was followed by the relentless exploitation of immigrant labour that eventually led to the anti-Asian riots of 1907 (Masuda et al 2012; Masuda & Crabtree, 2010). Although Vancouver’s last Indigenous hamlet was displaced to the northern periphery of the new city in 1923, a strong population of Coast Salish Peoples maintained their presence in the DTES (Culhane, 2003). The Japanese population inhabiting the neighbourhood along Powell Street was forcibly relocated to internment camps in 1942 (Aoki, 2011). Furthermore, in 1960 Hogan’s Alley, an ethnically diverse and predominantly black neighbourhood in the DTES, was demolished to construct the Georgia Viaduct (City of Vancouver, 2014b). Critical scholar Nicholas Blomley (2002) argues that the way urban transformations have unfolded in Vancouver have been motivated by the city's self-perception as a disciplined white space.

For nearly a century, the residents of the DTES have demonstrated resistance to social justice violations. When the 1930s economic downturn resulted in joblessness and inadequate housing supply, men took to the streets to fight for their right to food, shelter, employment, and fair wages (Ley, 1994; Ley & Dobson, 2008; Wade, 1997). Throughout the years, rallies and squatting settlements were forcefully dismantled by police using tear gas and batons. Nevertheless, the DTES has sustained a staunch culture of opposition and resistance (Ley, 1994; Ley & Dobson, 2008). The continuous rioting has contributed to the stigmatized perception of the low-income community as disorganized, unstable, and lawless (Ley, 1994). For this, and other reasons, the area became regarded as untamed, or as Sibley might describe it, “beyond the spatial limits of civilization” (2008. p. 381).
After many years of capital flight and underinvestment, Vancouver’s property values skyrocketed and revitalization schemes were being used to justify the re-colonization of the DTES (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010). By the 1970s, historic architecture was being restored, hundreds of housing units were being demolished, and exclusive businesses were moving into the area (Dale & Newman 2009; Ley, 1994). Around this time, a neoliberal turn in global economics was underway, allocating power to the private sector and perpetuating feelings of disenfranchisement in the neighbourhood inhabitants (Purcell, 2002). Vancouver was conspicuously transformed from a resource-based economy into a post-industrial knowledge-based economy (Dale and Newman, 2009; Hutton, 2004). During this transformation, urban policy decisions enabled the concurrent investment and disinvestment of housing stock, which contributed substantially to resident polarization (Smith, 2003). This perpetuates neighbourhood tension, demonstrating that different socioeconomic groups bear conflicting opinions about what the DTES neighbourhood should look like in the future (Smith, 2003).

Gentrification is a highly contested and politicized process that is associated with urban change and neighbourhood revitalization. The ‘revitalization without displacement’ doctrine suggests that urban change can occur in an area without causing residential displacement (City of Vancouver, 2014b). On the other hand, gentrification is a modern phase of dispossession that contributes to visible social inequality and displacement in the DTES. Critical scholars recognize gentrification as essentially the ongoing promotion of civilized city life (Lees, 2000), and specifically in the DTES context, as the “re-colonizations of the neighbourhood by the middle class” (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010, p. 661). Gentrification is both exacerbated and curtailed by urban social policy (Smith, 2003). Policies seek to simultaneously enhance the
‘livability and sustainability’ of a city while temporarily providing services and support amongst inner city hardships (Lees, 2000; Quastel, 2009).

In Vancouver, environmentalism has become tied up with the gentrification narrative through policy strategies that promote capital accumulation and neoliberal renewal under the guise of ‘sustainability’ (Quastel, 2009). The City of Vancouver is working toward becoming the Greenest City by 2020 and recently announced that the DTES area is the forthcoming “greenest place to work in the world” (City of Vancouver, 2012a, p. 12). In order to achieve this status, the City of Vancouver intends to populate the area with green companies, organizations, infrastructure, and land-use planning (City of Vancouver, 2012a). In so doing, the City successfully harmonizes environmental sustainability with capital accumulation (Kear, 2007) and ultimately displacement.

The sustainability agenda plays into the displacement and dispossession of housing in the DTES. Single room occupancy (SRO) hotels, which now provide low-income residents with unsafe housing in neglected buildings, will require a large financial investment in order to meet the desired standards of sustainability. Structural renovations are often termed ‘renovictions,’ because tenants can no longer afford to live in the newly renovated housing units due to their increased market value. Displacement due to renovictions was listed among the local ‘fears’ in the DTES (City of Vancouver, 2014a). In response, Dale and Newman (2009) advocate that in order for Vancouver to become truly sustainable it cannot serve only the higher-income residents, but must be inclusive and accessible to all.

Unfortunately, the past is not history; territorial dispossession, (neo)colonialism, violence, oppression, and discrimination are embedded in the social, political, and physical structures that shape the neighbourhood today (Ley, 1994). The commonalities between
colonialism and gentrification can be easily drawn, as social injustices of gentrification impose a significant and consequential impact on the DTES neighbourhood, residents, and social communities (Smith, 1996; Dale & Newman, 2009). Structural injustices, social exclusion, and lack of access to affordable housing and amenities are among the negative externalities, or “collateral damage,” of building a creative city (Kear, 2007, p. 327). The creative city initiative employs cultural place-making to rejuvenate urban areas while simultaneously causing the displacement of lower-income residents and non-profit artist organizations. (See Catungal et al., 2009 for a Toronto-based case study). Urban transformations in Vancouver are identified by scholars as unjust and socially discriminatory obstructions to environmental and social health (Masuda et al, 2012).

This brief summary highlights the social histories of injustice, racialized dispossession and discrimination in the DTES. Today, within the context of gentrification, injustices of the past resurface in the continued inadequacy of housing, the growing issue of poverty, and the brutal mistreatment of Indigenous people. How these complex community narratives are encapsulated within CBPA works in the DTES is further explored in the chapters to follow.

2.1.2 Community Demographics, Challenges, and Assets

Many of its residents, supporting community, and service organizations would identify the DTES as a culturally diverse, low-income community with a rich set of social assets (such as social support services and artist-centric organizations). In 2011, an estimated 18,477 residents lived in the DTES (City of Vancouver, 2014b). A large portion of the population is made up of Chinese-Canadians, Japanese-Canadians, and Indigenous peoples. A comparatively high percentage of residents are federally registered as a ‘Status Indian’ (9% in the DTES versus 1%
in Vancouver at large) (Statistics Canada, 2006\(^1\)). There is a high concentration of artists in the area. Artists’ median earnings in the DTES ($14,300) was found to be nearly 20% percent less than that earned by artists living in the city overall (City of Vancouver, 2014a).

The DTES is face with a considerable list of challenges as well. Nearly 70% of residents live below the poverty line (CCAP, 2009) and according to the 2013 Local Area Profile an estimated 846 people are homeless in the DTES (City of Vancouver, 2013). A high proportion of people experiencing mental trauma and drug dependencies are greatly dependent on the support offered by local social networks and services. Individuals experiencing chronic poverty and unemployment are reliant on financial support services and susceptible to becoming dependent on the local shadow economies as a coping mechanism (Culhane, 2003; Fast et al., 2010). The Downtown Eastside’s shadow economies hinge on sex work, drug dealing, and the trafficking of scavenged goods (ibid). The neighbourhood is also infamous for open drug use, homelessness, unemployment, crime, and historic disinvestment (Fast et al., 2010; Smith, 2003; Masuda & Crabtree 2010; Masuda et al., 2012; Burk, 2003; Dale & Newman, 2008).

Media sources create a deficit-focused public narrative of the DTES (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010). In so doing, popular media reports perpetrates stereotypes and augments polarization between dominant society and the ‘other’ (Sibley, 2008). Residents are represented as being members of an impure subculture inhabiting urban areas of economic potential. Urban interventions have then utilized media reports and research findings that present the DTES as faceless and dysfunctional to justify efforts of urban change (Liu & Blomley, 2013). Media, as well as academic reports, have a strong impact on mainstream perceptions of the DTES:

\(^1\) In the DTES Social Impact Assessment Report (City of Vancouver, 2014a), statistics are drawn from 2006 census data because it is considered the most recent and reliable data available.
If your exposure to the Downtown Eastside has been limited to what you read in the daily press, then you're probably aware that it's Canada's poorest neighbourhood. But you might not know that it's also home to a diverse range of artists and musicians, a source of innovative answers to problems associated with inner-city life, and the cradle of Vancouver's reputation as a peaceable and ethnically diverse urban centre (Varty, 2008, October 29).

There is a strong community pride in the DTES, largely because individuals, community groups, and organizations are dedicated to support and develop neighbourhood assets and providing means for self-representation. The Carnegie Community Action Project (CCAP) conducted a community mapping project with DTES residents. Their key findings highlight the following neighbourhood assets:

Health and social services are close, available, needed, and appreciated; [...] Social housing provides a stable base for thousands of residents; [...] Rich cultural and community heritage; Green spaces help residents make a connection to nature and have become spiritually important; Many residents have empathy for homeless people and people with health and/or addiction issues; Residents feel accepted and at home in the DTES; [...] Because the DTES is a poor community and people experience many human rights violations, many residents work for social justice (CCAP, 2009, p. 2).

In addition, persistent kinship networks, a distinguishing characteristic of urban Indigenous life, is considered to be an important social asset in the community (Culhane, 2003). CCAP advocates for the continued operation and improvement of these assets as they are necessary in fostering a safer and healthier social environment (CCAP, 2009). This report includes a map of all the meaningful places identified during the community sessions (see Figure 3). What I found particularly interesting is that the area marking the DTES neighbourhood does not conform to the city sanctioned borders, but instead denote a general area.

High-spirited community groups have established a longstanding tradition of resistance, and assertively refuse the government’s prescriptions for urban change (Burk, 2003; Liu & Blomley, 2013) which threaten to unravel vital community assets (CCAP, 2009). It is often vulnerable, marginalized, inner-city neighbourhoods that most actively provoke change (Masuda et al., 2012). Activists and community organizations challenge the unfavourable representations
by recasting the DTES “as an old working class neighbourhood, marginalized under a globalized capitalist system yet filled with character and history” (Sommers, 1998; Quoted in Burnett, 2014, p.158). Mainstream ideologies collide with bold local resistance demonstrating that social and spatial boundaries in the DTES can be “constructed, demolished and energized” (Sibley, 1995, p. 32).

Figure 3: Map of Meaningful Places (CCAP, 2009)

2.1.3 The DTES as a Therapeutic Landscape

For various reasons, the DTES is considered a place of sanctuary (Varty, 2008, October 29), or as a therapeutic landscape by many of its residents and supporting community (Masuda and Crabtree, 2010). Therapeutic landscapes are culturally resonant places that encompass local values, and are inclusive of marginalized, and/or traditional ways of healing (Gesler, 1992). These landscapes serve to recognize the deep interconnectedness of place, identity and health
In contrast to the reductionist model of modern healthcare, therapeutic landscapes function under a holistic paradigm, defining health as “a complex interaction of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, environmental and societal factors” (Williams, 1999, p. 3; Gesler, 1992). They can be physical (gardens, public art, egalitarian spaces) and social (support networks, youth programming, community services), ephemeral or permanent (Masuda et al., 2012). For example, public food servings are ephemeral therapeutic landscapes as they are unconcealed and unbound by fixed boundaries (Johnsen et al., 2005; Gesler, 2005).

In the DTES especially, therapeutic landscapes serve as havens amidst urban realities and social injustice (Masuda & Crabtree 2010). Interestingly, they are shown to be significantly beneficial to urban Indigenous communities who suffer a disproportionate amount of violence (Burk, 2006; Culhane, 2003). Inhabitants perceive the DTES as a therapeutic landscape because it acknowledges their needs “for belonging, social interaction, redemption from social marginalization, and solidarity against political oppression” (Masuda et al., 2012, p. 664). Among many social and structural constraints in the DTES (Fast et al., 2010) individuals carve out relatively safe geographic niches (Beazley, 2002). However it is critical to note, that the DTES is not necessarily perceived as a therapeutic or safe space by everyone (Fast et al., 2010)

I do not wish to essentialize the DTES into single notion of place (such as therapeutic or other). Rather, I seek to highlight the notion of its complexity and recognize the many differential experiences that exist within it by using CBPA to reflect the diversity of place. This same critical perspective can be applied to the homogenizing concept of ‘community’ (Weijer & Emanuel, 2000; see Appendix A for a critical reflection on the notion of the DTES ‘community’). Public art, a significant community resource in Vancouver’s DTES, serves as a material reflection of this social complexity given its ability to co-evolve with its human
companions (Thrift, 2008). Public art’s potential complicity in gentrification perpetuates its symbolic significance in the DTES community. Public art can be understood as a metaphor for, and an indicator of, the variant and conflicting interests and idealizations that reside in the urban sphere.

2.2 Cultural Geographies of Public Art

2.2.1 Public Art in Theory

Public art attracts scholarly attention because of its ability to inscribe meaning to cultural landscapes. As such, the multiple and variant scholarly understandings of public art are more robust and critical than the policies that seek to govern it (for example: Deutsche, 1991; Hall & Robertson, 2001; Hutchinson, 2002). Most commonly, public art is described as material culture appearing in an “open arena” where a diverse group of people can gather and interact (Massey & Rose, 2003, p.6). The term ‘public art’ is a clash of two deeply contested words. Its definition is thus dependent on how its component parts are understood in isolation (Hutchinson, 2002; Massey & Rose, 2003; Hall, 2007). I begin by addressing the contested understanding of the term ‘art’, followed by a brief discussion of what ‘public’ means in the context of urban art.

Art can be problematic in that it is often embedded with hierarchical divisions (for example, professional versus community art). There is a hazy distinction between art and non-art, between performativity and everyday life (Pasztory, 2005; Crouch, 2010). This subjective distinction is contingent on one’s individual interpretations, experiences, and ideologies (Radar, 2011). There are many ways that art can be considered public. The tangible presence of art in an accessible or outdoor space is one way that art becomes public. However, it is important to note that spatial exclusions (based on race, gender, class, and age) limit the use of common space and
prevent it from being truly public (Mitchell, 1996). Another way that art can become public is through its engagement with the discursive and imaginary spheres of publicness (discussed in Hall, 2007). Deutsche (1991) discerns art as public when it engages and intervenes discursively in public issues. Based on Deutsche’s social credentials of publicness, public art need not physically appear in outdoor space for it to become an accessible topic of discourse. Art may also be considered public when it emerges from processes of community involvement, democratic participation, and public engagement (Hall, 2007). Massey and Rose’s conception of public space is as a platform for “social processes, practices and relations” occurring between dissimilar individuals (2003. p. 6). In lieu of this understanding, art cannot be considered truly public if it fails to invite negotiation among diverse social understandings (Massey & Rose, 2003). Thus, the publicness of public art is dependent on the extent that its audience connects and attaches meaning to it (Hall, 2007). Here, an audience member is not a passive observer, but an interpreter, contributing to the continuous making of the public installation (Tolia-Kelly, 2011). Thus, art is not only public in its physical presence, but also in its discursive and imaginary engagement within a broader social and political sphere.

2.2.2 Public Art in Vancouver

With this understanding of the theoretical definition of public art in mind, I will now examine the Vancouver-specific definitions. The City of Vancouver’s Public Art By-law describes public art as follows:

For the purpose of this By-law, “public art” shall include but not be limited to any and all art forms, whether temporary, freestanding, incorporated with other forms of development, or otherwise, which the Committee in its collective judgment determines to be public art (City of Vancouver, 2008, p. 17).

Although nebulous, this definition makes clear that decisions around what is and is not considered art are accorded to a central Public Art Committee. This committee (comprised of
three ‘art professionals’, two reputable artists from the community, two urban designers, a developer, and a community member) holds responsibility to advise the City and Development Permit Board on citywide public art installations (City of Vancouver, 2006). The members who make these decisions are frequently not a part of the community that will be impacted by the art installation in question. In this case, public art signifies the allocation of power within a cultural landscape. Thus, in the words of geographer Tim Cresswell, “normative geographies are defined by those with the power to do so” (1996. p. 10). Therefore, in order to establish a deeper understanding of the geographies of public art in the DTES, one must investigate the underlying governing systems that allocate project funding, control access to public space, and impose barriers to participation.

The Vancouver Public Spaces Network (VPSN) is a non-profit organization advocating for more democratic, citizen-centered public space in Vancouver. They actually hold office space in the Woodward’s community tower in the DTES. The VPSN’s dedicated public art portfolio states that art is undefinable:

We don’t confine ourselves to thinking of public art as a particular object (eg. like a statue, or, an ugly bronze thing in the middle of a plaza). We support art that is undefinable; makes one wonder where it came from; is sometimes in odd places; includes events to briefly unsettle, surprise or delight; invites passersby[sic] to join in; is temporary; is citizen generated and curated; responds to the space; creates a community; draws attention where something is lacking; makes hidden city processes visible…you get the picture. (VPSN, 2013)

VPSN’s definition of public art ventures beyond its material form and towards the significance of its social and spatial functions.

The DTES Local Area Plan (LAP) was developed over two years of consultation between the City of Vancouver and the Local Area Planning Process Committee (including representatives of community groups, low-income and middle income residents, business, non-profit housing organizations, and social service agencies) (City of Vancouver, 2014b). The LAP
seeks to provide program frameworks, policy recommendations, and a plan to increase the quality of life for DTES residents. The importance of community-based art is repeatedly mentioned in the LAP document:

The DTES is home to a diverse range of public art. This includes examples of commissioned works by internationally recognized neighbourhood-based artists as well as community-inspired engaged murals and mosaics that reflect the neighbourhood’s history and diverse communities. In addition to permanent installations, public art has also been manifested in temporary installations and events (City of Vancouver, 2014b).

This definition demonstrates a deeper recognition of the local value of community-based public art. This recognition has been developed through the staunch advocacy work of community artists who represented the DTES in the planning committee. These three distinct descriptions of public art in Vancouver demonstrate that there are various forms and sources of public art, each holding a unique intention and relationship to the world (Hutchinson, 2002)

2.2.3 Top-down and Community-based Public Art

For the purpose of this thesis, two distinct sources of public art are of critical importance: top-down and community-based. Their unique commitments, intentions, and relationships to their environment are described below. It is worth mentioning however, that although I present these two forms of public art separately, in actuality, the distinction is never so dualistic.

Top-down public art (TDPA) is generally the product of an exclusive decision-making process and is created by an established professional artist who has been commissioned, for example, by the City of Vancouver. Traditionally, these pieces are permanent installations. TDPA, such as war memorials, encapsulate Foucault’s theory of power knowledge (Foucault, 1998). That is, they celebrate dominant histories of oppression, colonization, and hegemony. They seek to create and control a collective cultural identity in a way that distracts from ongoing
urban injustice (Sholette, 1997; Hall, 2007). TDPA slips quietly into public space, avoids any critical disruption, artistic risk, or sociopolitical challenge (Phillips, 1988). “Minimum risk art” is the end-product of bureaucratic machinery, comprised of a busy network of risk-averse decision makers (Phillips, 1988, p. 100; Hall and Robertson, 2001). Although TDPA is often framed as being politically neutral, it is notorious for frequently concealing a political agenda. Hall and Robertson (2001) recognize that public art is employed by the private sector as a mechanism to inscribe difference into the urban social landscape by establishing an aura of distinction and exclusivity that suits corporate values. Because of its exclusive nature TDPA is at times criticized for having a diminished degree of publicness.

In contrast to TDPA, community-based public art (CBPA) is created through a process of a community-engagement, which is most often facilitated by an artist or artists’ group (Bressi et al., 2008). Community, in this case, is a social group sharing common culture, interests, values, and/or geographic area. The CBPA movement is generally connected to greater social justice mobilization and activism and deeply grounded in principles of democracy (Lacy, 1994). There is a sense of community ownership behind these pieces due to a high level of inclusion through democratic decision-making processes (Sharp et al., 2005). It is a language of self-representation and provides a venue to express lived experiences (Marsden, 1996). It challenges the oppressive social conventions and structures that foster inequalities (Hall, 2007). CBPA is sometimes considered synonymous to new genre public art (NGPA), a radical form of public art that addresses community and ecological well-being by seeking to transform public space into a place of inclusion and engagement (Lacy, 1994). NGPA often takes an oppositional and disruptive approach to addressing social marginalization that stems from the uneven urban redevelopment (Hall, 2007).
2.2.4 Community-based Public Art and Place-making

Cultural geographers describe public community art practices as thought-provoking imagery that has the ability to create and give meaning to place, narrate history, and disclose imagined futures (Tuan, 1990). CBPA transforms public space into cultural, narrative (Tuan, 1990), ceremonial, and sacred places (Burk, 2003). Place-making and meaning-making through art is an important way that locals reclaim public space and perform grassroots neighbourhood revitalization. Place-making through CBPA assists in the democratization of space. The creative democratic processes of community art invite crowd-sourced ideas and inspire people toward a more socially-just future (Camponeschi, 2010). Fundamental to this inclusive democratic practice is the recognition of different voices and interests (Sharp et al., 2005).

CBPA efforts seek to render hidden histories visible by presenting them to a wider audience (Sharp et al., 2005). Projects publicly embody resistance through their material presence in the public sphere and challenge stigmatizations by projecting the ‘truth’ in public (Burk, 2003, p. 321). CBPA is deployed as a method to politicize space; it draws in media attention, raises awareness about local issues, gathers communities of support, and encourages further public discourse (Culhane, 2003). The educational value of public art can also help to deconstruct stigma and encourage social change (Tien, 2003; Mohatt et al., 2013). Furthermore, when CBPA successfully provokes public discourse, it demands government to consider alternative solutions, and eventually creates shifts in policy (Bower, 2011; Putnam et al, 2013).

CBPA can also contribute to a progressive definition of urban social health (Putland et al, 2013) and creates therapeutic landscapes (Masuda et al., 2012). The surrounding urban environment has a significant impact on individual health and social well-being (Nayak, 2010; Masuda et al., 2012). CBPA collaborative public art projects can provide an alternative service
for vulnerable groups, in a way that visually challenges stigmatizations and creates spaces of support (Mohatt et al., 2013). These visual projects mark the landscape with symbols that commemorate alternative histories, boldly confront persistent urban injustice, and celebrate cultural and community assets.

CBPA can also provide an opportunity for social connectivity. The City of Vancouver’s Social Impact Assessment report (2014a) recognizes that because of its ability to diminish social isolation, participation in arts and culture activities is vital for the well-being of individuals and neighbourhoods. By celebrating culture and creating spaces of support, Indigenous public art in the DTES contributes to expressions of Indigenous identity. Studies show that Native-themed artistic representations are closely connected to the well-being of Indigenous people (Wendt & Gone, 2012; McIvor et al., 2009; Burk, 2010).

Both therapeutic landscapes and CBPA contribute to co-creative knowledge production. In their creation and realization, therapeutic landscapes (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010) and CBPA (Burk, 2003) challenge social relations and support the community’s pursuit for justice. This project continues to investigate the “liberatory and oppositional political potential that geographers have long located in art” (Hawkins, 2012 p. 59) and how this is embodied in CBPA projects in the DTES.

It is valuable to draw attention to some of the key tensions and contradictions at play with regard to CBPA’s role in a changing inner-city community. As much as CBPA can empower a community and contribute to neighbourhood-led revitalization, it may also contribute to the authenticity of an area. Increasingly, economic development interests capitalize on neighbourhood assets such as authenticity, cultural expression, and grittiness (Ley, 2003). In this way, CBPA can unintentionally be conflated with the topic of gentrification. Additionally, the
counter-hegemonic and oppositional tendencies of CBPA may undermine its ability to serve as a therapeutic landscape. While freedom of speech may be liberating to some, Nayak’s study on emotional geographies found that aggressive street art can create sites of discomfort (2010). It is within these zones of inherent contradiction that cultural geographers uncover fertile grounds for inquiry. These tensions will be further explored in the context of the DTES in the coming chapters.

2.3 Gaps in the Literature

Despite the comprehensive scholarship and theory centred on art and its various manifestations and ramifications, a number of questions remain unanswered. There is a significant gap in understanding the intent behind community-based artists’ interventions, and their relationship to place-making and urban change. Research uncovering artists’ inspirations is most often done in isolation from an exploration of how art is experienced and perceived by its audience. Very few studies include the voices of the passersby when seeking to understand the impact of urban material culture (Hall, 2007). Furthermore, the street-level perspective is often absent from our scholarly understandings of gentrification and its experienced sociospatial impacts (Horgan, 2013). Research to date points to the value of seeking to understand CBPA’s role in place-making in an inner-city context. For example, the role of public art in creating therapeutic landscapes is only briefly recognized in the literature and prompts further exploration (Masuda, et al., 2012; McIvor et al., 2009).

Furthermore, uncertainty still surrounds the sociopolitical regulations of public space and the constraints imposed upon CBPA. We do not completely comprehend what types of social and political environments are required to enable grassroots organizations and community artists
to become urban activists and effectively exercise power in public spaces. There is little scholarship addressing CBPA’s success in renegotiating power relations and resisting gentrification. Existing literature on CBPA presents a nebulous understanding of what forms and characteristics of public art act to encourage or inhibit gentrification. One of my main research goals is to investigate the ways that gentrification affects or interacts with CBPA, and how community artists work within this tension.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Methods can be conceptualized as a container: capturing information and carrying data forward for analysis (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2008). I first present the theoretical frameworks that have informed and inspired this research design, followed by a review of ethical considerations. I then explain my qualitative, mixed-methods approach and data analysis strategies that I employed in this study. I conclude with a summary of challenges and limitations that I faced along this research venture.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This research design was guided by the principles of community engaged scholarship, and critical theory. These theoretical frameworks are briefly described below.

3.1.1 Community Engaged Research

The values of community engaged scholarship (CES) anchor my research approach. Mirrored by many of the principles embedded in radical geography (Cloke, et al., 2004), CES encourages the active involvement of researcher within their community of interest. More than just observation, this requires a researchers sustained immersion in the living environments and cultural activities of a community (Amaral & Wisner, 1970). CES involves collaborative knowledge generation and requires a high level of social accessibility of results (Holland, 2005). It is a transdisciplinary and fluid research process that is capable of adapting to the changing needs and desires of a community (Holland, 2005). As the CES research approach gains popularity and credibility, the distinction between social science ‘experts’ and research ‘participants’ has begun to blur. Researchers are no longer expected to reproduce hierarchal,
discipline-specific research methodologies with esoteric results (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008; Tilley-Lubbs, 2009). Through CES, researchers take on a participatory role and participants are respected as stakeholders of the research process. Boyer, a trailblazer of engaged scholarship, describes community engaged research methodologies as a function of discovery, integration, application, and teaching (1990). However, in order for the positive attributes of CES to materialize, all parties involved in conducting research—be it the academic institutions, individual researchers, or community organizations—must foster reflexivity and remain sensitive to distributions of power and privilege (Tilley-Lubbs, 2009).

3.1.2 Critical Theory

This research project has employed the lens of critical cultural geography, as well as feminist, poststructural, and postcolonial theory. Critical cultural geographers interpret the human landscape by employing “[c]oncepts such as sense of place, landscape as text, symbolic landscapes, negotiated reality, hegemony and resistance, territoriality, and legitimization and marginalization” (Gesler, 1992. p 735). Feminist theory, as explained by community-based participatory scholars Wallerstein and Duran (2008) has shifted its focus away from women as a universal construct and towards an analysis of the intersectionalities of sexual orientation, race, gender, class, ethnicity, and other potentially marginalizing identities. Poststructuralist theory analyzes the ways “language and narratives construct reality and our view of social institutions […] and how these constructions are resisted by communities” (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008. p. 36). Lastly, postcolonial geographers analyze the ongoing legacies of European or Western power upon people and lands and resistance to colonial subordination (Nash, 2002), and seek to
uncover and honour local narratives that have experienced and/or are currently experiencing colonial oppression (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008).

These theories provide a critical lens for investigating the complexity of social interactions that unfold within a research area (Cloke et al., 2004). They seek to expose the systematic structures of injustice that fragment the public sphere into spaces of plenty and spaces of deficit, offer insight into how best to navigate power relations and deconstruct systems of inequality, and prompt the ongoing awareness of research positionality (Cloke et al., 2004). Feminism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism all share a similar set of methods and goals. Most notably, however, they all celebrate research respondents’ strength and agency in working towards social justice (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008).

3.2 Ethics

This research has been conducted with careful consideration of DTES’s history of injustice and exploitation, ongoing challenges, and state of vulnerability. The methodological design was devised with adherence to the University of Guelph’s ethical standards along with a critical alertness to research positionality. The research approach and methodologies I have employed in this study are dedicated to the production of ethically appropriate and academically credible results.

3.2.1 University of Guelph Ethics Approval Process

This research project received approval from the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board and adheres to both the University’s ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. These standards require that as the investigator, I communicate openly with participants about research intentions and procedures and obtain written or verbal consent before
proceeding with an interview (See Appendix D for Consent Form). I was required to ensure research assistants understood and complied with the confidentiality standards set forth by the ethics protocol (See Appendix E for Confidentiality Agreement Form). Data gathered (interview transcripts and photographs) were safely stored in a password protected computer and the signed forms were stowed away in a locked cabinet.²

3.2.2 Positionality

Positionality is defined by the social location of a researcher in relation to the individuals and community with which they work (Smith, et al., 2010; Herr & Anderson, 2005). Appearance can immediately expose privilege and create an unwanted divide between researcher and community. As someone who generally conforms to gender norms, who is not a member of a visible minority, and who is financially secure, I must be continuously aware of even the subtle impact this may have on the comfort of my participants. The personal identity of the researcher conducting interviews has been found to impact and prompt certain responses in research participants (Al-Natour, 2011). Thus, as researchers we must consider the ways that we inform and influence our findings—sometimes to the same degree as our research informants (Al-Natour, 2011).

I experienced that my positionality was fluid and varied throughout this project depending partially on the attributes of my informant such as gender, education, race, and socioeconomic status. The sections below, outlining the methodological procedure employed in

² I would also like to recognize that the ethics applications should only be regarded as a fraction of what is required to conduct ethnically sensitive research, and that researchers must go beyond the institutional standards of ethics (Tilley-Lubb, 2009). Crang (2003) states that the formulaic protocols used by ethics boards are rarely designed to consider or account for uneven distributions of power. Flicker and colleagues (2007) warn social science researchers to be cautious of the ethics approval process because of its clinical focus and unconcern with the equitable distribution of power and resources.
this study, allude to the plasticity of my positionality, shifting depending on the participant(s) involved and the research method employed. The following section interrogates the tensions of positionality and privilege and discusses possible approaches to navigating and equalizing uneven distributions of power found in the research field.

3.2.3 The Insider/Outsider Continuum

When determining the researcher’s location along an insider/outsider continuum, it is critical to understand the fluidity of positionality. We possess a multitude of identities and characteristics that can either perpetuate or dissolve differences. Although identities generally hinge on attributes such as class, race, place of origin, and gender, it is valuable to consider other attributes of self that serve to unbind our positionality from the simplified outsider/insider binary (Coloma, 2008; Al-Natour, 2011). For example, I was able to connect with artist participants over a shared passion for community mobilization, activism, and creative facilitation.

It is also important to note that although we are never wholly outsiders, we cannot claim to be absolute insiders either (Al-Natour, 2011). There are always aspects of our identity that set us apart from our research community, presenting challenges in garnering trust, gathering data, and analyzing accurately. Personal differences, or being interpreted as an outsider may advantage the researcher, because participants might see the need to carefully explain and elaborate on particular topics that they assume the researcher is unfamiliar with (Al-Natour, 2011). Therefore, the complexity of our identities presents researchers with both limitation and opportunity.

This quote was posted on the wall at Gallery Gachet:
Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes
-Walt Whitman
3.3 Research Methods

A mixed-methods research approach was employed in this study. These methods consisted of community engagement, semi-structured interviews, two successive discussion circles, and street-level surveys. Mixed methods were used in order to capture as many unique voices, perceptions, and experiences as possible in effort to establish data triangulation. Triangulation results from seeking out alternative and sometimes rival perspectives from multiple sources and using various techniques to test a hypothesis (Rothbauer, 2008). A true geographer, according to Salter and Meserve (1991), observes, maps, experiences, explores, participates, discovers, and speculates. Thus in the true spirit of geography my research project has sought to incorporate all aspects of research identified above. Methods used for data collection are explained in greater detail below.

3.3.1 Pre-visit research and pilot visits

In the months leading up to my research term, I explored the cultural geographies of public art by conducting literature reviews, attending informational meetings with key informants, participating in workshops, attending lectures, and carrying out two pilot visits. When I was not in Vancouver, I explored the extensive body of literature that qualifies and quantifies the DTES’ social environment. For a more grassroots understanding of ongoing social dynamics I read online local media sources that reported closely on the perspectives of local residents. These preparatory steps enabled me to formulate a research focus that was attuned to the ongoing needs and desires of the community and built upon prior academic knowledge.

Two pilot visits provided a deeper understanding of the ground-level social and political interactions in the DTES. In August 2013, I worked as a research assistant conducting one-on-one interviews at the United We Can recycling depot. In these interviews, we spoke with
informal recyclers about their day-to-day working conditions and their relationship to urban change. During my second pilot visit, I established organizational partnerships. Both of these visits granted me the opportunity to speak with locals, document street art, and connect with community artists. They also allowed me to establish my own micro-geographical understanding of the neighbourhood and experience neighbourhood change over time. Through the course of my visits in the year, murals were painted over, condos were constructed, and new cafés and restaurants opened their doors. I also had the opportunity to experience the way murals, graffiti art, parades, protests, and public performance art were used to raise awareness of local injustices perpetuated by urban restructuring.

*Figure 4: Research Schedule*

3.3.2 *Community Engaged Practice*

The majority of my empirical data was collected over a four month period (May to August, 2014). During this time I lived only a short bike ride from the DTES and made a
conscious effort to involve myself in the neighbourhood in a way that was genuine to both myself and the residents of the DTES. I focused my attention on the places and people that welcomed and appreciated my involvement. I remained transparent about my research interest and practice so as to invite criticism and feedback. I generally found that my research was well received by the individuals and organizations I spoke with, albeit, I also encountered unsettling moments that drew me to question my own motivations and intentions.

For the first month and half (as shown by Figure 4) I worked on a CES research project with the CACV that explored potential organizational adaptation in a changing social landscape. Research interviews were conducted with executive directors of social service organizations that maintained a working relationship with the CACV and offered art-based community programming in the DTES. Interviews were video recorded and compiled into a short research film that ensured the accessible dissemination of data. This research project was a valuable entry point into the arts community and connected me with various artists and art-based organizations.

I also volunteered at Gallery Gachet, a unique, collectively-run art space in the DTES that uses art as a mean to “demystify and challenge issues related to mental health and social marginalization in order to educate the public and promote social and economic justice” (Gallery Gachet, 2012). Gallery Gachet offers performance and visual arts workshops, provides peer support to those pursuing an artistic practice amidst mental struggles, and provides alternative opportunities for artists to participate in the art market. As an accepting social hub, Gallery Gachet has a consistent flow of artists through the space. Sometimes gallery volunteers made tea and listened to artists’ stories about their artwork, venturing into the intricate geographies of their imagination or their past. Gachet serves as a shelter from the elements and provides access to computers, art space and materials for community members.
In the alleyway behind the gallery, I assisted Pierre Leichner, a collective member at Gallery Gachet, with the installation of a blackboard that read: “I have a dream. One day I will…” Every week I documented the dreams that passersby had written in chalk, periodically cleaning the slate to make room for new imaginative responses. This art piece is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four and showcased in Appendix C. I also had the pleasure of performing in Gallery Gachet’s Mad Pride Cabaret, a fully inclusive event that uses art and music as a means to de-stigmatize ‘madness’ by recognizing that it is a sane response to the crazy world we live in.

I also received training to operate Art Cart, a mobile art station and bike trailer that is collectively owned and operated by Gallery Gachet and Oppenheimer Park. I was fascinated by the entrepreneurial opportunities the Art Cart presents to DTES artists. It allows artists to traverse the borders of the neighbourhood and engage a broader audience in their artistic practice:

“The Art Cart concept expands this idea of facilitating the production, ideation and expansion of opportunity for artists who have been negatively affected by their economic and mental health situations[...] Art Cart aims to support artist exposure, creative exchange, and art sales. It can be unhinged from convention as it navigates the shifting possibilities for art in the local cultural realm—who makes it, who shows it, who sees it and who sells it (Gallery Gachet, 2014)”

The Art Cart is both practical and political. It provides an opportunity for artists to sell and promote their work while defying the exclusionary nature of the conventional art market.

There were various art-based events and community festivals which I volunteered for and attended. At the Powell Street Festival, an important community event that celebrates Japanese-Canadian culture, I operated the Art Cart as a kiosk for the Right to Remain research project. This project, lead collectively by artists, researchers, and community organizations, seeks to “reclaim and re-enliven the human rights history of the DTES to ensure that the rights of present day inhabitants are prioritized amidst rapid social and environmental change”
Additionally, I helped community artists install public art pieces in the DTES, participated in a community choir in the Woodward’s social housing tower, attended meetings at the Carnegie Community Centre, and volunteered at a small community art café in the DTES.

Active community involvement was an invaluable component of my work and provided ample opportunity to just be present in the community. Participant observation is an important qualitative research method as researchers place themselves actively in the midst of their research community to cultivate a deeper “existential understanding of the world as the members see and feel it” (Adler and Adler, 1994. p. 286). It also proffered a deeper understanding of the micro-politics of the area (Herr & Anderson, 2005).

3.3.3 One-on-one Interviews

One-on-one interviews are considered among the most popular techniques for gathering qualitative research data (Kitchin & Tate, 2000). From listening attentively to the research participant’s personal experiences, opinions, and perceptions, a researcher can build a more comprehensive understanding of the research area and topic of interest (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Valentine, 2005). In-depth interviews allow the opportunity for informants to share detailed stories and for the researcher to establish a relationship and rapport with research participants (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This tried and true method served as a valuable component of my research methodology.

I was able to connect with many of the artists and key informants through my various community involvements outlined above. Snowballing (Clifford et al., 2010; Valentine, 2005) or chain sampling (Patton & Cochran, 2002) was an effective method for recruiting research...
participants as it ensured individual relatability to the research topic (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I also came across the names of key informants and artists in local media articles, leaflets, and websites. Community artists and key informants are described in greater detail below.

Key informants were selected for their expertise and expansive knowledge on the research topic (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). They included a total of five individuals who were representatives of arts-based organizations in the DTES, community-based researchers, a city councillor, and two Indigenous elders. Each held an extensive repertoire of knowledge, which helped to build a panoramic understanding of the geographies of public art in DTES. The questions used to guide interview conversations with key informants (Appendix F) were designed to strengthen my understanding of urban change as well as the social and physical impacts of public art in the DTES. Interviews with key informants averaged forty minutes in length.

I interviewed 13 artists who were directly involved with organizing CBPA projects in the DTES. Community-based artists were interviewed because of their intimate, day-to-day work in the DTES. These artists use community-engaged art to actively redefine the meanings of urban spaces, to capture attention, and spark public dialogue. Those who were actively involved with the DTES community and community-based public art projects were recruited for this study. Many played important roles in arts-based community organizations in the DTES. I interviewed artists between the ages of 29 and 64.

Interview questions were designed to uncover artists’ motivations, their involvement in the community, their perceptions of neighbourhood change, and their understandings of the role

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3 Interestingly, approximately 50% of artists (7 out of 14) interviewed were white, educated, and female. I inferred this to indicate that artists that demonstrated these characteristics were most like to have the capacity, skill set, and desire to lead participatory public art projects. It could also be a result of the chosen sampling method.
of public art in DTES. The purpose of these interviews was to understand the motivations behind public art projects and their intended contributions to the community (see Appendix F for a list of guiding questions). Because of their active involvement in the DTES as creative leaders and facilitators, artists’ insights provided a unique and ground-level perspective of the DTES neighbourhood.

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately 75 minutes. At the end of each interview, artists were invited to participate in two discussion groups. These sessions allowed artists to continue the conversation about public art in the DTES. The majority of the artists were interested in the opportunity to connect with other community artists in the neighbourhood. Correspondence with artists continued via email as we collectively organized the logistics of the discussion groups.

3.3.4 Discussion Circles

Group interviews connect individuals and provide the opportunity to “produce knowledge grounded in experience” (Flicker et al., 2007). Group interview techniques provide insight into a community’s underlying social structures and help to shed light upon how these structures shape social opinion and knowledge (Patton & Cochran, 2002). Discussion groups aspire to provide a stage for interactions and debates by allowing individuals to reflect on and compare their experiences and opinions with others (Cloke et al., 2004; Burgess, 1996). With the support of artist participants, I integrated aspects of Circle into the discussion group in effort to create a supportive and egalitarian gathering.

Circle is a structure of dialogue that is rooted in the tradition and practice of Indigenous nations world-wide (Ball et al., 2013). My training and experience as a Circle facilitator inspired me to draw on this technique. Artists who gathered for the discussion group collectively agreed
that incorporating aspects of Circle would help ensure that everyone was heard equally\textsuperscript{4}. Each attendee was given the opportunity to share their response to each of the questions, while the rest of us practiced active listening. I found this to be an invaluable mode of inquiry and a small step towards ‘unsettling’ (Unsettling Minnesota, 2009) the colonial research praxis. Two separate discussion circles were held with art activists to discuss the relationship the DTES has with artists and public art.

The discussion circles were held in a neutral space (a small bookshop café near the Main and Hastings intersection), and were catered by DTES-based social enterprise Potluck Cafe (potluckcatering.org). Food was provided to entice artists to attend the discussions and create a comfortable and communal environment (Ball et al., 2013). The energy in the room felt comfortable and artists expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to connect with others over a meal.

In the first discussion circle, consent forms were signed and artists were invited to speak to each of the discussion questions below. These questions were written out and posted to the wall to help guide the session and allow for self-direction:

1. What brings you to work in the DTES? (What inspired your work here? What drew you into this community initially?)
2. What is the role of public art in the neighbourhood? (What does it advocate for? Who does it speak to? And what kinds of spaces does it create?)
3. What is the role of an artist in the Downtown Eastside? (What kind of work do they do? How does their work contribute to the physical and social landscapes of the DTES?)

Participants were then asked to choose three pieces of public art that they felt were particularly contentious or meaningful to the DTES as sites for surveying the passing public. Artists identified multiple sites of public art (performances, memorials, alleyway graffiti, community

\textsuperscript{4}This also assisted the transcription process, because everyone spoke in turn.
gardens, etc.) and quickly built consensus around three chosen pieces of CBPA: Oppenheimer Memorial Pole, a stencil from the Lowdown project, and the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall. Participants then reviewed the questions I proposed for the public art surveys. The suggestions that arose in the first discussion circle were incorporated into the public survey that explored the street-level impacts of the three chosen sites of public art. The intention was to involve artists in the project development in an effort to maximize the social relevancy of the study. The results of these public art surveys are reported in greater detail in Chapter Four. Artists from the circle left expressing great interest in meeting again and reviewing the public responses.

The second discussion circle took place after the public surveys were conducted. Artists were presented with the results of the surveys and were given the opportunity to openly discuss and uncover any common themes in the raw survey data. This discussion was recorded and used later in the analysis of survey data. Three of the seven discussion circle participants were able to return for a second session and were joined by two additional community artists. In addition to the Consent Form, artists were asked to sign a Confidentiality Agreement, which set guidelines for the reviewing of the sensitive data and officially recognized participants as co-researchers (Smith et al., 2010. p. 407). The second discussion circle aspired towards the “democratization of knowledge and its production”.

3.3.5 Public Street Surveys

In seeking to address the second research objective regarding passersby’ perception of public art, survey questionnaires were conducted to encourage people to think about how they encountered, experienced, and engaged with public art in the neighbourhood (Hall, 2007. p. 1389). This intervention asked the public to consciously reflect upon their cultural environment, and in doing so contributed to the reanimation of the art (Hall, 2007). Thus, it is through our
daily actions that we continuously call our surrounding landscape into being and make it relevant to our own lives (Rose, 2002). This research method coincides with the third research objective: to understand how public art can transform urban space based on audience perceptions of the cultural landscapes of CBPA interventions.

Surveys were conducted for a total of 15.75 hours within the DTES and invited passersby to articulate their relationship with a particular public art piece. Surveys were conducted at the three selected sites: Oppenheimer Memorial Pole, a stencil from the Lowdown project, and the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall. I was joined by a research assistant during each survey period. The research assistant was informed of the research procedures and asked to sign a Confidentiality Agreement to confirm their adherence to ethics protocols. We surveyed at each site of inquiry for 1.75 hour within each of the three allotted time slots. The time slots are shown in Table 1 below. In order to capture a wider variety of voices and establish reliable data, we surveyed at various times and on both weekends and weekdays. We approached as many participants as possible within the allotted timeframe.

Table 1: Survey Time Slots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of the Week</th>
<th>Surveying Time Slots</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekday</td>
<td>11:30pm -2 pm Lunch time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:15 -7:30pm Evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend</td>
<td>2:45 -6:00pm Late Afternoon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pedestrians traversing the streets of Vancouver’s DTES witness, interpret, and experience public art activities in the neighbourhood. The sidewalk community represents a unique cross-section of the Downtown Eastside’s social fabric. This interviewee recruitment strategy is referred to as ‘on-site recruitment’ (Krueger, 1988). It can also be considered a form of ‘cold calling’ since passersby were not expecting a request to participate in a survey (Clifford et al., 2010). Only those who were willing and able to dedicate their time and who had consented to participating in a university study were involved.

As researchers, we obtained verbal consent from the participant and ensured that they understood and accepted the terms and conditions of the study. Copies of the Consent Form (Appendix D), were made available. Participants were then left to fill out the survey and asked to place it in small drop box (see Figure 5) to ensure confidentiality. We provided assistance to participants who were unable (for physical, language related, or other unknown reasons) to fill out the survey independently. A snack was offered to participants to show our appreciation for their time and input.

*Figure 5: Survey Drop Box and Consent Forms (Photo by Teréz Szöke. 2014)*
3.3.6 Recording of Data

Interviews and discussion circles were audio recorded so that I could comfortably converse and participate without transcribing notes in-situ. Survey data and audio recordings were later transcribed for analysis. The general tone, body language, and emergent themes were carefully noted in the research journal directly following the interview (as recommended by Clifford et al., 2010). My research journal held a chronological account of important observations, experiences, and interactions pertaining to my fieldwork. It was written in the style of creative non-fiction, an arts-based research technique that captures these observations and experiences in expressive detail and metaphorical language (Barone, 2008). The process of writing and rereading journal entries carved out moments for self-reflexivity. These intimate accounts and observations are extremely useful in the data analysis process (Clifford et al., 2010; Kitchin & Tate, 2000) and are imperative for building a holistic narrative.

3.3.7 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed qualitatively. First, the discussion circle and interview transcripts were read carefully to identify major themes, and then coded using NVivo (10.1.2) software and later organized into spreadsheet documents. Next, the survey dataset was analyzed, coding for the themes that artists (as co-researchers) identified during the second discussion circle. The list of codes and sub-codes appear in Appendix G. Throughout the various stages of analysis, I’ve aspired to remain cognizant of how the process of data analysis and the positionality of the researcher impacts the research narrative. In order to attend to this ethical caveat, categorizations must abide by principles of “openness, reflexivity and recursivity” in building an approximate
understanding of our “textured” social realities (Davis & Dwyer, 2007, p. 258; Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2008).

3.4 Challenges and Limitations

The DTES is the focus of much research attention, which is often described as exploitative. It was a challenge for me to reconcile my feelings that I might be contributing to an objectifying and neocolonial research presence. Crang (2003. p. 500) describes the research gaze as a detached research presence that operates within a “masculine economy of desire”.

The privilege to travel for research presented both opportunity and challenge. My program is based out of the University of Guelph, meaning that I spent a total of four and a half months in the DTES. A 4000km spatial distance created a social distance between me and the residents, because it made my privilege more apparent and limited my physical presence. This tension was briefly addressed in Section 2.2.4 (The Insider/ Outsider Continuum) where I recognize that other attributes of identity allow researchers to slide along this continuum of belonging.

A final challenge arose around issues of anonymity and disclosure. To my surprise, all interview participants consented to having their names identified in this thesis. I was happy to do this because associating their words with their names better highlights and respects their invaluable contributions to this thesis. Their consent demonstrated each artist’s trust in my ability to represent their narratives. However, it also created one of my greatest challenges: to accurately interpret and present the words of my research participants.

As previously mentioned, a high degree of research exhaustion exists in the DTES. This made some participants reluctant to get involved in yet another research study. Those who
contributed their knowledge could afford to take time out of their lives to discuss this topic. Those who could not participate in this project were unable to do so for numerous reasons: they felt uncomfortable or exhausted by the research process, they were inaccessible via phone or email, or they could not take the time away from work or other commitments. Unfortunately, these voices were not heard and therefore their opinions and stories are not included in this research narrative. Additionally, there were time limitations on this project and as such, research methods were intensive rather than extensive. As expected with qualitative research, the data sample is not necessarily a true representation of the broader community (Patton & Cochran, 2002).

A common criticism of qualitative research has to do with the high probability of research bias during data analysis (Patton & Cochran, 2002). The analysis process requires interpreting data, drawing assumptions, and amalgamating findings into a cohesive narrative. When these steps are conducted by a single researcher, the data falls victim to a set of (un)intentional presumptions. For example, when survey responses did not clearly articulate an opinion, it required that I draw inferences about the intention of the survey participant. I recognize that my biases impact the interpretation and reporting of the research data. Unclear research responses may also indicate the need to rework the survey’s formatting and questions in effort to obtain data that is more conducive to analysis.

In practicing self-reflexivity, the inherent biases of researchers can yield opportunity. I carefully considered these challenges and limitations. These critical reflections by no means discredit my research findings, but rather help to maintain their integrity.
Chapter Four: The Sociospatial Impacts of Community-Based Public Art

The results presented in this chapter emerged from the data gathered from the interviews, circle discussions, and from my personal experience in the DTES. The sociospatial impacts of CBPA identified in this chapter are: CBPA as a way of knowing, CBPA as an expression of culture and identity, and CBPA as a form of alternative political involvement. It is important to recognize that roles of CBPA identified in this thesis are neither mutually exclusive, nor are they implicit in every project.

4.1 Art as a Way of Knowing

“Well, I think that the arts have lost their place as a way of knowing or understanding ourselves and the environment we live in” (Pierre Leichner, Artist, Gallery Gachet Collective Member, Member of the CACV Board of Directors, during interview)

Pierre’s quote, echoed by a couple of other artists, captures a common trepidation; art as a mode of inquiry is under-realized and is becoming obsolete given modern society’s yearning for hard-facts and measurable results. Reassuringly, Tien (2003. p. 13) defends that art does in fact maintain an important role among the “pluralistic ways of knowing in our post-modern society”. ‘Art-informed ways of knowing’ can be defined as the gained personal and/or collaborative experiences that are obtained from participating in or witnessing the creation of art (Greene, 2001). It is through the continuous advocacy of artists and arts-based researchers that art holds its place in the generation and transfer of knowledge.

The arts’ potential to uncover social realities and imaginaries is one reason why artists and researchers expressed interest in CBPA projects in the DTES. The arts are recognized as a highly effective means for bringing forward and illuminating personal stories and experiences (Korza et al., 2002). On his website, Artist Richard Tetrault asserted that “[m]urals can be the catalyst for research into facets of urban life and culture, and the material and themes for the
murals, generated through extensive workshops within the community, adds to the resonance of each mural” (Tetrault, 2012). Artist and researchers alike recognize that participatory public art plays an almost utilitarian role in social research (Tolia-Kelly, 2011)

My research findings below demonstrate that CBPA serves as a mode of social inquiry and as a platform for knowledge mobilization, in its co-creation and its public presence. I discuss art as a way of knowing through the process and outcome of co-creation, and through the interplay of process and outcome that results from performativity. The sub-sections below distinguish art as a valuable means to gather and mobilize place-based knowledge, followed by a sub-section that describes how art is used as a way to visibly present place-based knowledge to the public.

4.1.1 Community-Art as Participatory Aesthetic Inquiry

Through this research, it became apparent that CBPA holds an important role in uncovering individual and community narratives and histories. Information is gathered in the co-creation of CBPA projects through community dialogue and consultation, archival or document-based research, and engagement within the public realm. This demonstrates the potential for CBPA projects to serve as stimuli for knowledge aggregation and generation. CBPA projects enable spaces for mutual learning and “material thinking” (Thrift, 2008; Vaughan, 2008) practices to emerge. Bower (2011) recognizes that the discussions and interactions that emerge from a project’s planning process are as valuable as the finished product. Collaborative art projects provide the environment/space in which individuals can gather to address prevalent personal or community issues. Incorporating community dialogue into the co-creation of a

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5 Tolia-Kelly identifies the growing interest in creative participatory research as contributing to a “neo-visual turn” in cultural geographic methodologies (2011, p. 135).
CBPA piece serves as platform for mutual learning. One of the artists explained that through dialogical community processing, participants are given the opportunity to address concerns, voice frustrations, and engage with other viewpoints. He explains that:

“[T]he thing about community, about art, about activism, [it’s] giving people a venue not to explode but to exchange” (Kim Washburn, Artist, Writer, One of the Carvers of the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole, during interview).

The *imaginal world*, according to psychologist Mary Harrell (2011), is a place connected to the unconscious that lies between one’s mind and the material world. Arts-based dialogue (which is integral to some CBPA projects) creates opportunity for the individual and the community to explore this imaginal world. Camoneschi (2010) recognizes that through creative democratic processes, participants address their needs and desires and crowd-source creativity to imagine a more equitable future. Building on the idea of material thinking as an “embodied and placed creative practice” (Vaughan, 2008, p. 1), a number of informants addressed the benefits of visual expression in helping to understand and formulate awareness of one’s surroundings:

“Art is in itself an expression. [...] The courage to express yourself is like the beginning of being able to notice. You can’t express what you don’t notice. So all art really encourages you to get in touch with yourself and be aware of your surroundings, which makes you be in the present” (Heidi Nagtegaal, Artist, Founder of Hammock Residency, during interview).

Heidi stated later in her interview that this art-based exploration is an important step preceding a more action-oriented approach. A couple of artists and informants described art as a means to conceptualize and materialize abstractions, thus creating a foundation for future action. Writer and artist Martha Rosler (2004) identifies art as a critical practice that crystallizes a response to a blurred social vision.

A number of CBPA projects discussed in the interviews involved extensive research and community engagement. Muralist Richard Tetrault worked alongside countless artists and
community members in the creation of a 5000 square foot mural covering the exterior walls of the Russian Hall. In his interview he described the magnitude of preparatory work that is involved in such large-scale CBPA projects, explaining:

“They’re not just superficial things. You got a year, you know. The Russian Hall Project took months and months of research and back and forth [between the community and artists]” (Richard Tetrault, Artist, Muralist, Founding member of Creative Cultural Collaborations Society, during interview).

Other artists spoke about how socially- and spatially-relevant pieces and performances come about after spending much time and energy rifling through archives and documents to expose hidden histories of the DTES. However, public art pieces that incorporate extensive research and public consultation offer deeper significance within the social landscapes of the DTES (as demonstrated in Buser et al., 2013). Artist Andrea Creamer spoke to the sense of collective ownership that develops around a CBPA installation when individuals feel that their voices have been integrated into the final product:

“[community members] can get behind it because they’re in a position that they are advocating for themselves and they have power in the art work, or in the process or in the conversation somehow” (Andrea Creamer, Artist, Project Coordinator at SFU Woodward's Cultural Unit, during interview).

Public art installations that were prepared with sincere collaborative effort with the community more accurately represent the area and become more deeply engrained in the social landscape.

CBPA uncovers a rich account of information and stories that are then translated into a public art installation or performance. However, at times more data emerges in the preparatory stages than can possibly be funnelled into a single piece of work:

“I think it was a great! Both a great process and a great outcome [...] We generated so many images and ideas out of a couple intense community workshops. That spun off into this, you know, the one piece that exists and then all the other ideas that didn’t get pulled together into it” (Richard Tetrault, Artist, Muralist, Founding member of Creative Cultural Collaborations Society, during interview).
Although some ideas cannot be incorporated into the final piece, the ideas that emerge from dialogue may potentially mobilize into future projects. Many of the artists commented on the unpredictable and immeasurable impacts of a CBPA project. Ripples of impact may transcend any given space and time (MacPherson et al., 2014). However, the indeterminate nature of an art-based community engagement is one commonly identified criticism of CBPA projects.

Another way that artists created spaces for creative exchange was by directly installing pieces of interactive art in the streets of the DTES. Doing so was a way of employing CBPA to gain a deeper understanding of the world and of using creative public inquiry to strengthen their connection to their social surroundings. Chalkboards are an example of how art can be used as a platform for public engaged knowledge-making and used to invite public input. Sam Cameron installed chalkboards to uncover possible ways to activate the alleyways in the neighbourhood. The chalkboards read: “To me the laneways are…” In terms of their success in gathering public input, Sam said:

“I was actually surprised. Every two days or so I’d come back and it would be full up, so I’d have to wash it off […] I didn’t want to wash it off too soon. I left it for a few days so that people could soak it up and then I’d put a little note saying: sorry, I had to wash this off so people could put more of their ideas on” (Sam Cameron, Public Art Portfolio Lead at Vancouver Public Spaces Network, during interview).

Sam felt the installation yielded a plethora of insights and activated the space. The information gathered was later incorporated into his master’s dissertation offering suggestions for how to activate DTES’ laneways and under-utilized public spaces (see Cameron, 2012b). Similarly, artist and retired child psychologist Pierre Leichner installed a chalkboard behind Gallery Gachet with the desire to gain a deeper understanding of the DTES’ social environment. He painted the chalkboard with the words:

I have a dream.
One day I will...
Interested in employing art as a mode of discovery, Pierre’s intention was to create a place where people and their aspirations could gather. Wishful thoughts for the future filled the board and scattered harmlessly along the walls of the alleyway. I was involved with documenting the progress and washing the slate clean to provide room for more responses to collect. I later revisited the photographs of the chalkboard, transcribed each of the responses, and identified themes that emerged from the data (see Appendix C for photo-documentation and results).

This research illuminated various ways that CBPA projects can create dialogical platforms for collective knowledge production. CBPA as a form of participatory action research integrates philosophies of collective knowledge production (Masuda et al. 2012), skills development, and community empowerment (Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme, 2010). CBPA projects in the DTES can thus be related to David Edward’s notion of idea translation. Idea translators are individuals dedicated to converting conceptual ideas into reality, in a sphere known as the ‘impact space,’ the terrain upon which creativity is mobilized and put to work (Dear, 2011; Edwards, 2008). This impact space is more closely discussed below in the way that CBPA interacts with its public audience.

4.1.2 CBPA as Communicating with a Public Audience

As stated above, art-informed ways of knowing (Greene, 2001) can be experienced not only in the stages of creation but also in the witnessing of CBPA. Thus a piece of community art installed in the public has the potential to serve as an allegory of place-based knowledge. As alluded to above, when extensive research and community dialogue is integrated into the creation of a public art piece, it becomes a material symbol revealing the values, histories, and identities that reside in the neighbourhood. Literature on new genre public art contends that the
interactions that transpire after a piece is installed are a component of the art itself (Lacy, 1994). Thus, the evolving relationship between art and its audience is an integral aspect of the art work. For instance, through CBPA projects, the internal dialogue of the DTES can be communicated to an external audience. This was pointed out by Councillor Andrea Reimer, who said:

“I think that public expression of art probably speaks to that. Like to say: I have hope, I have dignity. I can leave this thing here. This is me trying to communicate with the world, trying to have some value in the world” (Andrea Reimer, City Councillor Vision Vancouver, Chair of Planning, Transportation and Environment, during interview).

Her words also highlight the value of visual expression with regard to one’s agency over self and space. In these ways, the chalkboard installations provided an effective vehicle for public expression and communication.

In the discussion circle, artists reflected on how public art can be used to read a social landscape and to invite the audience to interpret the communities residing within it. Lindsey Adams referred to public art as a marker of the preparatory processes required to bring ideas to shape and form:

“Really like a piece of public art is like a marker to this process that has happened with a group of people, hopefully. [...] Whoever’s involved and whoever walks by can kind of appreciate and [those involved can] feel like they’ve been heard or that their voice has been listened to and reflected the way that they wanted it to be” (Lindsey Adams, Artist, Co-founder of F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective, during circle discussion).

A couple of the artists reflected on how CBPA can create a visible timeline of place-based events. CBPA projects were seen as inscribing the local landscape with symbols of progress and reminders of past sociopolitical battles fought by the community. For example, carved Indigenous poles in the DTES, as expressed by a local Squamish Minister, publicly mark pertinent stories relating to its place and its people:

“And there’s this story, that it’s our first newspaper because it tells the strength of their land” (Eugene Harry, XiQuelem, Squamish Minister, Vancouver Native Health, during interview).
Urban Indigenous poles, such as the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole, are unique from traditional totem poles because they involve carvers from various Nations and a community of indigenous and non-indigenous supporters. Oppenheimer Pole and the forthcoming Survival Pole respond to past and occurring urban injustice toward marginalized (both Indigenous and non-indigenous) peoples. Their presence stands as a narrator of the social landscape.

Public art was also praised by interviewees for its ability to change an individual's relationship to and awareness of their surroundings, and to stir the urban consciousness. Artist of the F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective reflected upon how passersby responded to the quotes they have stencilled on the neighbourhood’s sidewalks.

“And I’ve seen people [...] stop in their tracks and kind of notice and it brings them out of their—you know that rationale of going to point A to point B. It’s kind of those interactions during the day that forces you to reflect” (Lindsey Adams, Artist, Co-founder of F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective, during interview).

“No one is really paying attention to the world around them. But then once the colour goes down it’s like poof!”(Linnea Strom, Artist, Co-founder of F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective, during circle interview).

They noticed that these creative additions to the urban landscape were successful in capturing the attention of the passerby. These installations were described as having the ability to interrupt the flow of street life, to spark awareness of one’s surroundings and to prompt interaction between pedestrians.

Public art in the DTES can also serve to inspire thought and change one’s relation to a space. “Good” public art can unexpectedly provoke critical thought and call assumptions to question:

[Good art that is engaged can interrogate and literally, I’ve seen it a million times, can change people’s minds and change the way they see something and basically take the [...] settled idea that’s in your head and question it. That’s what I mean by public intervention, right? To do something to your perceived ideas (Karen Ward, Artist, Associate Member of Gallery Gachet, Member of the LAP Planning Committee, during interview).}
Karen, along with many of other informants considered street art an effective means for the DTES community to challenge public perceptions and reclaim self-representation. A number of artists measured the success of public art by its ability to provoke a reaction and response from its public.

CBPA is therefore a way of knowing: a means of discovery (of oneself, of one’s social and political environment, of possible futures, etc.) and a language to communicate with a wider public. Community values must produce a space to represent those values because otherwise they will remain abstract and fantasy (Lefebvre, 1991; in Burk, 2003). Essentially, the ability of CBPA to generate, mobilize and materialize place-based knowledges and narratives is what differentiates CBPA from other forms of public art. When visible to a broader public, art pieces communicate with a wider audience and aid in the deconstruction of stigmas placed on vulnerable groups of people (as shown by Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme's 2010 video project, and Mohatt and colleagues’ 2013 mural project). Harrell states that “the work of social justice activism begins with the act of shining a light on that which lives in the shadows and the margins of cultural awareness” (2011, p.62). The role of CBPA in amplifying cultural and place-based expression and political demands is discussed in the sections to follow.

4.2 Place-making: Cultural and Place-Based Identities

In the diverse social landscapes of the DTES, cultural and place-based identities frequently materialize through CBPA. Here I discuss CBPA as a visual expression of cultural and place-based identities, and as a part of community-led physical and social revitalization efforts. I will begin by describing the ability of CBPA to visually express cultural histories, presence, and perseverance. The proponents of urban place-making initiatives are interested in enhancing community, individual and ecological health. Additionally, a growing body of
literature explores the connection between culture, health and place in the urban context (Puleo, 2014; Masuda et al., 2012) and in relation to people of Indigenous ancestry (McIvor, et al., 2008; Wilson, 2003). This section seeks to demonstrate ways that these interconnected themes connect with CBPA projects in the DTES. I discuss here three ways in which CBPA contributes to place-making: cultural expression, socially and culturally appropriate places of grieving and healing, and arts-based grassroots neighbourhood revitalization.

4.2.1 Cultural Expression

CBPA plays a critical role in celebrating and making visible diverse cultural identities. I will discuss the ways that CBPA projects celebrate culture, render racialized histories visible, symbolize the evolution of culture, and facilitate cross-cultural understanding, as reported by my research participants.

The DTES is home to an array of public installations (murals, festival, performances, etc.) that publicly commemorate cultural diversity in the DTES. For example, the Powell Street Festival celebrates multicultural community pride by showcasing the work of Japanese, Chinese, and Indigenous artists. Today, the area that hosts the community festival is formally known as the Oppenheimer District. Prior to World War II, however, Powell Street was a site of settlement and congregation for many Japanese immigrants. The brutal dispossession of belonging and property, and the forced relocation of Japanese-Canadians to internment camps in inland British Columbia dissolved the Japanese prevalence that was once significant to the Powell Street area (Blomley, 2002). The Powell Street Festival celebrates the Japanese population that inhabited the neighbourhood prior to their relocation. As a form of CBPA, the festival acknowledges the
cultures and peoples that have been eradicated from the DTES over a long history of forced displacement.

Similar to the relocation of the Japanese community, the diverse and predominantly Black neighbourhood of Hogan’s Alley was demolished in 1970 to construct the Georgia Viaduct. Before this mass destruction, Hogan’s Alley was the home of many respected individuals, successful entrepreneurs, athletes, musicians, and political activists. In recognition of this, the Creative Cultural Collaborations Society launched an interactive video project in 2014:

“Black Strathcona Project, which commemorated the black community is an interactive video project that chronicles key people and elements of the black community that was very present here in East Vancouver” (Richard Tetrault, Artist, Muralist, Founding member of Creative Cultural Collaborations Society, during interview).

Ten plaques that chronicle key people and elements around the neighbourhood can be explored by foot or navigated online at blackstrathcona.com. Stories about the residents can be heard by scanning the QR codes with a mobile device or by clicking on the points labeled on a satellite image superimposed with a historic map of 1956. The project was installed in honour of the people and the culture that existed before being bulldozed by development interests.

Public art in the DTES is also used to signify not only the existence, but the continuous evolution of cultural identity and practice. CBPA pushes back against the romanticization of culture as traditional and embodies the bold representation of the ever-evolving and thriving cultural identity. This is often the case of people of First Nations. Evelyn Peters (1996) notes the dominant belief that the terms ‘urban’ and ‘Indigenous’ are mutually exclusive. This belief erroneously frames Indigenous culture as stagnant and ill-suited to the modernized urban sphere. Such an assumption is challenged not only in the bold visual presence of urban Indigenous art, but also in the methods of preparing art and in the modernity of themes integrated into Indigenous CBPA.
The expectation that Indigenous artists will revert back to using traditional methods can be seen as a form of neocolonial idealization, said a couple of interviewees. Creative public installations and practices demonstrate the creative ways that First Nations peoples demonstrate that their culture is advancing along with society and continues to thrive in an urban setting:

*I think there are special artists out there that really honour their culture and value their art through [...] the ways they express themselves, and their culture and their nation and their people. And art today is changing. [...] A lot of the carvers and artists out there are adapting with the times because they use culture and today’s art. They adapt. They have to adapt by bringing them both together, yesterday and today and they do. It’s like keeping the legends alive and the stories and the songs alive”*(Stephen Lytton, Indigenous Elder, DTES Community Actor, Poet, during interview)

In my research it became evident that Indigenous art in the DTES combines traditional and modernized art practices to create culturally resonant urban art. Squamish minister Eugene Harry vividly recalls a mural he came across that celebrates the commingling of the traditional and contemporary Indigenous culture:

“So, it’s like whoa! This is neat. Something from the past and the future[...] Breakdancing, the guy is spinning around on his head and that great big radio [...] There was a whale and a canoe and a First Nations pattern and up on the beach side, instead of longhouses there were people partying and dancing” *(Eugene Harry, XiQuelem, Squamish minister, works at Vancouver Native Health, during interview).

Elder Eugene spoke with enthusiasm about the ways that CBPA integrates tradition with modernity. CBPA pieces were thus described as contributing to a stronger sense of identity to urban Indigenous peoples.

CBPA also emerges as the temporary reappropriation of space through expressive cultural practice. Key informant Dr. Adrienne Burk, whose research explores the representation of women through public art in the DTES, commented on how Aboriginal elderly women assert their rights to space in a magnificent way:

“It’s pretty interesting in terms of retransforming that space particularly when they are commodified spaces or when they’re you know, spaces of tourism and then all of a sudden it’s a group of Aboriginal elderly women putting down tobacco and making sounds that people aren’t used to hearing and just sort of saying that there are other ways to recreate
These examples serve as powerful and tangible reminders that Indigeneity is not locked into the past, but vivaciously alive and in this very place (Wendt & Gone, 2011).

Another social function of CBPA identified by interviewees was its ability to build cross-cultural understandings. The DTES hosts an array of collaborative art pieces in which various cultural identities and ancestries intermingle. The Radius mural project is one such piece. Painted in collaboration with mentoring artists and youth from the Aboriginal, Chinese, and Japanese community, the mural aspires to weave together multi-cultural themes of identity and place. See Figure 6 for a photograph of the Radius Mural along with the artists. In her interview, Councillor Andrea Reimer spoke about the Radius mural to demonstrate the important role of CBPA in the community:

“[F]or the people that participated in the project it just- it ripples out. It creates cross-cultural understanding that will make them more likely to work with people of other cultures and build new art. [...] That understanding never shrinks. It only grows” (Andrea Reimer, City Councillor Vision Vancouver, Chair of Planning, Transportation and Environment Committee, during interview).

Building cross-cultural understanding demonstrates the aptitude of CBPA to serve as a vehicle for knowledge, discovery, and social connectivity.

*Figure 6: The Radius Mural (Creative Cultural Collaborations Society, 2013)*
4.2.2 Socially and Culturally Appropriate Places of Grieving and Healing

An unprecedented rate of addiction, illness, preventable death, mental trauma and other serious health disparities exist in the DTES. These issues often feed mainstream negative perceptions of the neighbourhood. However, they also inspire a local response that seeks to alleviate health disparities and work to dismantle assumption of the DTES as unhealthy or contagious. In fact, the DTES is described as a place that fosters health and healing through acceptance, solidarity, and community (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010). Several interviewees reported that CBPA played a strong role in improving individual and community well-being. There are publicly visible performances of caring (exemplified by food serving, public outreach programs, etc.) and a strong reverence for well-being in the DTES. Residents of the DTES foster community health through peer support, social services and health services (CCAP, 2009) constituting a place-based identity of peer-led community health in the DTES.

The majority of the interviewees also alluded to the strong connection between community well-being and CBPA. Benefits to both individual and community were identified both in the stages of co-creation and in physical landscapes of CBPA. For example, a couple of interviewees mentioned that community-art participants admitted to temporarily taking their mind off of drinking and/or drug use while they made art. The physical presence of CBPA was predominantly discussed in the interviews as having a therapeutic benefit. In fact, improving community well-being was sometimes considered an objective of CBPA projects.

The social determinants of health framework underscores the importance of physical environments for social and individual health (WHO, 2003). In my interview with City Councillor Andrea Reimer, she recognized that the public sphere serves as the living room for the DTES due to the lack of adequate private space and, as she puts it, an absence of
‘aesthetically nourishing’ spaces. It is common to hear from Oppenheimer Park dwellers that although they may sleep in SRO hotels or their apartment, they live in the park (Burk, 2010). Councillor Andrea Reimer acknowledges that when people’s housing options are neither safe nor secure, they end up spending a lot of their time in public space, and as such, public space becomes all the more valuable in the urban landscape.

A number of public projects were described by interviewees as creating temporary places of well-being. Johnsen and colleagues describe these impromptu spaces as ‘ephemeral micro-geographies of care’ (2005). A weekly creative outreach program that received start-up funding from the city’s Public Arts Portfolio provides an example of these types of spaces. The program was initially run on the street corner outside the Carnegie Community Centre where people were invited to make art (draw with sidewalk chalk, play instruments, listen to music). Spearheaded by Sharon Kravitz, the intention was to offer an accessible place for creative public expression and community engagement:

“I was like with my bare hands, you know washing people’s feet and painting their toe nails, you know? [laughs] And people thought that the art stuff for sure was just like, people don’t need art, they need a home. You know? People don’t need art, they need detox. They need this and that. And, you know, that was always a battle, right? It’s just like, I’m not saying that they don’t need housing, I’m not saying that they don’t need detox, but you can have housing and detox, but this is, this for so many people is the way they breath, and the way they can speak and a way they can articulate their experience of the world and this is life, right? This is the life part, right?” (Sharon Kravitz, Artist, Documentary Filmmaker, Community organizer, during interview).

Sharon’s quote identifies a tension that separates various approaches to well-being in the DTES. It is not uncommon to see the arts undervalued as a strategy for healing when compared against housing, rehabilitation, or medical care. However, others, including many of the interviewees, recognize that human rights to shelter, health, and expression, are not to be considered mutually exclusive but distinct and co-dependant. In the above quote, Sharon spoke about the ways that
she experienced the benefits of creative public engagement on individual and community well-being.

This correlation between well-being and social engagement has also been established by various studies (see Putland et al., 2013; The Vancouver Foundation, 2012; City of Vancouver, 2014a; Masuda et al, 2012). For example, the serious health impacts associated with loneliness and social isolation surfaced in a couple interviews. Research conducted by the Vancouver Foundation in 2012 found that the most pressing issue in Vancouver is neither poverty nor homelessness, but social isolation. People who reported feeling lonely were identified as being twice as likely to experience poor health when compared to individuals who did not identify with feelings of loneliness (The Vancouver Foundation, 2012). The DTES Social Impact Assessment recognizes that participation in arts and culture is vital to building livable neighbourhoods, is necessary for individual and community health, and is an antidote to social isolation (City of Vancouver, 2014a).

There are a number of CBPA pieces in the DTES that commemorate those no longer living, the many gone missing, and those tragically murdered. The CRAB (Create Real Available Beach) Park memorial boulder, (also see Burk, 2003), was installed in 1997 to honour the many lost sisters, daughters, mothers of the DTES. Artist and community activist Karen Ward discussed the cultural significance of the piece in her interview:

“That is such an important place for the entire community, and also used as a site for ceremony. [...] There is a native tradition where you prepare a meal, you have a spirit plate. So you load up the plate with whatever everybody is eating and you just leave it for the spirits” (Karen Ward, Artist, Activist, Associate Member of Gallery Gachet, Member of the LAP Planning Committee, during interview).

The memorial boulder is continuously encircled by offerings: flowers, candles, photographs, gifts (see Figure 7). It invites the spirits of the women who have gone missing to rest and creates a place for family and friends to visit and pay tribute. A news story entitled “Memorial in Crab
Park for missing women of Downtown Eastside” describes one of the many ceremonies that have gathered around the boulder to commemorate loved ones (see Aslam, 2010 August 29). In its ability to ceremoniously create visibility around this issue, this memorial gathering contributed to the social healing process (Aslam, 2010, August 29). This piece is one example of how material installations in the DTES can contribute to a therapeutic landscape (as discussed in Chapter Two). Those who have lost loved ones can begin to release their hold and allow the souls of the missing and murdered to rest in peace (Aslam, 2010, August 29).

Figure 7: CRAB Park Memorial Boulder (Photo by Teréz Szőke)

Like the memorial boulder, totem poles were described by a number of interviewees as instilling people with feelings of serenity and belonging:

“Wherever there’s a totem pole, visitors look and some of them have the knowledge that it’s a safe area and it’s a holy area. It’s where our ancestors walked and lived. And so a lot of them look at that totem pole and lot of them admire and a lot of them feel calm and feel at peace” (Eugene Harry, XiQuelem, Squamish Minister, Vancouver Native Health, during interview).

Therapeutic landscapes demonstrate the strong connection between urban Indigenous culture, land, and health (Wilson, 2003; McIvor et al., 2009). Indigenous public art in the DTES contributes to the spectrum of identity necessary to negotiate good mental health for indigenous residents (Burk, 2010; Peters, 2002).
It is important to note, however, that alternative memoryscapes may not be considered therapeutic to all those who encounter them. In the second discussion circle artists discussed that CBPA, although intended to create sacred space, may have traumatizing effects upon some passersby. Memorial pieces that commemorate death can serve as constant reminders of loss and pain:

“Public memorials and public grieving—especially around here—so much death and unaddressed grief that [...] it’s hard for a lot of people to have those pieces sitting there like that” (Sharon Kravitz, Artist, Documentary Filmmaker, Community organizer, during circle discussion)

Gould and Estrada (2014) found that murals can prompt passersby to recognize marginalized histories. To those who are too familiar with these histories, continuous public reminders may continue to pick at the scabs of unhealed wounds. Although bearing the risks of re-traumatizing its audience, CBPA was much more commonly described by interviewees as positively contributing to the DTES’ sociospatial public areas.

4.2.3 Arts-based Grassroots Neighbourhood Revitalization

In a similar vein, many of the artists and informants raised the issue of social and environmental justice, the rights to a healthy living environment, and the contributions of CBPA to creating a healthy environment. These themes emerged in discussions about grassroots urban revitalization because of the inherent connectivity between place and well-being. CBPA projects are committed to social rather than economic ends (Hall, 2007), and work to advance “human dignity, health, and/or productivity within a community” (Cleveland, 2011. p.4). Sharp and colleagues state that CBPA’s emphasis lies within cultural and community regeneration, as opposed to its corporate counterpart, which is perceived as a form of “cultural domination” (2005). By creating a space for discussion on community development and area regeneration,
community-based projects include and amplify voices that are otherwise disregarded (Kay, 2000).

Efforts of community-led neighbourhood revitalization employ public art projects in efforts to improve the DTES’ physical landscape. This topic was often paired with the idea that low-income residents deserved to live in an aesthetically nourishing landscape. Many of the interviewees stated that the DTES is deserving of beauty and that art is an effective means to enhance the otherwise neglected neighbourhood. In 1998, Sharon Kravitz and Richard Tetrault co-ordinated a large-scale art project entitled Walls of Change that was considered to be partly a beautification project:

“[W]hen we did the mural project it was sometimes described as a beautification project and we engaged a lot of people in that project, like 14 different organizations, and tons of people with that project. So the intention was to make the buildings look pretty and to make the neighbourhood look nicer and I think at the time it really didn’t take much for things to look nicer” (Sharon Kravitz, Artist, Documentary Filmmaker, Community organizer, during interview).

In addition to the aesthetic contributions of the project, Sharon emphasized the underlying social benefits of fostering social connectivity throughout its creation. Both artists believed that the DTES was physically uncared for and in dire need of creative community revitalization. This project, like other CBPA projects, was an attempt to dismantle those perceptions of the DTES that centre on addiction and despair.

In an interview with F.O.U.N.D. Spaces Collective, Artist Linnea reflected on the reactions they received from passersby as they installed the Lowdown project stencils discussed in Chapter Five:

“So it’s kind of interesting, I mean we had anecdotal comments as we were doing the project, where people were saying, you know, that we feel like we deserve beautiful things too and we’re really happy that people in this area’s words are getting said” (Linnea Strom, Artist, Co-founder of F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective, during circle discussion).
The gratitude that the artists of F.O.U.N.D Space Collective received for their work speaks to the appreciation toward artistic expression that is so prevalent in the DTES.

A brilliant example of how CBPA projects contribute to grassroots revitalization efforts was discussed in the first discussion circle. Andrea Creamer witnessed a group of participants leaving the community paint-in events (described in greater detail below) with paint buckets and brushes in hand. She described that the group was walking to community safe-injection site, Insite, to touch up the exterior of the clinic:

“So smart! In case media comes by, this place looks great. They can’t say anything about Insite. Like look at how pristine and fucking clean it is!” (Andrea Creamer, Artist, Project Coordinator at SFU Woodward's Cultural Unit, during circle discussion).

The residents diverted unwanted media attention by ensuring that the clinic was visually presentable. On a side note, however, it is despairing to see that such efforts are necessary, and that the DTES community has to continuously defend and justify the existence of this lifesaving service.

CBPA creates a means to express cultural and place-based identities, carves out culturally appropriate sites of community health and well-being, and contributes to community-led revitalization. The projects discussed above demonstrate how the DTES community employs CBPA to appropriate urban public space through grassroots place-making.

4.3 Visual Politics: CBPA as a Political Statement

Art can be described as a language that renders the human imagination visible; it exposes the complexities and the first-hand experiences of social injustice in creative and often revolutionary ways (Harrell, 2011). CBPA is comparable to new genre public art in its effort to disturb the ideologies of the mainstream and turn public attention toward the contradictions of the global city (Hall, 2007). In the DTES, oppositional street art actively confronts impacts of
dispossession and reanimates social memory (Blomley, 2002). I will first present the significance of alternative political involvement in the DTES, followed by the ways that CBPA projects contribute to alternative politics. CBPA contributes to the reframing of the formal decision-making process by illustrating residents' capacity to speak for themselves, their needs and their desires, rather than be spoken for.

4.3.1 Alternative Political Involvement in the DTES

Residents of the DTES express feeling disenfranchised and exempt from the political decision-making process that govern their well-being. Through evocative and demonstrative creative protests, residents demand a voice in the political dialogue that they are often excluded from. Andrea Reimer emphasized that residents of the DTES are impacted by the inaccessibility of formal politics:

“And I think that a lot of it is people who have a lot to say and don’t have a lot of places to say it. They probably don’t feel comfortable coming into city hall. They may not even vote” (Andrea Reimer, City Councillor Vision Vancouver, Chair of Planning, Transportation and Environment, during interview).

The “widening gulf” between mainstream political priorities and local concerns (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010, p. 656) demonstrates that alternative modes of participation in urban politics is important and necessary in the DTES. Critical artistic expression that seeks to challenge capital-driven, exclusive and patronizing political structures is increasingly recognized as having impactful and oppositional pull (Ley, 2003; Braun, 2002). The sociopolitical significance of public art in a changing urban landscape such as the DTES is also supported in critical social science literature (see: Buser et al., 2013; Bower, 2011; Burnham, 2011; Scholette, 1997; Hall & Robertson, 2001).

Radical forms of inclusive democratic involvement appear in various stages of preparing and performing CBPA; these projects can be seen as modes of public visual democracy. Public
visual democracy refers to the graphic (illustrative, text-based) expressions that are superimposed upon the urban landscape to serve as an alternative entry point into urban politics. For example, hoarding boards (temporary plywood fencing built around the parameters of a construction site) are common in areas of redevelopment and act as a canvas for alternative political involvement. Residents publicize their opinions and politicize space by covering these temporary surfaces with community murals, paint-ins, posters and graffiti.

4.3.2 Political Arenas and Performance Politics

Neighbourhood residents organize around CBPA projects as a way to relay politically-charged statements and demands. CBPA projects were described by some of the interviewees as contributing to the transformation of a landscape into active arenas in which residents can refuse neglect, renegotiate urban politics, and challenge distributions of power. Richard described this phenomenon:

“So, the idea was to turn that space into an active arena, a visual to refuse to the negation of the neighbourhood that came with neglect and politics” (Richard Tetrault, Artist, Muralist, Founding member of Creative Cultural Collaborations Society, during interview).

Beyerbach and Davis identify art as a component of a community “sphere of action” around which questions are raised, information is brought forth, and engaged citizenship is cultivated (2011). Within this sphere of action, participants influence issues of ‘urban spatial politics’ (Elwood, 2006)⁶. Activist art is an effective means of appropriating urban space and establishing political arenas (Sholette, 1997).

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⁶ Elwood (2006) defines urban spatial politics as encompassing urban planning, problem solving, and service provision.
The paint-in protests, reoccurring in the DTES, are strong examples of how temporary political arenas are socially constructed through CBPA. Paint-in protests are events where residents rally, voice their dissent, and make political demands. Several interviewees shared stories about their involvement with the paint-in protests. Karen Ward, one of the organizers, briefly explained the experience:

“We’d have like a march down the street and we’d all go to Pantages and we called it ‘paint-ins’. There would be like 100 people of all ages, little kids, everybody. We’d be there painting messages and drawing pictures and talking about rights to housing and this and that and people loved it because it was reclaiming space” (Karen Ward, Artist, Activist, Associate Member of Gallery Gachet, Member of the LAP Planning Committee, during interview).

Karen reflected on the significant sense of ownership over space that participants gained in participating in the visual protest.

**Figure 8: DTES Paint-in Protest (Robinson, 2014, March 9)**

A recent paint-in protest was organized in response to the Local Area Plan (LAP), which was accepted by Vancouver City council in March 2014. Residents showed their dissent toward the LAP’s 30-year plan, which sets out to accommodate 8,850 condominium dwellers and 3,300 high-income renters while forcing at least 3,350 low-income residents to disperse across
Vancouver (See Mainlander Article: Wallstam et al., 2014, March 17). Residents paraded down the street and painted their demands upon the now-demolished old Pantages Theatre in protest of the plan’s inadequate response to social housing needs. The paint-in event immediately made news on the *Vancouver Sun* website (see article by Robinson, 2014, March 9). The pictures available to the online (as shown by Figure 8) public carried with them the painted demands of the DTES residents: “Save Our Homes”, “Flambé the Rich”, “Displacement Fragments Community”. These messages, written by those who continuously endure unjust conditions, were viewable to the passing public until they were removed from the streets. However, the online news stories exposing pictures of the Paint-In demands are not so easily brushed over. The discursive presence of contentious public art projects were shown to exceed their tangible existence by circulating through online media and public memory.

Through the drama of theatre and the charisma of ceremony, Indigenous peoples momentarily assert their rights to their traditional lands. Art installations, public demonstrations, performances and occupying movements are contentious, visible statements that claim the right to self-representation, self-governance, cultural autonomy and land. The act of seizing space was particularly charged in the summer of 2014 after Vancouver City Council officially acknowledged that Vancouver stands upon the unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations. This symbolic declaration generated a variety of responses, one of which was a tent city in Oppenheimer Park. Visuals (banners and signs), and audio (music and singing) are often embedded in social movements and demonstrations in the DTES. ‘Embedded art’ is a term used by Oliver Ressler, a filmmaker and activist, to refer to art pieces that are implanted in larger activist mobilization (see Léger, 2008; Robertson & Cronin, 2011). These pieces amplify the bold visual presence of local demonstrations and direct action. An example of this was the
dignified white tee-pee, a wooden structure roofed with drooping branches of cedar, and hand-made signs that stood in the midst of the tent city. These embedded symbols illuminated efforts of Indigenous cultural activism, and contribute to building connections between place, identity, activism and creativity (Ginsburg, 1997).

Political theatre was also discussed by respondents as a way that DTES residents take a stance against political decisions that impose detrimental impacts on the community. The Poverty Olympics is a perfect example of bold political theatre. The Poverty Olympics was an annual community-organized event that ran for three years leading up to the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. It was run by community groups and concerned citizens, and employed satirical performances to heighten awareness and draw media attention toward the discriminatory impacts of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. The event showcased performances such as ‘Welfare Hurdles’ and ‘Skating around Poverty’ (Poverty Olympics, 2010), employing humour as a tactic for problematizing Vancouver’s blissfully euphoric notion of the 2010 Olympics as a jamboree of economic and social prosperity. The marches, public ceremony and the media attention heightened the visibility of the issues around poverty and homelessness that were both exacerbated and camouflaged by the dominant discourses on the global city and the Olympics (Forkert, 2011). Stephen Lytton enthusiastically shared his experience being involved in the Poverty Olympics:

“It was addressing the most recent Olympics we had and how there was a fear factor of getting displaced. There was a lot of money going into the Olympics. A lot of the resources and services that we had were cut back. So the community came up with ‘Poverty Olympics’ to address that and [...] to compete against the Olympics, just to say that we too can have an Olympics in the terms of poverty. [...] And there was media there and we were addressing the issues of poverty, the Olympics and displacement and people going missing or dying because of the Olympics” (Stephen Lytton, Indigenous Elder, DTES Community Actor, Poet, during interview).
Stephen highlights the unfortunate and discriminatory impacts of the 2010 Olympics that overwhelmed Vancouver’s most vulnerable population (Aoki, 2011). When Stephen spoke about the Poverty Olympics, it was clear that this performative counter-event gave residents a sense of empowerment and pride.

Through aesthetic expression, street theatre, and physical reclamation of space, activists, artists and residents attract media attention toward issues of concern and raise their voices in the otherwise inaccessible political discourse. CBPA serves as direct response to the lack of agency residents feel they have over their own neighbourhood due to social marginalization and creeping gentrification. Residents live with a looming fear of displacement from their home, social networks, and support services. It is not merely the issue of physical displacement, but also a diminishing sense of social belonging. Artist Rebecca Geddes considers CBPA, such as murals and performances, an apt response to regaining voice and social agency:

“People keep getting pushed out and so it’s also a way [...] of claiming space and having a voice and making that voice heard that maybe sometimes talking isn’t heard. Sometimes when you have a big loud mural people actually take notice. Or when you do a performance piece, like people actually take notice in that way” (Rebecca Geddes, Artist, Student of Midwifery at University of British Columbia, during interview).

Rebecca identified the social impact of public art as an eye-catching statement that adds volume to those voices rarely heard. It is evident through the examples above that residents employ artful resistance as a means of re-inscribing their ‘right to remain’ (see Masuda & Franks, 2014). Public art thus takes on a prominent role as a strategy in cultural politics. By visually communicating the needs of a community within public space CBPA can be consumed by a wider audience and influence the greater geographic imagination (Warwick, 2006).

Many interviewees pointed out that political statements were not the sole motivator for community art installations in the DTES, and pointed to other goals such as the co-creation of knowledge or merely exploration. Linnea Strom stated that public art which is not purely
motivated by activist intentions or seeking active engagement in political discourse should not be considered meaningless, irrelevant, or contributing to gentrification. CBPA can, however, publicly present socioecological utopians that aspire toward environmentally conscious cities, emancipatory urban structures and egalitarian public spaces (Demos, 2012; Sholette, 1997; Mitchell, 1996). Sharp and colleagues defend that “regardless of the scale and type of intervention, the installation of public art within the urban fabric is inevitably a political exercise” because of its visibility and agency over space (Sharp et al., 2005).

4.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have identified the key themes surrounding the sociospatial role of CBPA in the context of the DTES. I have organized my findings under three distinct, but recognizably concomitant categories: CBPA as a mode of inquiry, CBPA as an expression of culture and identity, and CBPA as a form of alternative political involvement. Evidently, CBPA, and the people working passionately to organize them, can provide the public with a deeper understanding of the social, political and physical landscapes of the DTES. My findings provide justification to support that CBPA proffers a deeper engagement with and understanding of one’s social environment. It is also a useful symbol to consider in the semiotic deconstruction, the active exploration of the meanings behind social symbols in a landscape (Hall, 2007). The oversimplification of public art projects as either beautification or oppositional ignores the multiple and overlapping impacts of art within the sociospatial cityscape. It also presents a key tension in seeking to understand the impact of public art within the process of gentrification (Chapter Six further discusses this tension). The following chapter presents the sociospatial impacts of three unique CBPA pieces from the perspective of the passing street-level audience.
Chapter Five: Public Art Audience’s Perception of Public Art

5.1 CBPA Site Synopsis

As previously mentioned, little scholarship explores the audience’s relationship with and their perception of the sociospatial impact of community-based public art. In seeking to address this gap, I took my research to the streets and conducted 301 public surveys with pedestrians around three sites of CBPA. The gathered results are presented in the following order: the Oppenheimer Park Memorial Pole, the Lowdown Stencil, and the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall. At each site of inquiry, the same questions were asked, but surveys were slightly altered to correspond with the particular site (see Figure 9 for an example of one of the surveys).

Figure 9: Bud Osborn Memorial Wall Survey

Public surveys were designed to generate socially-inclusive research data and an active discussion between researchers and passersby. The intention was to recognize the passing audience not as passive observers, but as contributors to the continuous production of place and meanings of place (see Lacy, 1994).
Table 2: Street Survey Quantitative Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preference for amount of public art</th>
<th>Total Number of Surveys = 301</th>
<th>Oppenheimer Memorial Pole</th>
<th>Walk Fast…Lowdown Stencil</th>
<th>Bud Osborn Memorial Wall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More</td>
<td>27  = 60%</td>
<td>70  = 55%</td>
<td>58  = 45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less</td>
<td>2   = 4%</td>
<td>4   = 3%</td>
<td>11  = 9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Amount</td>
<td>1   = 2%</td>
<td>15  = 12%</td>
<td>12  = 9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>15  = 33%</td>
<td>39  =30%</td>
<td>47  = 37%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Demographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident of the DTES</td>
<td>39  = 87%</td>
<td>70  = 55%</td>
<td>82  = 64%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works in the DTES but lives outside of the DTES</td>
<td>2   = 4%</td>
<td>17  = 13%</td>
<td>10  = 8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident of Vancouver but lives outside of the DTES</td>
<td>2   = 4%</td>
<td>17  = 13%</td>
<td>17  = 13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor from out of town</td>
<td>2   = 4%</td>
<td>23  = 18%</td>
<td>13  = 10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of residence not specified</td>
<td>0   = 0%</td>
<td>1   = 1%</td>
<td>6   = 5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above (Table 2) provides a quantitative overview of respondent’s place of residents and their preference for public art. As shown in the table, by the number of completed surveys, there was more pedestrian traffic flow by the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall and the Lowdown Stencil than around Oppenheimer Park. To appreciate how passersby felt about the CBPA piece, the survey asked participants whether they wished to see more, less, or the same amount of public art similar to the one being surveyed. Although the response rate was fairly low (only 65% responded to this question), passersby at the Lowdown Stencil most frequently reported that they wished to see more public art of its type. Respondents were asked to provide information on their place of work and residence as a way to assess their relationship to the area. Of all participants, more than half (63%) identified themselves as residents of the DTES. The
Bud Osborn Memorial Wall and Oppenheimer Park are socially and geographically embedded in the DTES community and attracted fewer visitors (only 27% were non-residents). However, the Lowdown Stencil was located in an area more deeply affected by urban change and a higher percentage of respondents indicated they were non-residents of the DTES (45%). The quantitative results of each public art site are illustrated by two pie-graphs and presented in the appropriate sections below.

*Figure 10: Map of Surveyed Public Art Sites*

Survey results are presented below in three sections that focus on each of the three corresponding CBPA sites. Each section begins with a brief background of the site to establish its social and spatial context and significance. A map of the DTES (Figure 10) marks out the location of each site of inquiry. After a synopsis of participant demographics and key themes for each section, I present a final section titled “Transcending Themes” that reflects on the themes that emerged across all three.

5.2 Oppenheimer Memorial Pole
The Oppenheimer Memorial Pole (as shown in Figure 11) has a bold presence in the southeast corner of Oppenheimer Park. Unlike the totem poles in Stanley Park, which represent marketable symbols and tourist attractions (Barman, 2005; Aoki, 2011), the Pole stands as a tribute to those who have fallen and to those who continue to survive through struggle in the DTES. It faces the direction of the commercial and political centres of the city in “condemnation of past silences and a lack of dialogue when it was most needed” (Aoki, 2011, p. 46). The metal plaque staked into the ground beside the Pole is engraved with the following dedication:

To our sisters and brothers
who have died unnecessarily in
the downtown eastside and to those
who have survived.
The Oppenheimer Pole is a humble display of grassroots organization within the Indigenous community in the DTES (Aoki, 2011). It was raised in 1997, the same year that a memorial stone was installed in CRAB Park. After years of tireless effort from the DTES community, these two pieces were installed as material reminders of the detrimental impacts of silence. In 1998, a year following the installation of these monuments, the Vancouver Police Department finally chose to acknowledge the catastrophic number of murdered and missing Indigenous women (Burk, 2007). These pieces provoked critical debate around the mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in Vancouver (Culhane, 2003).

The carving of the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole was led by master carver Dick Baker along with a team of local carvers (Burk, 2010). In preparing the pole, carvers were asked to refrain from drinking and drug use. Carvers supported each other along this journey in various ways, such as attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings together. A host of others gathered in the ceremonial carving. Some of the artists interviewed shared fond memories of their involvement in the process, whether they were involved in the carving or helping to prepare the meals. A few survey respondents shared similar memories. Many hands and many hearts were involved in the co-creation of this towering monument.

After the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole was raised, it became a place of prayer and social gathering. The Pole is a site where people leave offerings and pay tribute to their loved ones. The Women’s Memorial March, which takes to the streets to raise awareness of the Indigenous women who “disproportionately continue to go missing or be murdered with minimal to no action to address these tragedies or the systemic nature of gendered violence, poverty, racism, or colonialism” (Ajik, 2014, December 27), congregates at the Pole every February the 14th.
Oppenheimer Park is a socially significant place and is located in the heart of the DTES. Day and night, people congregate at Oppenheimer Park; it serves as the living room to those who otherwise live in undesirable living conditions, such as in SRO hotels, or on the streets (Burk, 2010). It serves as a key site for social congregation, cultural events, and sociopolitical contention. Aoki’s (2011) work explores the highly politicized nature of the park due to its proximity to an area once known as Japantown (described in Chapter Four). Artists discussed the significance of the Park in the first discussion circle:

[Oppenheimer Park] has been such an influential space on so many levels. [...] All the communities that have been a part of that space and all of the gatherings and memorials and protests that have happened there since the 1900s and before that. It’s just a phenomenal space for the First Nations community, Japanese community, and the drug using community, everybody. (Sharon Kravitz, Artist, Documentary Filmmaker, Community organizer, during circle discussion)

In preparation for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, the city invested $1.8 million into the park’s redesign (Harris, 2010, September 1). The community lost access to the Park for a year as an architectural firm spearheaded this work. The new Oppenheimer Park was equipped with increased surveillance, improved walking paths, manicured landscaping, and high-visibility structures with the intention to redefine the social function of the Park (Harris, 2010, September 1). Undeniably, this renovation project has stirred contention and criticism among the community. Prior to this physical transformation, the space was a hub for drug dealing, drug-use, and sex trade. Today, the park serves as a more inclusive space for all ages, though it still serves as a social refuge to those who are homeless or live in ill-managed SROs. It continues to be a lively gathering place for those of different nations, cultures and walks of life, but provides less protection to individuals engaging in the illegal activities than before. My memories of visiting the park involve music, community feasts, karaoke, arts programming and friendly interactions.
The Park also hosts various community street festivals that foster a sense of pride and belonging (such as the Powell Street Festival and the HomeGround Festival).

In the summer of 2014, the park was unable to host the annual Powell Street Festival because it had been fully occupied by a tent city. This was initially instigated by community members to reassert Indigenous sovereignty in response to the City’s official recognition that Vancouver is built upon the unceded lands of the Coast Salish peoples (Georgia Straight, 2014, September 24). Tents were also pitched to draw attention to the inexplicable rates of homelessness and the inadequate government response. Tim Cresswell (1996. p.4) states that although homelessness can be interpreted as a public performance, it should not be inherently understood as a political statement because in many cases it simply serves as a means for survival. In the case of the Oppenheimer Park occupation, we can observe both: for some dwellers, occupation of the park carried a political message; to others it simply provided the basic amenities for survival. Oppenheimer Park Tent City was a site of sociopolitical transgression, rest, and belonging until mid-October, when it was forcibly dismantled by police (see CBC News, 2014). These circumstances unquestionably influenced my data, as I was collecting surveys at the time that tent city was occurring.

Oppenheimer Memorial Pole was the only site of inquiry not positioned along Hastings Street. Being a residential area, the flow of pedestrian traffic along the sidewalk was generally calm and sparse. The energy was personable, and although we collected a significantly smaller number of surveys at this site, a higher proportion of passersby agreed to participate in the study. This slower pace also granted us more time to chat with individuals about the tent city, about their relationship to the Pole, and about life in the DTES. We surveyed from the sidewalk along East Cordova Street, about 10 meters away from the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole, in an effort to
maintain a respectable distance from the tent city inhabitants. Some of the individuals in the park approached us with curiosity and willingly filled out the survey. However, a couple of respondents were concerned that our public inquiry had underlying intentions that posed a threat to the park and/or the Pole. I carefully explained that we had no intention of altering the space or the art in any way. I inferred that this uncertainty was rooted in a socially-ingrained distrust in researchers.

5.2.1 Survey Results

As shown in Figure 12, of the 45 Oppenheimer Pole survey participants, 87% identified as residing in the DTES. The low percentage of tourist and non-resident passersby is explicable given the ongoing presence of tent city and that the park’s residential location. The majority of the respondents (60%) expressed the desire for more public art like the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole (see Figure 13). This number was smaller than anticipated, possibly attributable to the high proportion of respondents (33%) that failed to specify their preference.

*Figure 12: Oppenheimer Memorial Pole Respondent Demographics*
The four predominant themes that emerged from the survey data described the Oppenheimer Pole as: a sphere of protection, an Indigenous acknowledgement, an alternative memoryscape, a place of social and spiritual congregation. These themes demonstrate Oppenheimer Memorial Pole’s capacity to serve as a therapeutic landscape.

5.2.2 Sphere of Protection

Many of the participants regarded the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole as a peaceful presence in the park. Some respondents suggested that the Pole changes the space by creating a sphere of protection around the Park:

“[The pole signals] that the community in and around the park is protected” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

“Changes [space] in good way, shows what the park is about, space for natives to squat safer than downtown” (Passerby, Vancouver Resident, lives outside of the DTES, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).
“An unreal feeling. Past times. Serenity, protection, guidance. Stability, almost like empowerment. It shows that somebody something some source is still looking out for you” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

“Yes [it changes the space], I think that it makes the park more sacred, brings substance. Feels like there's something there” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

These quotes demonstrate that residents of the DTES consider the Pole a signal of safety and consider its surrounding land to be sacred and protected.

5.2.3 Urban Indigenous Presence

The Pole serves as material acknowledgement of the Coast Salish lands upon which Vancouver was built. A substantial number of participants stated that the Pole brings awareness to the land’s Indigenous significance. A couple of respondents were explicit in identifying the function of First Nations poles as presenting information about place-based histories:

“Reminder of the heritage and natural history of the region; how it’s developed; and from which roots” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

Moreover, it promotes awareness towards First Nations culture and Indigenous connection to the land:

“I'm glad the pole exists as recognition of native presence in the DTES. Native culture is often overlooked” (Passerby, Lives outside of Vancouver, but works in the DTES, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

In seeking to interpret the social significance of and message behind the Pole, some participants indicated that it can create deeper understanding of its surrounding social landscape:

“It adds educational and character to wherever it sits. It provides a piece for conversation about its detail and what it represents” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole). 

Evidently, carved figures on totem poles can relay information or messages about the land and its people. The Oppenheimer Memorial Pole invites its passersby into dialogue:
The stoic silence of the pole conceals an ongoing conversation with those who encounter the monument, as well as an invitation to dialogue with those who do not (Aoki, 2011. p. 46).

5.2.4 An Alternative Memoryscape

The Oppenheimer Memorial Pole serves as a marker of place-based histories of Vancouver and more specifically the DTES. Many respondents described the Pole as a monument of memory. It represents the endured struggles of the past and conjures up tender thoughts of loved ones—notably, the many murdered and missing sisters, mothers and daughters of the DTES. While collecting surveys, respondents shared heartrending memories that were evoked by the Pole:

“It represents the loss of our sisters. We can't hug our sisters. Reminds us of those who are missing but not forgotten” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

“Yes, it is a daily reminder that the lives and struggles won't be forgotten” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

These quotes resonate with the literature on alternative memoryscapes. Objects like the Oppenheimer Pole serve to concretize the connection between the living and the dead, the past and the present (Saunders, 2003); they trigger memories and provide tangible visuals for storytelling (Muzaini, 2012). Alternative memoryscapes do not provide fixed narratives as conventional spaces of memory, such as those created by war memorials. They are sanctuaries that evolve out of many personal memories and memory practices (Muzaini, 2012).

5.2.5 Social and Spiritual Congregation Place

Many of the participants considered the Pole to be a symbol for community strength. Oppenheimer Park serves as an important place for the DTES community to gather and the Pole stands as a focal point for social congregation. Respondents reflected on the extent to which the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole governs the social life in the Park:
“Yes, I get up in the morning and I have to be around people and be social. The pole dictates something you don’t even know about” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

“In the 70s this Park was different. The pole made it more of a meeting site. More people hang out. The space feels safer” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

Some of the respondents felt the Pole connected individuals with their social, environmental, and spiritual landscape:

“It makes me feel a sense of unity with the people and the lands and the animals” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

“The concept of having the spirits of the totem with the people who need their help is awesome” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

“Reminder of healing. Everyone’s soul lives in the tree. Everyone needs to know the real tree represents eternity. Everyone has a kid inside. Reminds us of the kid inside us all” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

“The pole makes me feel very thoughtful and spiritual. It makes me think of the poles up north and the First Nations and people who are gone” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

Many of the individuals who participated in this survey found the Pole to serve as a congregation point for both earthly and spirited beings. Many respondents expressed that the Pole is a sacred monument that inspires strength and unity among those who experience its radiant presence. The Pole signals a place for souls to rest and for spirits to gather. It creates a sphere of protection around the park, serves as a cultural symbol, and marks a place for ceremony, pride, and grieving. The interactions and conversations reported here strongly suggest that the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole is a symbol within Oppenheimer Park’s therapeutic landscape.

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7 The community mapping project headed by CCAP discovered that green spaces were also described as bearing spiritual and cultural significance in the DTES (CCAP, 2009).
5.3 The Lowdown Stencil

untitled — by Anne Hopkinson
walk fast,
walk past,
look at me,
outcast

Figure 14: Lowdown Stencil (Photo by Teréz Szöke)

These confrontational words, written by community poet Anne Hopkinson, were spray-painted in bright orange across four sidewalk panels where West Hastings Street becomes East Hasting, an area undergoing obvious social and physical transition (see Figure 14). The stencil lies next to a strip of newly renovated cafés and bistros which are directly across the street from the Hastings Community Garden and a local pub with boarded windows. Steps away from the stencil stands the contentious Woodward’s development project, an infamous harbinger of urban change (see Lees, 2011; Ball, 2015, February 25). I interpreted this fragment of space as a sphere of liminality: a “threshold” or ambiguous transition that unravels or advances previous ways of structuring identity, time, and community (Jones & Garde-Hansen, 2012).
This stenciled poem was one in a larger public art project called the Lowdown. The idea was designed and carried out by the two founding members of the F.O.U.N.D. Spaces Collective and 14 local writers. Artist Linnea Strom and Lindsey Adams connected with a number of local writing groups, such as those that met at the Carnegie Community Centre, Jacob’s Well Centre, and Ray-Cam Co-operative Centre, and invited them to submit their writing to the project. Quotes, colours, and various locations along Hastings Corridor were all selected in consultation with the poets. The artists then took to the streets with pylons, paint, and stencils and began to lay down the words (see Figure 15). This process was met with curious pedestrians who commented on the project and eagerly asked questions. The artists recognized the performative nature of their art installation in the way that it interrupted the everyday flow of pedestrian traffic and in its ability to provoke dialogue:

“It could be considered maybe a performance art piece too as we are on the streets, gathering a crowd. People were standing around watching us. It’s been a very interesting process” (Linnea Strom, Artist, Founder of F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective).

Linnea and Lindsey invited me along while they installed some of the quotes and later to join artists and poets in a walking tour of the freshly-laid stencils. The local poets who attended
were delighted with the stencils; some of them read their poems aloud to us. They exhibited pride in their work and expressed gratitude toward the artists for allowing them to present their words to the public. Andrea Creamer, an artist passionately involved in arts-based community programming in the DTES, reported on the enthusiasm that billowed from friends who partook in this project:

“They are ecstatic. They are so joyful [...] One of them has texted me like 3 times, like ‘have you seen my work?’” (Andrea Creamer, Artist, Project Coordinator, SFU Woodward’s Cultural Unit, during interview).

Andrea noted that participants hold a strong sense of agency and ownership over their space in their neighbourhood. She reflected on the role that this project and others like it play in the lives of DTES residents:

“So these are little markers and little traces of where they own space [...] and it makes it theirs for them, over and over and over again and that’s how you reinforce it. Maybe there’s a condo there but their words and their feeling and their heart is also here, right?” (Andrea Creamer, Artist, Project Coordinator, SFU Woodward’s Cultural Unit, during interview).

Projects like this strengthen personal connections to space in a community that is threatened by urban change and displacement.

The Lowdown art project was funded by the Hastings Crossing Business Improvement Association (HxBIA). The allotted funding was sufficient to cover the costs of supplies and acknowledge poets for their contributions. According to their website, HxBIA “is no regular BIA” (HxBIA, 2014). They are socially innovative, motivated by strong socially- and environmentally-conscious values, and dedicated to the authentic urban culture of Vancouver’s DTES. They also claim to “take a leadership role in managing change and shaping a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable local economy here in the Downtown Eastside” (ibid.), while explicitly advocating for the rights of those who hold a business membership. However, the HxBIA is ultimately responsive to its business members, whose priorities may differ from that
of residents’. For example, mentioned first among their list of member services is their support for graffiti removal. Like other BIAs, the City has granted the HxBIA power over the use of public space. Since they have legal rights to physically alter public space within their BIA zone, they were able to grant permission to the F.O.U.N.D. Spaces Collective to spray paint on city sidewalks.

To some, however, these community art installations were regarded as graffiti. One of the poets from the Lowdown stencil project found that his poetry had been pressure-washed from the sidewalk. The adjacent building had a ‘For Sale’ sign posted in the window and the poet was certain the property owner had pressure-washed the sidewalk clean of rogue social and cultural expression in an effort to increase the saleability of the property. This was a particularly ironic scenario given that the HxBIA, an association dedicated to enhance the economic desirability of the area, had funded the project. In Chapter Six I explore more deeply the unease that artists and participants felt about their affiliations with contentious funding sources.

During the first discussion circle, artists of the F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective shared a story of a tense encounter with the police while installing their stencil. They reflected on the officer’s violent energy, masked by a kind demeanour. The officer made the artists feel uncomfortable by snapping photographs of the artists as they spray-painted the quote along the sidewalk. Installing street art in a heavily policed neighbourhood can raise suspicions with the law and invoke anxiety for those involved, even if proper permission had been granted. During the first discussion circle, Linnea reflected upon her experience and empathetically noted the impact of constant surveillance on residents:

*So I can see the level of intimidations of people down here and I really feel... [takes deep breath] (Linnea Strom, Artist, Founder of F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective, during discussion circle).*
This comment was followed by silence and then by nods of agreement from other artists. In the interviews, a couple of stories emerged about artists being approached by police officers while performing or installing art in the DTES. However, in most cases, the interactions were described as fairly cordial.

5.3.1 Survey Results

As illustrated by Figure 16 below, only 55% of respondents identified as residents of the DTES at the Lowdown stencil. This reflects the presence of new business and tourists attractions in the area. There was a visibly higher presence of middle-class and business class individuals.

Figure 16: The Lowdown Stencil Respondent Demographics

Some individuals politely informed us that they were rushing off to meetings or were on short lunch breaks and did not have time to complete a survey. Although the refusal rate was not
recorded\textsuperscript{8}, at this site it was noticeable that many pedestrians sped by without any acknowledgement. One respondent made note of this repetitive rejection in their survey response:

“Ironically, I saw lots of people walk past the girl” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil)

This respondent pointed out the irony in being repeatedly disregarded, given that the bright orange poem criticized avoidance and othering. Interestingly, though, the majority (55\%) expressed wanting to see more art like the Lowdown stencil (see Figure 17).

\textit{Figure 17: Respondent Preferences}

Three predominant themes emerged from the survey data: significance of written words, site specificity and aesthetic appeal. These themes and supporting quotes are presented below.

\textsuperscript{8} During the surveying period both the research assistant and I were preoccupied with administering the surveys. We were unable to simultaneously keep a tally of the number of passing pedestrians and record those who chose not to participate in the survey.
5.3.2. Significance of Written Words

Word art invites the passerby to engage with and interpret the poetics and hermeneutics of a piece. The words in the poem inspired many respondents to share their thoughts on issues of social inequality in the DTES:

“It makes me think individuals shun others who represent caricatures of suffering and poverty due to unresolved issues that they themselves are facing. Society is only as strong as its weakest link” (Passerby, Resident of Vancouver, Works in the DTES, Lowdown Stencil).

“It makes me feel/think about the impersonal and individualistic tendencies of Vancouver and how nobody makes eye contact especially with the ‘outcast’” (Passerby, Resident of Vancouver, Lowdown Stencil).

The poem brings to mind the social dynamics, such as the act of othering, that are prevalent in both the DTES and Vancouver at large. The stencil clearly acknowledges the ongoing social marginalization in the neighbourhood. To those who experienced being ‘outcast’ these words invoked a personal response:

“It made me think of how alone I feel out here because my baby mamma kicked me out and I’m on the streets. Every time I pass it I think or feel more grounded” (Passerby, Resident of Vancouver, Works in the DTES, Lowdown Stencil).

“Makes me feel like I’m at home. I’m outcast. I can relate to it. I walk past it every day” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil).

I inferred that these respondents felt that these words publicly acknowledged their marginalized presence and granted them a sense of solidarity and belonging. This recognition, although comforting to some, was seen by others as an undesired reminder of hardship and exclusion:

“Makes me feel more homeless and hopeless (first thought). Depressing” (Passerby, Resident of Vancouver, Lowdown Stencil)

A number of hopeful passersby reported that this stencil provoked urban awareness and ideally inspired people to change the way they behave towards each other. They focused on the possible influence that the stencil had on pedestrian consciousness:

“I thought it would make judgmental people aware of their attitude as it expresses this so bluntly and well” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil)
“That everyone should be noticed. Actually makes me feel opposite to the words...slow down and take notice” (Passerby, Resident of Vancouver, Lowdown Stencil)

“It makes people think they about their attitude towards others and thus might create empathy and compassion” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil)

Passersby thought carefully about what the poem was trying to communicate and tried to predict the impact this may have on others who encountered it.

A couple of individuals found the sardonic tone of the poem to be ineffective at relaying its message.

 “[T]his particular stencil might come across as sort of privileged and probably irritating to people who have to see it every day. It’s presumably delivered in an ironic tone, but irony is highly problematic in these sorts of didactic art pieces, well-intentioned though they may be. I don’t know if this piece fully succeeds in what it is meant to accomplish.” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil).

This respondent also wrote at length about feelings and thoughts provoked by the poem, and how important it is to draw attention to the poor quality of life in the DTES⁹.

5.3.3 Significance of Location

This installation was not only recognized for its discursive connotations but also for its specific location in the urban landscape. The poem was spread out over four sidewalk panels and therefore could be experienced in motion (a survey respondent described this as a “kinetic” experience). Given the direction in which the words were stencilled, the poem could only be read in motion by someone walking from the west (the City’s business centre) towards the east (entering the DTES). One of the passersby was walking upstream from the stencil and noticed that the words appeared upside down and reversed:

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⁹ Although, this respondent was concerned that the tone of this quote would prevent it from getting its message across, they may not have been aware that the poem was written by a local resident, someone who conceivably encounters these social stigmas on a daily basis.
“Makes me feel backwards. Why am I so backwards?” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil).

This alludes to the sense of alienation that some DTES residents may feel when walking out of the neighbourhood towards Vancouver’s business district.

Some of the survey responses demonstrated a perceptive recognition of the stencil’s placement on the frontiers of gentrification. These quotes exemplify an acute awareness of the spatial significance:

“Makes me aware of the discomfort most people (sometimes me...) feel around poverty. The location of the piece is at the edge of gentrification” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil).

“It invigorates the space and diffuses the social separation of gentrification” (Passerby, Non-resident, Works in the DTES, Lowdown Stencil).

A few respondents, such as those above, recognized that the poem lies on a contested social border. This individual acknowledges how the poem relates to the DTES’ shifting sociospatial boundaries and acknowledges the area's history of land dispossession:

“1- recognizes contented spaces and articulates that. 2- I like that it draws attention to inequality in the DTES. Forces people to think about public space- e.g. whose streets? Our streets...who gets to say that? Plus- colonized land” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil).

Some survey responses indicated that passersby recognized the significance of the stencil’s location. The site specificity of the word-based art drew some of the respondents to reflect on how the physical changes in the neighbourhood impacted social relations.

5.3.4 Aesthetics

Many of the responses chose to focus on the aesthetics of the piece rather than the message or location. Some of the respondents found that the stencil effectively added beauty to
the area. Residents and non-residents alike made note of how the piece made the space more appealing:

“It makes you think more about this area. This jazzes up the area & this area deserves uplifting art. It is looked down upon too much (the DTES)” (Passerby, Non-resident, Works in the DTES, Lowdown Stencil).

This non-resident recognizes that the DTES is deserving of art that is beautiful and also challenges the stigmas imposed on the community.

In contrast, some survey participants found the stencil to be ineffective and suggested ways that it could be made more effective in capturing the attention of the passersby. To prevent it from blending into the landscape, a number of respondents suggested that the piece should be bigger, brighter, and more visually audacious:

“I thought it was purposeless. This is a better way to get the cause out than simple stenciling. No, [it doesn’t change the space] I think it should be more in your face because things need to be said down here. Homes for the poor” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil).

This respondent recognizes that the demands of the residents are important and should be vibrantly expressed. Few survey respondents actually reported that the Stencil had a negative impact on the passerby and the space. They considered the piece to be physically unappealing and contributing to the urban landscape’s unpleasant feel:

“Too cluttered. Too much input in my life. Signs, ads, can’t help but read them. Sometimes overwhelmed. Signs everywhere” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil).

“Unfinished, incomplete, annoyed. ... Less attractive. I avoid unanswered questions, incomplete statements” (Passerby, Not a resident of Vancouver, Lowdown Stencil).

It is important to highlight that the majority of the responses reflected on the positive impacts of the piece in brightening the space, and provoking thought. Many of the respondents shared an opinion that the piece would promote awareness of one’s surroundings due to its visual interruption in the landscape and its socially relevant and confrontational message.
5.4 The Bud Osborn Memorial Wall

*Figure 18: The Bud Osborn Memorial Wall (Photo by Teréz Szőke)*

The DTES neighbourhood is animated by a tight social network, but certain individuals stand out as particularly influential or supportive in this community. Bud Osborn was one such man: a poet, activist and leader in the DTES for decades. When he passed away, residents gathered in memory of his life and in celebration of his accomplishments. This memorial event, taking place May 16, 2014, was promoted through Facebook, as follows:

Memorial program begins outside of InSite at noon followed by a march to Oppenheimer Park for an open reading with live music, stew and bannock at 2pm. **We will be building a community memorial for Bud at the garden beside InSite on Friday. Please feel free to bring flowers, poetry or something of your choosing to contribute to the memorial or the tribute wall. Please share and spread the word.** (Memorial for Bud Osborn, Facebook Event, 2014)

The event was immediately covered by media and published in the *Georgia Straight* later that afternoon (Lupick, 2014, May 16). Speeches were delivered by the NDP Member of Parliament and by the former manager of the Portland Hotel Society (a non-profit working in the DTES providing social housing and support). Throughout the afternoon, attendees expressed their love and their loss with art, poetry and music. They painted a tribute wall, pictured in Figure 18, spanning over half a block along Hastings Street covered in messages, pictures, and poetry. The painted wall was steps away from the Carnegie Community Centre near the infamous
intersection of Main and Hastings streets. Directly across the street was Insite, DTES’s renowned safe injection site, which Bud staunchly advocated for. Behind the plywood hoarding, which served as the canvas, laid the remains of the demolished Pantages Theatre.

By late summer, around the time the surveys were conducted, the construction of the newest DTES condominium had begun on the site of the Pantages demolition. The ongoing redevelopment project noticeably influenced how respondents felt about the painted hoarding. The surveying took place two months after the Bud Memorial Wall had been painted, which was far longer than artists had expected the tribute to last. In this time the Wall had taken on a life of its own, slowly being altered by the public. Although it started off as a wall covered in kind words that addressed the late Bud Osborn, it became mixed with messages of resistance, such as: “Stop Gentrification”, “Love, No Condos” and “We Resist Block By Block”. This may have influenced the survey responses since many passersby interpreted the wall as a platform for resistance. They saw it as taking a stance against displacement and against the diminishing availability of safe and affordable housing for low-income residents.

Because of our proximity to Main and Hastings, we were approached by many individuals who were waiting in line at the Insite clinic or who were on their way to meet friends for a meal at the Carnegie Community Centre. There was a heavy flow of pedestrian traffic during each survey period, and we encountered many individuals who walked back and forth repeatedly in that time. I felt uncomfortable conducting research at the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall for various reasons. Its proximity to vital social service sites was one reason for my apprehension as I felt concerned about bringing research into a community place. Additionally, the hoarding around the construction site narrowed the sidewalk corridor and left only a slender
and intimate zone to approach pedestrians. This amplified the feeling that we were imposing ourselves in the local people’s space\textsuperscript{10}.

5.4.1 Survey Results

As mentioned, the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall was located in an important social and spatial intersection in the DTES. It is not surprising then that the majority of respondents (64\%) identified as residents of the neighbourhood (see Figure 19). Like Oppenheimer Park, survey results show that this area is not a common destination for visitors. Only 45\% of respondents indicated that they would like to see more public installations like the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall (see Figure 20).

\textit{Figure 19: Bud Osborn Memorial Wall Respondent Demographics}

\begin{center}
\begin{tikzpicture}
\begin{pie}[text=legend, usesage=draw]{
    resident of the DTES/64\%,
    out of town visitor/10\%,
    works in the DTES (lives outside of the DTES)/8\%,
    not specified/5\%,
    lives in vancouver (outside of the DTES)/13\%}
\end{pie}
\end{tikzpicture}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{10} The hoarding narrowed the sidewalk and physically diminished public space in the DTES. It impeded on the flow of traffic and it symbolized, to me, the ongoing ‘squeezing out’ of the DTES residents.
Three predominant themes emerged from the survey data: the wall’s significance to urban change, its negative visual impact, and its role as a platform for expression. These themes and supporting quotes are presented below.

5.4.2 Significance to Urban Change

The boarded-up construction site stood as a symbolic border between street life and the ongoing redevelopment. More than at any other site, passersby commented on the looming impacts of gentrification upon DTES residents. Many respondents chose to focus their attention on the relationship between the Memorial Wall and the development project:

“Doesn’t affect the actuality of building or construction that’s going behind the wall”  
(Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

“No [it doesn’t change space in any way] because it’s a construction site. Not interfering in any way. This area is starting to change, wish it changed. I’m an addict but I think there should be less [druguse]”  
(Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).
“It makes me feel like it’s holding onto the block and once it’s torn down and the development begins the block will change” (Passerby, Resident of Vancouver, Works in the DTES, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

These respondents felt that the painted hoarding had no ability to impact the construction proceeding behind it. Some went on to express that gentrification is inevitable:

“I like to think it [the Wall] does [influence change], but it hasn’t resulted in much. Seems like he [Bud] did a lot of work for nothing because it doesn’t stop construction” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

“I know that one day it will all be gone” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

“Frustration. Represents frontiers of shift. You can’t stop progress but I love it here. Lose status quo” (Passerby, Place of residency not specified, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

Although many respondents recognized that gentrification was occurring, they (even residents) held varying opinions about urban change. While generally respondents expressed discontent towards the new condominium, it is worth noting that not all respondents stood in opposition to structural and social change:

“[The Memorial Wall does not change the space, but] the condo going up is. But I’m for the condo. I live here and income mix high/low is a good thing” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

This resident believes that social mixing would improve the neighbourhood and did not express fear in potentially being displaced in the process. Residents, evidently, do not demonstrate consensus in their perceptions of neighbourhood change and its impact on the neighbourhood.

5.4.3 Negative Visual Impact

The aesthetic impacts of the painted hoarding was discussed by many of the respondents. Few stated that they felt that the painted wall visually enhanced the space. Other respondents reported having a negative response to the painted hoarding. The scramble of words and images
appeared to have frustrated and overwhelmed a number of passersby who felt the piece induced an unfavourable impact on the urban landscape:

“Anarchy of colour and words that never catch my eye other than distracting” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

“It gives it a dingy environment feeling” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

A couple of participants offered suggestions on how to improve the piece so that it enhances the landscape and properly pays tribute to the life of Bud Osborn:

“I think [there is the] opportunity to do a better job. Spending $ for better paint job. All about Bud. Should be a nice design and not let anyone near” (Passerby, Resident of Vancouver, Works in the DTES, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

A few other participants shared similar feedback. They recommended investing more money into it, hiring professional artists, or curating public input to improve the appearance and social impact of the piece. These comments underscore the diversity of opinions surrounding what is and is not considered art (see Chapter Two). Dean Radar contests that, “context and backdrop, ideology and identity” inform the way we perceive, experience and understand a piece of material culture that appears in the public realm and whether we consider it to be art (Radar, 2011).

5.4.4 Platform for Expression

In contrast to those respondents who opposed this piece as a chaotic collage littering the landscape of their neighbourhood, others saw value in it as providing an unconstrained platform for public expression. This was another prominent theme emerging from respondents’ reactions to the wall:

“Yes, [it changes the space] it's positive because it gives everyone an opportunity to have a voice and participate in their community” (Passerby, Resident of Vancouver, Works in the DTES, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).
“It encourages people to be creative and gives them the opportunity to express their feelings in a safe way” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

“I feel I can paint on the wall. I want to write. I’ll show you tomorrow. I’m thinking I need help with my health and I don’t have food. Human rights” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

“Improves space. Gives a sense of participation and exchange” (Passerby, Resident of Vancouver, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

Those who saw it as an open forum forvoicing opinions and exchanging messages suggested that the Memorial Wall had a positive influence on the space. This was the most notable theme that emerged from the surveys. Geographer Don Mitchell recognizes that people value a world where “unstructured, but not threatening, encounters ‘remain’ possible”—a world “where there always is room to have one’s voice heard and one’s demonstration (or other performance) seen” (1996, p. 128). A couple of respondents connected the free visual expression on the wall to individual and community health, but the topic of individual and community well-being did not emerge in the surveys to the same extent as it did in the interviews.

As discussed in Chapter Four, CBPA pieces in the DTES serve as a means to present information to the public. Respondents reflected on this function of CBPA with regard to the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall:

“Lets other people from other parts of town who have money [...] know how they [residents of the DTES] feel. Yes, drug addicts but also good people trying to make it through the months” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

“The wall provides a glimpse into the minds of the residents of East Hastings” (Passerby, Lives outside of Vancouver, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

These comments suggest that the messages on the Wall are not intended for members of the DTES, but rather for a wider public. Perhaps it is intended to reach out to those making decisions without resident consultation, or to those who make problematic assumptions about folks in the DTES. The comments above, focusing on the positive contributions of public expression, are in sharp contrast to those quotes which describe the wall as meaningless, unsuccessful, and visually
unappealing. Needless to say, the audience of public art is by no means a homogenous group and a single piece of public art can influence its passersby in distinctive ways.

5.5 Transcending themes

Below I report on six overarching themes as they related to all the three CBPA sites: their relationship to urban change, their ability to prompt feelings of belonging, their function as telling symbols in a social landscape, their role in facilitating public visual expression, their presence as traumatic reminders, and their aesthetic impact.

5.5.1 Urban Change and Social Justice

Respondents discussed the placement and meaning of the CBPA pieces in relation to ideas around urban change. This was evident in the sections above reporting respondents’ comments about the physical location and the semantics of the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall and the Lowdown stencil. Respondents recognized that these pieces were positioned in liminal spaces, in an area where social and physical borders were shifting. Survey responses revealed that passersby regarded the painted and stencilled statements to be directly targeting issues of social injustice and displacement brought about by urban change. Participants also expressed a fear of change in an unexpected way: some survey results from the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole and the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall suggested that participants misunderstood the intentions of our survey and thought that our objective was to alter or preserve the piece in question in some way. This invoked some wary responses in a couple survey participants at the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole. At the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall, a couple of the respondents suggested we not paint over the wall, or cautioned that due to the ongoing construction, there was no use in
attempting to protect it, as it was destined to be torn down after the building was completed. Passersby may have felt these community markers were threatened by the continuous redevelopment in the DTES.11

5.5.2 Symbols of Belonging

At each of the three sites, many of the participants expressed that the art stood as a symbol of belonging. This speaks to the important role CBPA can play in creating community among those involved in its co-creation, and in offering a message with which audiences can find solidarity. Passersby expressed a deep sense of connection to all three installations:

“Native Pride—beautiful art for everyone who come to the Park, our heritage of the west coast native peoples” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

“This wall makes me feel proud and honoured to be a lifetime resident of East Van/DTES” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall)

“Sad but not alone, I’m a panhandler so I understand it. It gives people hope in a way” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil)

Responses revealed that these passersby, notably residents of the DTES, regarded CBPA as symbols that recognized local culture and community.

5.5.3 Interpreting a Social Landscape

Those who did not necessarily signal a personal connection to the space suggested that they were able to gain a deeper understanding of the social landscape of the DTES through the CBPA around them. This was re-emergent theme at each site of inquiry, as demonstrated by many of the quotes provided above. At the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole, a number of

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11 These responses may have also been spurred by the language used in one of the survey questions: “Does it affect or change this space in any way?”
participants stated that one can become aware of social injustice and colonial histories by reading the symbols carved into the Pole and the accompanying description. An even more substantial proportion of passersby realized the potential of the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall and the Lowdown Stencil to provide passersby with a glimpse into the lived realities of residents in the DTES. This theme is worth noting because it supports the notion that the audience also recognizes public art as a method of knowing and exploring one’s social environment. Public art presents information to the public, and respondents confirmed that these messages were recognized by passersby.

5.5.4 Importance of Public Visual Expression

Survey data at all three sites revealed that participants held a strong appreciation for public outlets of visual expression. Many of the survey responses stated that having channels of self-representation to publicize the values and the desires in the DTES was a valuable addition to public space. Most notably, this theme emerged from the Bud Osborne Memorial Wall surveys, as a number of passersby considered the Wall to be an open forum for expression. Some participants identified the stencil and the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole as serving a similar function. In the case of the Lowdown Stencil, many of the participants recognized the poem as visually expressing truths often left unspoken:

“It affects [the space] by saying what people keep secret in their head. Maybe we will recognize how we see shit in this place” (Passerby, DTES Resident, Lowdown Stencil)

Through these CBPA pieces, those who do not experience homelessness, the recurrent loss of loved ones, addiction, etc. can catch a glimpse into the realities of those who do.
5.5.5 Traumatic Reminders

Material reminders of loss and struggle in the public sphere can be overwhelming to those who are longing to move forward and let go of these hardships. A briskly walking passerby at the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall exclaimed that it was a “[c]onstant reminder of negativity and sadness. Time to let his death go”. Interestingly, artists were not expecting this paint-in wall to last as long as it did. Some interviewees and passersby considered this to be a feat, while others suggested that the continuous public reminders of death were difficult to bear. This caveat is also addressed in Chapter Four in discussing the impacts of alternative landscapes. Although tears were shed at the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole, and passersby admitted to feeling saddened by the words of the Stencil and overwhelmed by the Memorial Wall, most of these respondents suggested that these physical symbols verified their grief and served as important modes of public expressions.

5.5.6 Visual Impact

Several passersby at each site suggested ways that the artworks could be improved to heighten their impact or make them more visually stimulating. The impulse to provide suggestions for improvement can be indicative of a sense of collective interest and ownership over public space and CBPA projects in the DTES. Some of the survey participants at the Bud Osborn Memorial Wall wrote that the wall was an eyesore in dire need of a more visually-pleasing design:

_I think that it would be great to see more painting and less words. Pictures hold a lot of meaning_ (Passerby, DTES Resident, Bud Osborn Memorial Wall).

Others suggested ways to make the wall more permanent and professional. They recommended investing more money, hiring a renowned artist, and installing the piece in a place where it cannot be defaced by others. This would diminish the level of publicness that is established
through public participation for the purpose of creating a visually more harmonious mural. Participants suggested that Lowdown Stencil was ineffective at capturing the eye of the passerby and that it should be bigger, and brighter. If a piece of public art is left unnoticed, this too reduces its level of publicness. The Oppenheimer Memorial Pole also received criticism, albeit very little, on the way that the wooden beam was hollowed out in the carving process.

These six themes allude to the complex and continuously unfolding relationship that CBPA has with its location and its public audience.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has summarized the most prominent themes that emerged from the 301 street surveys collected across three different sites of community-based public art in the DTES: Oppenheimer Memorial Pole, The Lowdown Stencil, and The Bud Osborn Memorial Wall. This empirical data yields results that are congruent with the sociospatial functions presented in Chapter 3. At each of these three sites, participants reflected on the role that CBPA plays in building a deeper understanding of one’s social, political, and physical surroundings. Surveys revealed that many passersby expressed deep appreciation for CBPA particularly because of its ability to serve as places of sanctuary, as symbols of belonging, and outlets for expression. That being said, varying responses gathered at a single site demonstrated the unique relationship each passerby had with a piece of material culture. For example, what one respondent regarded as a symbol of social chaos and hopelessness another understood as an allegory of freedom and community pride. Resident versus non-resident responses did not reveal much thematic difference. These empirics lend themselves to a richer theoretical analysis of the complex relationship between CBPA and its passing audience (discussed in the chapter to follow).
Chapter Six: Reflecting on Urban Change and CBPA

This chapter presents a theoretical reflection on the relationship between urban change and CBPA, situating the results presented in previous chapters within a wider structural context. I draw upon the findings of my empirical research, as well as engage with the literature to substantiate this discussion. The results of this study resonate with contemporary gentrification literature, describing a tendency toward the commodification of culture, privatization of space, and depoliticization of art in global cities.

Urban injustice, racial discrimination, and socioeconomic inequities perpetuated by uneven patterns of urban change prompt communities to politicize public art. Community artists work in solidarity with the marginalized residents of the DTES who are being pushed out by the progression of urban change. Within the context of Vancouver’s DTES, artists and residents alike employ public art in response to political neglect and the delegitimization of residents and community.

However, using art as means to raise a community’s voice in this way is not foolproof. In some instances, supporters financing CBPA work have imposed their own agenda on projects. Furthermore, not all artists resist gentrification or reject the commodification of artwork. As discussed by several interviewees, artists also chose to work in the DTES because it provides an appealing sociopolitical backdrop. These projects often perpetuate rather than alleviate the stigmatization of poverty and drug-use. CBPA can act as a form of constrained resistance to the potentially commodifying and privatizing impacts of top-down public art, but it does not always do so. Thus, CBPA resides within the contentious topic of urban change due to the ongoing commodification of culture, the perception of artists as gentrifiers, the economic development interests of funding organizations, and CBPA’s active resistance to urban social injustice.
6.1 Gentrification and Displacement

Gentrification is driven by neoliberal public policy and steered by material and ideological power (Ley & Dobson, 2008). Lees (2011) states that gentrification in the 21st century is parasitic, bound to and dependent upon urban policies that aspire for social mixing and strive for global city status. Gentrification is also regarded as a form of embellished neocolonialism, the appropriation of space by white supremacist culture (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005). This analogy is particularly compelling given the strong multi-cultural presence in the DTES. The unjust impacts of gentrification, such as displacement, are thus glossed over by “business performance, real estate inflation, the buzz of marketing literature and the prophets talking up economic growth in creative cities” (Ley & Dobson, 2008, p 2472). Masuda and colleagues recognize the moving in of middle-class residents as the driving force behind the “cycle of stigmatization” in Downtown Eastside (Masuda et al, 2012, 1249). This cycle is characterized by the City’s failure to provide adequate resources to an area and it results in the diminished capacity of the community to achieve positive neighbourhood change.

Municipal policy decisions are generally seen as the force steering intra-neighbourhood polarization (Smith, 2003; Hutton, 2004). Although marketed as socially inclusive, gentrification efforts too frequently result in social polarization and eventual displacement as poorly maintained, yet affordable housing units are replaced by condominiums (Walks & Maaranen, 2008). Cities aim to attract middle-class residents and promote heterogeneous neighbourhoods through strategic developments such as mixed social housing (Dale & Newman, 2009). While the City of Vancouver has positioned social mixing within its sustainable community agenda (Murray, 2011), there is little evidence proving its success in achieving neighbourhood stabilization (Ley & Dobson, 2008). Economic revitalization typically deepens socioeconomic
inequalities, and in turn, policy interference becomes necessary to alleviate the chasm between rich and poor (Sharp, et al., 2005).

With a general understanding of the process of gentrification and social polarization as established above, I will discuss how these phenomena touch down in Vancouver’s DTES, and specifically how they interact with the work of community artists in the neighbourhood.

Figure 21: The DTES Dispersal Plan  (City of Vancouver, 2014b)

6.1.1 Displacement in Vancouver’s DTES

Gentrification is frequently associated with displacement (Smith, 1996; Dale & Newman, 2009), but in the case of Vancouver, there is effort to integrate a “revitalization without displacement” doctrine into planning and development reports. One such report, the Vancouver Agreement, provides an example. In her analysis of the report, Murray speculates that the City’s intention is to ensure the “peaceful coexistence of people” from different socioeconomic backgrounds by transforming “bad” poverty into “good” poverty, resulting in the establishment
of sustainable socially mixed neighbourhoods (2011. p. 19). Although fraught with criticism, the City of Vancouver’s planning policies have mostly abided by this “revitalization without displacement” doctrine—that is, up until the advent of the Local Area Plan (LAP) and its ‘dispersal plan’ (see Figure 21; Wallstam et al., 2014, March 17).

The LAP “dispersal plan” widens the “revitalization without displacement” commitment to a city-wide context (City of Vancouver, 2014b; Wallstam, et al., 2014, March 17). In doing so, it commits to providing rent subsidies and social housing outside of the DTES, but this results in scattering approximately 36 percent of DTES residents across the city (Wallstam, et al., 2014, March 17). This proposal did not fulfill the recommendations devised by the LAP’s low-income caucus (Wallstam, et al., 2014, March 17). The LAP supports market housing development, highlighting the opportunity for condominium development in and around the DTES, notably, Gastown, Victory Square, Thornton Park, Chinatown, Kiwassa, and the Hastings Corridor (City of Vancouver, 2014b p. 24). Amidst this opportunity, the 30-year revitalization plan aims to accommodate 8850 new condominium dwellers in the DTES (Wallstam, et al., 2014, March 17).

Many of the interviewees voiced concern that the conversion of housing stock threatens current residents, even if they are to remain in their newly transformed neighbourhood.

“Ok, so the area’s between the [Regent] and the Brandiz which are the two worst SROs [single room occupancy hotels] right now and across the street from it is Insite. And I’m just anticipating that fairly well-off people are not going to want to live across the street from Insite...which will actually kill people. [...] It’s in a very vulnerable place in the neighbourhood. It’s right down from Carnegie. It’s across from Insite, that’s a harm reduction services on the same block, and then when they do this the land that the Brandiz and the [Regent] are on suddenly triple in price” (Karen Ward, Artist, Activist, Associate Member of Gallery Gachet, Member of the LAP Planning Committee, during interview).

Studies prove that overdose-induced fatalities have significantly decreased since the opening of Insite (Marshall et al., 2011). Lack of access to Insite (due to its closure, or residents’ relocation away from it, etc.) would evidently endanger the lives of intravenous drug users. Several interviewees alluded to physical displacement, the loss of access to social services and support
networks, and the looming fear of being displaced as bearing severe social and health-related implications on current residents. Thus, social mixing, which has been coined a positive attribute of gentrification, advances into displacement and diminished health of low-income residents (Walks & Maaranen, 2008).

6.1.2 Artits and Gentrification

Artists are often conflated with the discourse on neighbourhood revitalization and are frequently recognized as a colonizing arm (Ley, 1996) or as pioneers of gentrification (Sholette, 1997). In his influential work, Florida (2003) considers artists to be drivers of economic growth and urban expansion because their creative contributions add economic value to an area. He positions them in a broad category, the super creative class, but by doing so risks undervaluing the social and political contributions of the artist as community facilitator and mobilizer. Although a number of researchers dispute Florida’s thesis (see for example Markusen, 2006; Catungal et. al, 2009; Ley, 2003; Matthews, 2010), his work has been accepted by mainstream society and quickly adopted into North American municipal policy (a phenomenon labelled “discourse-turned-policy” by Catungal et al., 2009. p. 1095). Artists are lassoed into urban revitalization strategies because their lifestyle and work alter space (in both symbolic and physical ways), contributing to the ‘discovery’ of new areas that appeal to the middle-classes (Matthews, 2010; Quastel, 2009).

It was evident from my interviews that artists were cognizant and critical of the complicated role that they and their peers play with respect to urban change. Artist and academic Gregory Sholette (1997) writes that even those artists who expressively criticize class displacement “[understand] that they were themselves central to the displacement process” (p.6). This is because artists’ work enhances neighbourhoods, increasing the appeal for middle- and
upper-income investment. In her interview Sharon spoke about the way in which artists are implicated in the process of gentrification:

“That’s when the artists move in, that means you’re hooped because the area’s gentrified [...] I have mixed feelings about it, because they also lose their houses, and they also lose their studios and their apartments, and they shouldn’t necessarily be naïve about the process that they are moving into a neighbourhood with cheap rent. That’s who it’s being marketed towards now, it’s artists. [...] Anybody who’s actually buying an artist loft [...] probably isn’t an artist. And if they’re an artist, then they’re an artist that makes a lot of money, which I don't know too many of [...] It’s part of how they’ve been branding the neighbourhood - this sort of this edgy urban chic” (Sharon Kravitz, Artist, Documentary Filmmaker, Community organizer, during circle discussion).

Like Sharon, many of artists interviewed recognized that the relationship between artists and gentrification is both produced and perpetuated by neoliberal policies and place-branding efforts.

Ley and Dobson (2008) report that, in the past, when the welfare state was more willing to interfere in the urban housing market, rent control strategies were far more predominant in Vancouver. A couple of the artists, such as Linnea Strom, recommended that the City should implement policies that control rent prices to support, rather than exploit, creative social capital:

“The answer is creating low-rise industrial spaces, that are super cool that artists can live in—rent controlled, that don’t go through the roof, and then you keep up this level of culture happening that you apparently want instead of shoving it away. And you’re also creating housing that is also sustainable. [...] Everybody deserve a home. I don’t care if you have mental illness, or you have health concerns or you are a senior or you’re on drugs, you deserve to be housed and we don’t have anything properly set up in our city for that” (Linnea Strom, Artist, Co-founder of F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective, during interview).

Linnea alludes to the fact that if culture is valued in the DTES, then it should be preserved, rather than framed as a marketing tool. This echoes Mathews’ (2010. p. 672) statement that if the arts are to remain within the urban fabric, then “it is necessary to value their role beyond economic fodder” and cultural flagship.

Artists, paradoxically, are also threatened by the urban change that they are presumably cultivating. Although the majority of artists (60%) lived outside the city-sanctioned borders of
the DTES, they were deeply involved in the community. Artists expressed being drawn to the DTES for a host of reasons, such as: to access social and health services, to be among a creative community, to attend SFU’s School of Contemporary Arts, and to lend their creative capacities to local organizations as volunteers and staff. Whether residing in the DTES or not, the majority of artists interviewed expressed a strong sense of belonging to the DTES community. However, urban change also threatens to dissolve what Markusen and Johnson (2005) refer to as ‘artist-centric’ programs, organizations and centres in the DTES. Thus, some artists expressed trepidation that ongoing urban change will unravel their “social constellations” (as expressed by Artist Andrea Creamer). Sharon’s quote above also alludes to the fact that, although artists are viewed as escorting the process of gentrification, they too are experiencing both physical and social displacement.

Many of the artists expressed concern about how their presence and their creative work impacted the well-being of those around them. A couple of community artists reported that being conflated with gentrification instills in them a sense of wrong-doing. Heidi noted that it inflicts artists with guilt that may ultimately interfere with their efficacy in fighting for social justice and equality:

“If you’re going to argue against gentrification and someone’s trying to lump artists into like an agitational force towards gentrification —I think that it’s the wrong angle to take, or it’s not a helpful angle to take. And often times, it really disempowers artists instead of using our skill sets and solidarity for like radical means. You know, like if you’re always feeling guilty about being the first step of gentrification then you’re not going speak against it because you’re going to be like, yea, I’m like this. There’s shame there” (Heidi Nagtegaal, Artist, Founder of Hammock Residency, during interview).

Regarding artists as pioneers of gentrification obscures their potential role as creative advocates fighting against displacement. Thus, artists can be understood as both victims and aggressors of gentrification; they are considered to be both vital to place-identity and useful catalysts for animating underused spaces (Matthews, 2011; Sholette, 1997).
Ley (2003, p. 2541) maintains that it is a “misplaced charge” to lay the blame of gentrification upon artists. Rather, it is the broader political trajectory that inadvertently converts cultural capital into economic capital that should be held accountable:

“I don’t know. I just, I’m not totally sold on this idea that artists [drive gentrification] [...] I think that they are just part of a really long trajectory that comes from enacted policy from all different levels of government” (Andrea Creamer, Artist, Project Coordinator at SFU Woodward’s Cultural Unit, during interview).

A couple of interviewees recognized that artists’ reputations were tainted by exploitative policies that capitalize on the artists’ creativity and their role in the valorization of space (Ley, 2003). Whether artists participate in or work outside of the art market, they are not exempt from the cycles of commodification that feed the urban capitalistic metabolism:

The redemptive eye of the artist could turn junk into art. The calculating eye of others would turn art into commodity, a practice as true of the inner-city property market as of the art work (Ley, 2003, p. 2542).

By converting artists’ creative “sweat equity” into economic capital (Matthews, 2011; Lees, 2011; Ley, 1996), the commodification cycle and its proponents are the more culpable leaders of gentrification (Markusen, 2006), not artists.

6.2 Commodifying Community Attributes and the Privatization of Space

As established in previous chapters, public space is socially significant and extensively used in the DTES. As such, much of the tension surrounding issues of urban redevelopment is vividly experienced and actively debated in the public sphere. I witnessed various ways in which neoliberal urbanism contributes to gentrification (Lees, 2000; Smith, 1996; Slater, 2004) and how these tensions are embedded in and illustrated by public art in the DTES. Below, I identify various sociopolitical practices that contribute to the privatization of space in the DTES and the
diminishing availability of ‘truly’ public space (Mitchell, 1996). I explore how these cycles of commodification play out in the DTES with regard to material culture.

6.2.1 Commodification of Culture

Contemporary literature on gentrification shows that neoliberal policies and promotional strategies propel economic development (Hall, 2007; Zukin, 2010; Sharp et al., 2005; Burnett, 2014; Ley, 2003). Developers, municipal governments and private business owners employ strategic marketing tactics that valorize the preexisting attributes of an area (such as grittiness and creativity, in the case of the DTES) in effort to attract investment and consumption. Authenticity is also sought out by hiring artists to publicize the ‘discovery’ of new areas (Quastel, 2009). Ethnic, low-income areas are marketed as ‘authentic’ (Zukin, 2010) and sold to the adventurous gentrifiers who are drawn to the unique urban experience (Florida, 2002).

Aoki (2011) identifies that the City of Vancouver’s enthusiasm for image-building and place-branding is inspired by its agenda to obtain international recognition, attract foreign investment, and develop tourism-related capital. Existing attributes of the DTES, such as grittiness, visible poverty, and high social tolerance, are being romanticized in effort to make the area more appealing to outsiders (Burnett, 2014; Masuda & Crabtree, 2010). The City of Vancouver evidently takes advantage of this place-branding technique. For example, in the LAP grittiness is listed among their key place-making strategies:

Gritty and messy – Reveal and celebrate the ‘un-kept, chaotic and unpredictable’ towards urban discovery and local identity (City of Vancouver, 2014b. p. 68)

The HxBIA refers to the creativity in the neighbourhood as the local currency (Burnett, 2014) and the presence of artists is pitched as a marketable asset (HxBIA, 2014). On the front page of the HxBIA website, beneath a photograph of a colourful street mural, reads “Hastings Crossing
BIA enjoys one of the highest concentrations of artists in Canada” (HxBIA, 2014). A couple of the artists acknowledged in the interviews that their art, along with the expressive, place-based identities of the DTES, are shamelessly glorified to attract newcomers.

This trend of manipulating existing characteristics into something saleable is also affecting the DTES urban Indigenous culture. There is a growing recognition that First Nations culture produces economic and social benefits to Canadian cities (City of Vancouver, 2014b; Peters, 2010; Forkert, 2011). Interviewees alluded to how corporate and municipal interests supporting Indigenous art, if not conducted in a respectable fashion, can be interpreted as an act of neocolonial commodification of culture. One of the interviewees criticized the City of Vancouver’s 2014 Year of Reconciliation for its disingenuous installation of Indigenous public art. In interviewees’ opinion, Indigenous art was used to illustrate the false impression that the histories of tragic mistreatment of Indigenous peoples have been properly remediated. Another example, as previously alluded to in Chapter Five are the totem poles situated in Stanley Park.

6.2.2 Cultural Domination and Erasure

Formalized public art has been described as a form of social erasure or ‘cultural domination’ (Sharp et al, 2005). This phenomenon precedes gentrification and is embedded in the histories of colonialism. Councilor Andrea Reimer spoke of historic plaques, old legacy projects, installed in the DTES, which claim that Vancouver was built on unoccupied land:

“There’s one plaque still down, down in the DTES that talks about tearing all this empty land, which would imply that no one was here before the city of Vancouver was here. [...] Terra Nullius was a concept the crown used to assert that this is empty land” (Andrea Reimer, City Councillor Vision Vancouver, Chair of Planning, Transportation and Environment, during interview).

12 For a more in depth discussion on the misappropriation of Indigenous art for the 2010 Olympics see Forkert, 2011.
This plaque disregards the existence of inhabitants prior to colonial settlement. Councilor Reimer recognizes that it is a reminder of the settlers’ ignorant brazen takeover. The ruthless acquisition of land for personal and/or economic interest is not solely a notion of the past. Aligned with the ‘colonial doctrines of discovery’ (Walia & Diewert, 2012, February 24), development interests turn a blind eye toward current inhabitants and dispossess people of their homes and community in the process of reimagining a landscape. Sharp and colleagues (2005 p. 1015) recognize that developers treat these urban landscapes as virgin sites and new urban designs overwrite place-based histories.

Place-based collective memories are counter-productive for those who seek to override, rather than commemorate and celebrate, local identity. This occurred in Halifax’s now annihilated community of Africville (Nelson, 2000), as well as many of the ongoing redevelopment projects in the DTES (Burk, 2006). As Burnham (2011, p.7) notes, “a place without a history, without a community” is “ripe for gentrification”. Alternative community narratives and cultural identities are ignored and erased as a way to fabricate this readiness for redevelopment. Developers value certain kinds of art: those without strong sociopolitical messages about the community they reside within. Therefore, when developers fund CBPA projects, they are unlikely to be pleased when the mural painted along the hoarding of their condominium development site celebrates the existing social and cultural community and advocates for social housing over market housing.

6.2.3 Aestheticized and Structural Controls

The capitalistic reconfiguration of place-based attributes described above plays an important role in gentrification by generating ‘spaces of consumption’ (Zukin, 1998). These
capitalistic transformations contribute to the privatization of space, impose topdown aestheticized fear (Demos, 2012) and decrease the availability of public street space in the DTES (Masuda and Crabtree, 2010). This is done through aggressive authoritarian measures such as policing, private security, continuous surveillance, criminalization of homelessness, disciplinary designs, etc., which effectively control the movement of street life (Masuda and Crabtree, 2010; Aoki, 2011). For example, the City urges the immediate removal of graffiti because it associates graffiti with crime, diminished property values, increased citizen fear, and decline in business (City of Vancouver, 2012b). Government-funded graffiti removal efforts were accelerated to clean public space of unsightly behaviour before the 2010 Olympics.

In the public parks (read: living rooms) of the DTES, the tension caused by imposing new social conventions and physical makeovers is increasingly prevalent. Some of the parks have opening hours and police officers keep a continuous surveilling eye on park dwellers. With these measures in place, it is questionable whether a city park is any more public than an accessible art gallery (see Hall, 2007). A generously funded upgrade transformed Oppenheimer Park into a more appealing destination by removing unsightly elements and people from the space in preparation for the Olympics (Masuda and Crabtree, 2010; Aoki, 2011). This landscape redesign greatly disturbed the function of the park as a gathering place (ibid.).

Demos states that urban structures can aid in gentrification efforts by imposing perceptions of control and surveillance over social behaviours in public space (2012). New businesses and higher-income residential units install disciplinary designs to conspicuously carve out their entitlements to space. Exclusionary designs are installed to detract individuals from resting or even standing in an area too long:
“We don’t have spikes but we have rocks. We have rocks all over Vancouver. You can’t lay there, right? This is the double bench, this is the covered area but it’s gated and this park has no sheltered area” (Andrea Creamer, Artist, Project Coordinator at SFU Woodward's Cultural Unit, during interview).

Passive aggressive urban structures not only dictate proper behaviour, but also prescribe when and how long one may use a space. Residents must adapt and adhere to the proper use of spaces that are continuously redefined with urban change in order to survive on the streets and avoid expulsion (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010; also see Fast et al. 2010).

As another example of structural control, while Pierre and I fastened the “I have a dream” chalkboard installation in the alley behind Gallery Gachet, a construction crew built a two-story plywood wall directly across the lane. Before they disappeared behind the towering enclosure, I inquired about their construction project. One of the builders declared that they were building a temporary wall to keep the “shit-heads out”. Pierre and I laughed at the irony, knowing very well that we were doing the opposite. Our installation aspired to attract, rather than repel, interaction in the back alley. This tension exemplifies the clash in values between social groups that is made more visible in socially-mixed neighbourhoods.

6.2.4 Top Down Public Art and the Privatization of Space

Public art becomes a tactic in the privatization of space by the ability of projects to fabricate “auras of distinction and exclusivity appropriate to their corporate contexts” (Hall and Robertson, 2001, p. 20). Public art may be installed alongside urban redevelopment to impose “cultural upgrade” to the social landscape (Lossau, 2006. p. 52). The artistic redevelopment of a landscape is regarded as a method to manipulate the histories and identities of inner-city communities like the DTES (Demos, 2012; Hall, 2007; Sholette, 1997) and transform cultural
capital into economic capital (Lossau, 2006). These themes will re-emerge in the discussion about patronage and contentious funding sources.

It is not only the municipal government that uses public art as a place-branding tool to attract attention to the ‘authenticity’ and ‘uniqueness’ of the DTES neighbourhood; real estate developers, Business Improvement Associations (BIA), and other corporate organizations employ these same tactics. A commonly cited document by the Policy Studies Institute (1994) provides a list of the social and economic benefits attributed to public art that speak to urban revitalization interests. Among this list of benefits are: enhancing local distinctiveness, attracting investment interest, creating sites for cultural tourism, increasing property values, activating public space, reducing buildings maintenance, and discouraging vandalism (p.38). This report encourages institutional investment in public art for the purposes of economic and cultural development (Hall and Robertson, 2001). Thus, this document provides a strong rationale to invest in public art for the purposes of urban economic renewal.

Both art and architecture in public space may be presented as apolitical and neutralizing, while under the surface holds a strong political statement felt especially by those who are excluded from the newly constructed urban image (Deutsche, 1991; Sharp et al., 2005). Top-down public art (TDPA) contributes to the privatization of space by seeking to increase adjacent property values, thereby making the neighbourhood less affordable for current residents (Lossau, 2006; Mathew, 2010). This trend holds true in the DTES, where municipal government and private developers use art as a way to add value and attraction to public space (Burk, 2003). The desire to depoliticize an area is common in contemporary public art installations (Deutsche, 1991; Tolia-Kelly, 2012). In doing so, government-sanctioned art installations aspire to anaesthetize its passing audience, as acknowledged by many of the informants in this research:
“And sometimes stuff that’s sanctioned by governments, it doesn’t challenge anything and it actually negatively affects the community because it’s like laying claim to a neighbourhood that does not want to be claimed” (Kim Washburn, Artist, Writer, Oppenheimer Memorial Pole Carver, during interview).

Many of the informants recognized that TDPA, although claiming to be apolitical, often carries a hidden agenda (see Deutsche, 1991; Sharp et al, 2005).

Corporate-sponsored public art can forcefully diminish one’s sense of social belonging within public space. When a permanent installation is stationed within a social landscape without genuine public input it is more likely to overwrite, rather than pay tribute to, the place-based histories and cultural identities in that space. Sharon Kravitz explained that public art can be patronizing and disintegrate the current sense of ownership if it does not engage the DTES residents:

“Because if it feels imposed and then it belongs to somebody else” (Sharon Kravitz, Artist, Documentary Filmmaker, Community organizer, during interview).

When culture is assigned to the DTES through TDPA, it works to exclude previous inhabitants. Thus, it is evident that place-based attributes can be commodified, erased and/or overwritten to accommodate for economic revitalization in the DTES. In contrast, CBPA creates new, inclusive spaces that foster a stronger sense of belonging for residents in the DTES.

6.3 Contentious Funding Sources

My research data uncovered that much of the tension in bringing art into the urban public connects to the issue of funding. Julia Aoki (2011 p. 36) discusses the revanchist city’s efforts to invite local investment and states that “[c]apital flows interact with local geographies, visual and material cultures, as well as political-economic dynamics”. Lees (2000) conceptualizes gentrification as a cyclical process, driven largely by the through-flow of investment. Thus, it is important to analyze the flow of capital through a changing urban area and the funding that pours
into public art projects. Institutions, organizations and businesses often have a strategic agenda when investing in public art projects. The source from which a CBPA project acquires funding (be it civic, corporate, non-profit, etc.) may be bound to a strategic agenda. I present the key funding sources discussed in my interviews, presenting artists’ opinions and experiences of relying on external funding.

Public art has been associated with development, largely through the ‘percent for art’ policy that has been popular in urban North America and Europe since the 1980s (Hall, 2007; Policy Studies Institute, 1994; Hall & Robertson, 2001). Rosler (2004, p. 119) states that this arts program brings artists into the urban-planning blueprint by authoritatively imposing art upon a reinvented and privatized public space. In Vancouver, the Private Sector Development Program (PSDP), a ‘percent for the art’ type policy, requires that developers invest in public art projects. The program stipulates that “[p]rivate sector rezonings greater than 100,000 square feet are required to contribute $1.81 per buildable foot to a public art process approved by the City” (City of Vancouver, 2015). Karen spoke about this program in her interview:

“Public art is paid for generally through development; there’s a per square footage cost. So in areas of the city like Harbour where there is a lot of relatively recent development, there’s also a lot of public art, right? And yet not nearly as many people on the street because they are in their private space enjoying whatever they’ve created there” (Karen Ward, Artist, Activist, Associate Member of Gallery Gachet, during interview).

Established professional artists are hired to design pieces that are installed in areas where there is a high development density. Needless to say, PSDP does not support CBPA or low-income artists, and it does not necessarily yield a piece of art that authentically reflects the social or physical attributes of the area in which it stands. These concerns were discussed and criticized by many of my interviewees. Some artists went on to state that public arts funding was generally available to professional artists, that it favoured ‘apolitical’ art, and served the well-to-do.
Funding made available to CBPA projects equate to a far smaller sum of money than that provided by PSDP, and therefore CBPA projects often draw funding from multiple sources. Funding for CBPA is often provided by developers, Business Improvement Associations, and city enhancement funds. Many of the artists explained in their interviews that these external funding sources upon which many CBPA projects must rely can be fairly controversial. If the values of the funding organization conflict with the values of the community, the integrity of a CBPA project can be tainted. Pierre voiced his concerns about the potential repercussions of patronage:

“So, a lot of it also, again, the issue of patronage. You know, who pays for it? And why are they doing it? And what are they trying to beautify? Or are they are they just beautifying or aestheticising? [...] It can be contested” (Pierre Leichner, Artist, Gallery Gachet Collective Member, CACV Board Member, during interview).

He demonstrates that certain funding sources can raise skepticism and the belief that an ulterior motive is looming under the surface. When a CBPA project is supported by a contentious source, artists and community members have been reluctant to participate in the project. Artists in the F.O.U.N.D. Spaces Collective reported that poets chose not to participate in their Lowdown project specifically because they were uneasy about the affiliation it had with the Hastings Crossing Business Improvement Association (HxBIA). The F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective felt that the HxBIA did not impose their agenda on their project:

“[T]he Hastings Crossing Business Association, they have the arts and culture wing, and that’s where it can be controversial what we are doing. I guess, it’s the funder. Although they’ve had no involvement whatsoever. They were like we like your project, here is the money, go do it. And then we got to do the rest of it. We had to consult with the locals” (Linnea Strom, Artist, Co-founder of F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective, during interview).

The HxBIA’s only affiliation with the project was to provide the funds necessary to cover the cost of project materials. Still, some poets were unwilling to partake because their values did not align with the mandate of the BIA. This is understandable, given that BIAs work to redefine the
symbolic meanings of their areas by commodifying local culture—a motivation at odds with that of marginalized residents and anti-gentrification activists (Burnett, 2014).

Similarly, artists and art-based organizations were hesitant to accept funding that was affiliated with the 2010 Olympics. The neoliberal roll-back in arts funding situated artists and artists' groups in an especially vulnerable position after the provincial arts budget was cut by 50% and the 2010 Sports and Arts Legacy Fund was established with a $10 million dollar investment (Forkert, 2011). The Legacy Fund made money accessible to artists, but this was met with skepticism, and some artists and organizations were adamantly unwilling to accept this offer. Heidi was one such artist:

“So the way they could spin it was that it looked like BC was really supporting the arts, especially if it was Cultural Olympia fund. Which was really like a backstabbing way of slashing resources but then having a really glossy finish over it” (Heidi, Artist, Founder of Hammock Residency, during interview).

This suspicion around funding affiliated with the Olympics was echoed by other Vancouver-based artists and art-based organizations. A news article published by the Vancouver Media Co-op identified some of the reasons why artists chose to turn down this offer: they were ethically opposed to the Olympics and its role in forced displacement and gentrification, they were concerned it would dilute their critical politics, and they rejected capitalist-propelled creativity (Paley, 2010, February, 11). However, the massive budget cuts that closely coincided with this offer obligated artists and organizations to accept financial support with the Cultural Olympiad logo, even if it clashed with their political and ethical standpoints.

Funding organizations were sometimes inclined to change CBPA projects’ narratives to ensure they fit with their corporate image. A couple of the artists suggested in their interviews that they were required to make compromises in order to comply with the conflicting interests of their funding source(s). When the redevelopment of the Woodward’s building was underway, the
City of Vancouver and Westbank Corp., the real estate development company behind the project, funded a community-based mural project. A group of 36 participants, including patrons of the DTES Women’s Centre, residents of transient housing, and those living on the streets, set out to paint the hoarding around the construction site (CACV, 2007). Sharon Kravitz organized the mural project and served as a mediator between the funders and project participants. The funders turned to Sharon when they realized that the mural contained messages that illustrated the community’s disapproval of the ongoing development. However, Sharon was unwilling to censor the words of the community to please the interest of the developers:

“[W]e bent on this, we bent on that but we’re not going to bend on this” (Sharon Kravitz, Artist, Documentary Filmmaker, Community organizer, during interview).

This comment speaks to the modifications and compromises CBPA sometimes needs to make in order to satisfy the corporate agendas of funders. Many of the artists indicated, however, that artists and organizers were not willing to silence the voices of participants—those who experienced firsthand the adverse impacts of the ongoing gentrification. Artists recognized that they held a responsibility to the needs of the community and worked to provide a platform that allowed for open expression. In the case of the Woodward’s Mural, Sharon was able to safeguard the messages on the mural. The completed mural contained a large, but hidden message: Homes for All (see Figure 22).

*Figure 22: Woodward’s Mural Project (CACV, 2007)*
Another theme that arose in the interviews was that funders (such as developers and BIA's) were inclined to limit their interference with the CBPA projects. A couple of interviewees noted that when funding sources impose their agendas upon a CBPA project, funders may stir contention and generate bad press for themselves. Funders realize that if they wish to be commended for supporting CBPA, they must resist the desire to censor participant’s voices or to curate community engagement.

Funding parameters may also inconspicuously control the trajectory of a CBPA project. A couple of artists reported that the City refused to endorse a CBPA project if it involved artists who were previously convicted of performing illegal graffiti. Sam reflected on a public art piece he was coordinating and his efforts to obtain financial support from the City. He was pleased by the City’s responsiveness and their willingness to support the project, but was taken aback by the list of stipulations the City laid out in order for the project to receive funding:

“Anybody who was a known graffiti artist couldn’t participate, if the city was going to fund it with their money. However, we then turned it around. Well, we could crowd-source the project and bring our own funding to the table as opposed to it being public money” (Sam Cameron, Public Art Portfolio Lead at Vancouver Public Spaces Network, during interview)

In order to be eligible for funding from the City, CBPA projects may be required to exclude particular voices. As indicated in Sam’s comment, those facilitating CBPA projects would rather secure alternative funding sources than be bound to the vision of the revanchist city and silence particular voices.

Thus, artists reported that some funding sources, most notably civic and corporate, can impair a CBPA project from being politically and socially influential. Symbolic amounts of funding are rarely sufficient to cover the cost of material, time, and upkeep (Forkert, 2011). Hall and Robertson (2001, p. 20) state that this “reliance on public and corporate sponsorship and its location in the ‘colonized’ spaces of the post-modern city center have precluded any disruptive
intervention in the urban scene”. In his review of arts-based community development projects, Cleveland cautions that regardless of intentions, the mere presence of powerful financial contributors impose barriers upon local efforts to promote a healthy and sustainable community (2011. p.7).

Although external funders can have a potentially de-stabilizing impact on community projects, resource-poor art projects are generally inclined to accept the support that is available. The vulnerability of the arts, due to inadequate funding, puts artists in the position to accept funding from sources that they would prefer not to be affiliated with. Andrea Creamer spoke about the marginalizing nature of this dependency:

“Art isn’t necessarily a thing that has money attached to it. For some people yes, for others it’s not. It’s about the making, the creating, the thing, and not necessarily about the money. So, it finds itself sourcing money, being given money, using money that comes from very complicated places. I think it’s unfair. I think that art is this marginalized thing and then it’s pitted against marginalized people” (Andrea Creamer, Artist, Project Coordinator at SFU Woodward’s Cultural Unit, during interview).

Evidently, those who organize CBPA projects must cautiously navigate contentious sources of capital as it pours into a changing urban environment. In this section I have sought to present CBPA as a type of constrained resistance to the commodification and privatization of space that is supported by TDPA.

In their efforts to obtain funding free from constraints, organizers investigated a limited number of alternate options. Crowd-sourcing was used as an alternative means to obtain funding for CBPA projects. The Sacred Circle Society used Kickstarter, an online platform which connects creative projects with a community of financial supporters. They successfully raised $19,093 to support the installation of the Survival Pole in the DTES. Some of the interviewees expressed the need for highly accessible grants for ‘outsider artists’ (Fine, 2004). The Community Arts Fund, offered by the Community Arts Council of Vancouver, supports low-
income artists and organizations by providing them with both financial support and opportunity for skill development. Some of the interviewees noted that there should be more funding sources that mirror this model to provide low-barrier support explicitly geared toward low-income artists and communities.

6.4 CBPA’s Role in Resisting Urban Change

Citizen disenfranchisement and ‘cultural domination’ provokes resistance (Sharp, et al., 2005) and sparks a productive urge of creativity. With a profoundly well-established tradition of community activism, the DTES has proven that creative resistance can lessen the impact and rate of gentrification (Burk, 2003; Ley & Dobson, 2008; Blomley, 2008). Ley and Dobson argue that devoted neighbourhood mobilization has contributed to the unique place-based moral culture that extends and secures the right to the city for low-income and/or disenfranchised residents (2008). DTES residents and community-based artists are active in their efforts to challenge the slick upscaling of their neighbourhood (see Figure 23).

*Figure 23: Resistance Against Condos in the DTES (CCAP, 2014)*
All artists interviewed expressed a strong dedication to political and/or community involvement (a trend also identified by Buser et al., 2013; Bower, 2011; Burnham, 2011; Scholette, 1997; Hall, 2007; Forkert, 2011), and many were among those fighting to establish “zones of social justice” in the DTES neighbourhood (CCAP, 2013, Jan 28). Community artists and the projects that they facilitated were valued for their aptitude in providing outlets for expression. Community artists were often recognized as “stauch defenders” of progressive and accessible social services and programs (Markusen, 2006).

Politicizing urban space with unsettling messages temporarily disrupts the subjectively constructed meaning of space (Gould and Estrada, 2014). Public demonstrations and informal intimidations targeted at gentrifiers have proven to be an effective form of resistance. Creative political dissent illuminates social tension and draws attention to inequitable urban development. Cities with high socioeconomic inequality and vigorous mobilizations attract less investment capital, are slower to gentrify, and diminish their competitive status on the global market (Sharp, et al., 2005; Ley and Dobson, 2008). By claiming space with CBPA that does not seek to beautify, the work unsettles the public and resists encroaching gentrification.

In Chapter Three, I presented examples of the ways that CBPA can build political arenas of counter-hegemonic visual democracy to retaliate against the sociopolitical mainstream. From my analysis, the key messages and themes that have emerged from the CBPA projects responding to unjust urban restructuring address the lack of safe social housing, diminished affordability of life-sustaining services, commodification and erasure of local culture, on-going racial injustice, diminished access to public space, social discrimination, and inadequate (culturally inappropriate) healthcare and services. It is still not clear how and which attributes of CBPA projects escort or hinder the process of gentrification. To date, there is no evaluative
framework that measures social and political impact of artful community intervention (Sharp et al., 2005; Hall and Robertson, 2001; Cleveland, 2011). However, my research suggests that by cautiously navigating the flow of capital, by reclaiming public space, and by carving out opportunities for dissenting voices to emerge, CBPA can raise an oppositional voice in the politics of gentrification.

6.5 Chapter Summary

I began this chapter by exploring the impacts of urban change and displacement in the DTES. I have addressed some of the ways that artists and public art projects are conflated with the process of gentrification. I have drawn attention to the commodification of pre-existing community attributes, as well as the role that TDPA plays in aestheticized fear (Demos, 2012), artful redevelopment, and the privatization of space. Even while under the constraints of funding, CBPA can act in resistance to these efforts. However, as identified above, funding sources threaten to dilute the political messages behind CBPA pieces in the DTES. Capitalistic interests and capital providers appear to co-opt CBPA and enrol it into the process of gentrification. However, proponents of CBPA projects have shown to be resourceful with obtaining alternative funding and working with the resources at hand in order to sustain visible, vocal, and vivacious resistance against urban change, privatization of space, and the displacement of DTES residents.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This chapter offers a thematic summary of my project findings, followed by a summary of research contributions and policy recommendations. Acknowledging that this study investigates only a fragment of the vibrant cultural landscape of the DTES and of the sociopolitical impact of community-based public art, this chapter also offers recommendations for future research.

7.1 Thematic Summary

The thematic summary below is loosely structured around the four objectives guiding my research work.

7.1.1 Objective One: To unearth the motivations, intentions and intended impacts of public art, as defined by community artists and key informants

Artists proved to be a valuable entry point into gaining grounded and comprehensive insight into the social, spatial, and political geographies of the DTES. They revealed a deep understanding of community through sustained creative engagement, not only as artists, but also as organizers, activists, and volunteers. Some of the artists identified as residents of the DTES and shared personal experiences battling trauma, economic, and health-related hardships. The intentions and motivations around CBPA that were shared by artists contributed greatly to the sociospatial functions identified in Chapter Four and demonstrated also in the site-specific analyses presented in Chapter Five.

Artists were acutely aware that their creative contributions were susceptible to being commodified by corporate neoliberal agendas and had the potential to be conflated with the process of gentrification. Unfortunately, as described and essentially criticized by many
interviewees, some artists use this to their advantage, using the DTES as a dramatic sociopolitical canvas for self-aggrandizing projects. However, on the whole, despite the potential contributions that artists make to urban change, artists who were meaningfully engaged in the community were found to be appreciated and respected in the DTES.

7.1.2 Objective Two: To understand how community-based public art can transform urban space based on audience perceptions

Street-level survey results revealed the function of CBPA as an effective form of placemaking, cultural activism, and political participation. Surveys also demonstrated that passersby were highly cognizant of ongoing gentrification as well as the relationship between CBPA and urban change. My findings are congruent with social science literature that explores socially-inclusive public art practices such as a new genre public art (for example: Lacy, 1994; Hall & Robertson, 2001; Hutchinson, 2002; Burk, 2003). In its ability to communicate shared place-based histories, identities, needs, and aspirations, CBPA is an apt catalyst and conduit for the “generation and communication of public discourse” (Hall & Robertson, 2001, p.12). The discursive arena that builds around the co-creative process of imagining, installing and encountering public art pieces in the DTES demonstrates that CBPA projects can be instrumental in the democratization of space and the emergence of community-based solutions.

Another important finding that emerges from my work is the apparent alignment between artists’ and community participants’ intentions with many of the interpretations shared by the surveyed public. This alignment is not common with all types of art, making it a particularly unique finding. This appears to be a function of the community-based nature of public art installations for a number of reasons. For example: CBPA projects often engage a wide range of participants in their creation (i.e. funders, organizations, community members, artists, the
public), they correspond with other community movements, they are covered in local media reports and they are addressed in public discourse.

7.1.3 Objective Three: To investigate the relationship between community-based public art and well-being

My findings have situated CBPA within the discourse of alternative landscapes—most notably, within therapeutic landscape literature. CBPA holds a place within these landscapes, because like therapeutic landscapes it embodies a “counter-hegemonic approach to knowledge production” (Masuda & Crabtree, 2010, p.657; Burk, 2003). By rendering marginalized histories visible, CBPA projects also build memoryscapes. In its co-creative production, as well as in its physical public presence, CBPA was seen by artists and passersby as creating sanctuaries for social connectivity, community-health, and expression.

From the surveys gathered at the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole, a strong connection emerged between therapeutic landscapes and Indigenous urban art. The data collected provided evidence to suggest that the Pole and Park are critical components of urban Indigenous cultural identity and well-being. The contributions of CBPA in creating therapeutic landscapes for urban Indigenous peoples (sanctuaries that symbolize cultural, spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional well-being) is a key emergent theme in my data that warrants further exploration.

7.1.4 Objective Four: To investigate the complex social, political, and spatial relationship between CBPA and urban change

CBPA proves that culture is alive, thriving, and present in this very place. Bold visual representations provide tangible evidence that the neighbourhood is not a blank slate, or a faceless Terra Nullius (as discussed in Chapter Six). Rather, with the presence of CBPA pieces
the neighbourhood is more easily read as a cultural landscape layered with many overlapping communities. CBPA has proven to be an important public platform for self-representation, and helps to improve the publics perception of the DTES. Projects have actively challenged media representations that further stigmatize residents in a way that justifies urban redevelopment projects. This is also echoed in Aoki’s work discussing the Oppenheimer Park Memorial Pole and the events that have gathered around it:

“Erasures and qualifications of human life in the media and civic policies, which are complicit in the loss of human life, have pushed DTES activists to issue resounding condemnations of those institutions and ideologies that perpetuate silences.” (Aoki, 2011, p. 47)

As alluded to in Chapter Six, cultural activism highlights the existing ethnic and value-based networks in the neighbourhood, acting as a form of resistance to cultural domination by elites and capitalistic interests (Sharp et al., 2005).

CBPA as a form of opposition and resistance does not set out to achieve universal inclusivity for community members; rather, it brings attention to those otherwise excluded from formal decision-making processes (Sharp et al., 2005). Thus, CBPA acts as a vehicle for visual democracy, allowing for individual and multiple standpoints to emerge. Politically influential CBPA does not seek to amalgamate the variant and contradictory voices of the DTES into a romanticized consensus (Peto, 1992; Burk, 2006; Hall & Robertson, 2001). If public art seeks to essentialize identity, place, or community it ignores the “contested, fragmented and mutable nature of these concepts” (Hall & Robertson, 2001). For it to be politically and socially impactful, CBPA must not ascribe to a “myth of harmony” (Peto, 1992; Hall & Robertson, 2001, p. 19). However, provocative public art becomes an active agent in promoting social change by questioning and illuminating the fundamental social systems and institutions that govern public life (ibid.).
My results show that CBPA has a role in radical politics because of its ability to activate 'geographies of resistance' (Beazley, 2002) by creating impromptu political arenas that serve as platforms for visual democracy. Through it, conversations about social injustice are brought onto the streets, literally and figuratively, and forced into public awareness. With ironic humour (as used in the Poverty Olympics) or with aggressive determination (such as protests and paint-ins), these expressive mobilizations have cultivated a distinctive culture that claims space for those who are economically marginalized (Sharp et al., 2005; Burk, 2003; Harvey, 2008). Controversial projects in the DTES demonstrate an ability to influence the social and political environment by capturing the attention of media and public discourse (Sharp et al., 2005; Burk, 2003). Particularly in the DTES, residents in the DTES use CBPA projects to convey powerful messages against redevelopment (Burk, 2006).

Ley and Dobson (2008) state that continuous volatile messages from locals interfere with the ability and desire of new residents to create a comfortable life when moving into the DTES neighbourhood. Therefore, aggressively expressive public art has the potential to hinder the social desirability of the area even after development has occurred. However, this expressive art can have a similar impact on existing residents, as indicated by those who expressed that the “screaming” wall made them uncomfortable and gave the area a “dingy” feel. Thus, this sociospatial impact of public art was described by respondents as both positive and negative.

In various ways, public art in the DTES is conflated with the discourse on gentrification. Urban policy strategies also seek to employ the arts to build social cohesion, to improve quality of life, to strengthen the economy, and to attract capital flow (Mathews, 2010). Artists can be both willingly and involuntarily involved in the commodification cycle (Ley, 2003). As discussed in Chapter Six, even seemingly undesirable place-based attributes are susceptible to
commodification. Even social and physical characteristics of poverty are used to lure consumers and investors into the DTES (Burnett, 2014). As with urban grit and danger, CBPA and cultural authenticity is strategically ensnared within the gentrification process for its value in place-branding. Considering art as “economic fodder” (Mathews, 2010, p. 672; also see Florida, 2002) devalues the socially, culturally and politically significant attributes of CBPA (Buser et al., 2013). Furthermore, because of its economically vulnerable position, CBPA is required to accept funding from contentious sources, implicating CBPA more deeply in the process of urban change. Funding sources that were often associated with economic development interests were found to bind CBPA projects to a set of rules or a corporate affiliation that conflicted with the values of those involved.

My intention was not to provide a conclusive assessment of the complicity or resistance of CBPA with regard to gentrification, but to investigate the inherent contradictions and tensions (sociospatial and political) which reside in this relationship. In my investigation, more themes and complicated tensions emerged than could be fully addressed or neatly woven into the narrative of this thesis. I recognize that this research project has unearthed more complexity than it has resolved, which resonates with a statement made by feminist scholar Jane Flax:

“If we do our work well, reality will appear even more unstable, complex, and disorderly than it does now” (Flax, 1987, p. 643).

7.2 Scholarly Contributions

This study has sought to address some of the gaps in critical social science literature around the sociospatial impact of CBPA within changing urban environments. Through in-depth interviews with community-based artists, this study has investigated the intent behind CBPA interventions. It has also furthered nascent academic scholarship that challenges the portrayal of
artists as a homogenous group complicit in gentrification processes (for example Markusen, 2006; Catungal et al., 2009). In furthering knowledge of CBPA and its sociospatial relationships with the urban public, this project took to the streets to incorporate the voices that have been absent from critical literature on public art (Hall, 2007).

Critical research on public art has not yet thoroughly investigated the structures and sociopolitical regulations that enable or inhibit CBPA practice. In response to this gap, my work has sought to uncover reasons that CBPA is seen as a form of constrained resistance to gentrification and displacement. It appears that this constraint emerges from uneven funding for public art in general, the involuntary commodification of place, and from stipulations on CBPA projects in particular. Interviewees brought up critiques and suggestions around funding, the commodification cycle, and decision-making structures. These suggestions, provided below, address the aforementioned knowledge gap within the context of the DTES.

7.3 Policy Recommendations

In the interviews, artists and key informants suggested ways to improve public art policy and practice to better incorporate CBPA in the urban social fabric. I present three guiding recommendations based on research findings: ensuring place-resonant public art, unbinding CBPA from the commodification cycle, and providing low-barrier funding to non-professional artists.

My findings show that Vancouver’s Public Arts Committee (described in Chapter One) should ensure that public art installations are done with meaningful consultation with those they seek to represent, and those who will encounter the pieces on a daily basis. A DTES subcommittee that is comprised of community members and local artists could be devised to
safeguard the strong place-based identity in the DTES. Artist Karen Ward has been a staunch advocate for this community-based subcommittee because it ensures that public art is socially and spiritually relevant; it cultivates, rather than disintegrates, a sense of resident belonging and neighbourhood ownership. It also ensures that support and opportunity is made available to local artists.

During my data collection, some informants hinted that the City of Vancouver may be in a position to redevelop the current PSDP ‘percent for arts’ program. If they do so, I recommend that it is done in a way that redistributes funding from high-profile artists to support community artists and CBPA. The large sums of money that this fund accumulates should be re-allocated to art-centric organizations that are deeply grounded in the DTES community arts. These organizations, like the Community Arts Council of Vancouver, would then provide funding to artists and CBPA projects, along with skill-based training (in the arts, grant-writing, personal development, etc.), thus providing CBPA projects with continuous support. This would ensure that funding is made more accessible, without discrimination or competition. By being one step removed from development interests, CBPA would have greater autonomy and a stronger voice.

This leads me to a final recommendation: to introduce social policy measures that prevent the commodification of community attributes so that they cannot be employed in gentrification efforts. This builds upon Mathews (2010) recommendation that if the presence of art is to be maintained in the urban sphere, it should not be treated as a lure for capital flow. Proper urban social policy measures should be put in place to prevent neighbourhood-led revitalization efforts from increasing property values and displacing those who have invested their energy into building a more welcoming neighbourhood. People should have the right to a healthy and “aesthetically nourishing” urban environment (as expressed by Councillor Andrea Reimer)
without fear of being displaced. This also requires that the affordability of housing, studio space, and artistic-centric spaces be maintained. The social contributions of public art as mode of inquiry, as a form of grassroots place-making, and as an alternative form of political involvement should not be commodified. The ability of CBPA to generate and channel information, identities, and opinion should be more carefully considered as a form of participation within broader political discourses.

7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

_The most authentic endings are the ones which are already revolving towards another beginning._

-Sam Shepard, _The Paris Review_, 1997

Given that my results present community art as a powerful form of inquiry and discovery, I recommend future research be undertaken with an exploration of immersive and creative research methods (Tolia-Kelly, 2012). This recommendation is inspired by the deep appreciation for creative expression and self-representation that were expressed by DTES residents and community. Additionally, geographer Mike Crang states that visual methodologies produce densely textured understandings of our surrounding world (2003. p. 501). Academic geography should continue to become more accessible through creative methodologies (for examples see Masuda & Crabtree 2010 use of photovoice, and Gutberlet & de Oliveira Jayme's participatory video project) which work to actively facilitate discourse between academia and the public (Pereira, 2009; Tolia-Kelly, 2011).

An important theme of this research is the parallel between therapeutic landscapes and community-based public art. Although some scholarly work explores the interweaving of Indigenous cultural expressions, land, and well-being, it is situated primarily in the non-urban context. Scarce attention is paid to urban Indigenous populations who are often more at risk due to their limited access to traditional lands (McIvor et al., 2009). The importance of land to
Indigenous healing practices (Wilson, 2003; Wendt and Gone, 2012; McIvor et al., 2009) and the high population of urban Indigenous people in the DTES suggest that uncovering the urban health impact of traditional art is an opportune research pursuit. Similarly, an important conversation could address the relevance of these therapeutic landscapes to the inner-city Chinese and Japanese communities.

In furthering the exploration of CBPA as a form of resistance to urban injustice, we need to better understand what attributes of CBPA increase its social and political impact. Issues surrounding the ephemeral nature of CBPA emerged in many of the interviews. Temporary, transgressive, and transformative modes of reclaiming space can galvanize social change and political impact because these “zapping” acts contribute to the destabilization of dominant power structures (Burk, 2003, p. 330; Mitchell, 1995). Less ephemeral pieces, on the other hand, sustain their physical and discursive presence for a prolonged period of time and, in the DTES, are continuously reactivated by community mobilizations (as experienced at the Oppenheimer Memorial Pole).

The chosen location of CBPA is also an interesting investigation topic for geographers. For instance, what would be the transgressive impact of CBPA if it were to break out of the borders of the DTES? How would the sociospatial function of CBPA change if it was installed and/or performed within Vancouver’s economic, tourist, and political centres? If urban social injustice is a product of wider structural problems, then creative resistance to injustice should not be bound to the diminishing geographic space within which the injustice is concentrated.

Another emergent concept that merits deeper exploration surrounds the politics of achieving social visibility. A more complete analysis is needed of the impacts of urban policy on the governance of public space and public art. Central to that is the need for in-depth
understandings of the enabling or preventative impact of social policy, funding mechanisms, etc. on artists’ and communities’ abilities to harness CBPA for political ends. Future research should work to uncover the social and physical structures and urban policies necessary in order to ensure that artists, creative expression and cultural activism can continue to exist within the urban sphere without being engulfed in the commodification cycle.

I extend these suggestions for future research with the sincere acknowledgement that the DTES is already over-researched (a concern which repeatedly arose throughout my research term). I would also like to acknowledge the shortcoming of using university-based research, only one of the many spheres of discourse, as a driver of social change. No single discourse can or should monopolize the discussion on social justice. Fine and Barreras (2007) state that this discussion needs to be had among “a discourse of anger and outrage, morality and ethics, science and expertise, community organizing and public opinion” (p. 179). These words, along with my research findings, and the work of other scholars (such as Tolia-Kelly, 2011; Hawkins, 2012) advocate for the continued co-creative work between artist and critical geographer.
References


Cameron, S. (2012a). One Hundred Years of Struggle. *Memory is the Mother of Community: The poems, stories and writings of Sandy Cameron*. Retrieved from http://sandycameron.vcn.bc.ca/


Appendix A: The Downtown Eastside ‘Community’

Figure 24: Ultimately Community, Lowdown Stencil (Photo by Teréz Szőke)

A community can be simply geographically defined, or recognized as a group of people who share common culture, identity, traditions, history, and health issues (see Weijer & Emanuel, 2000 for a list of 10 key commonalities that bind a group of people together). However, when referring to Downtown Eastside as a ‘community’ I am not only addressing those who live directly within its city sanctioned borders. This ‘community’ includes those who are homeless, passionate about the DTES, work in the social service sector, rely on community services, advocate for basic human rights, identify with the DTES, etc.

It is difficult to simply define what is meant when referring to ‘the DTES community’. It is difficult to capture all the people, places, and connotations that is encapsulated by this title. I spoke to Andrea Creamer about this in her interview. I told her about how I was concerned that I was being too general, or simplistic, when referring to the DTES as a ‘community’. She assured me by saying:

“Yea, but it’s the Downtown Eastside. It is. It’s like a term that is understood to mean a particular thing and it usually is aligning with a particular type of recognition with personal politics, community politics and community advocacy. So, you know, by using it it is giving power in a good way. It is sharing power” (Andrea Creamer, Artist, Project Coordinator at SFU Woodward’s Cultural Unit, during interview).

Andrea made reference to the past effort of DTES residents advocating to be recognized as the Downtown Eastside, not as ‘skid-row’ (also see: Penderson & Swanson, 2008). I would also like to recognize that there are many overlapping communities within the DTES.
There are people that reside in, or frequent the DTES not by choice. Artists of the F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective shared a memorable story relating to this complexity. When Linnea and Lindsey were out on the streets stenciling the words pictured in Figure 24 upon the busy streets they both noted one particular encounter with a passerby:

“We were doing the community one that’s in rainbow colours by the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre. This one guy walks by and he goes, ‘Yea! That quote is spot on! And this is not my community and I live here’ and he walked off. And I was just like, whoa! Because there was so many people who walked by that were saying stuff about feeling like they belonged and then there was this guy and he’s like ‘I don’t want to belong here and I’m stuck here’” (Linnea, Artist, Co-founder of F.O.U.N.D Spaces Collective, during interview).

I acknowledge that referring to the DTES as a ‘community’ would perhaps suggests that the DTES consists of a harmonious group of residents and non-residents. This is, of course, not the reality of the situation. My intention is not to romanticize the DTES, but instead to recognize it for all of its complexities—its challenges and its assets.
Appendix B: Map of Public Art in the Downtown Eastside
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) The Belonging Action</th>
<th>16) Coast Salish Carvings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2) Snapshots of History</td>
<td>17) Community Murals (painted over by graffiti)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Lao Tsu Mural</td>
<td>18) Native Art Mural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Tent City Oppenheimer Park</td>
<td>19) The Only Seafood Café</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Lowdown Stencil</td>
<td>20) Through the Eye of the Raven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) The Hidden Truth Mural</td>
<td>22) Bud Osborn Memorial Wall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Welcome to Chinatown</td>
<td>23) I Have a Dream Chalkboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Jump for Joy</td>
<td>24) Victory Square Memorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Crow Highway</td>
<td>25) Chinatown Arch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) The Urban Indian</td>
<td>26) Celebrating Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) The Heart Has Its Own Memory</td>
<td>27) Statue of Gassy Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) We Take Care of Each Other</td>
<td>28) Ultimately Community Lowdown Stencil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Chalkboard Photos

The “I have a dream” chalkboard installed behind Gallery Gachet, introduced in Chapters Three and discussed in Chapter Four, rapidly filled with comments. I took photographs weekly and analyzed the responses that gathered. Below, I have provided the twelve predominant themes that I identified from the dataset, along with one or two corresponding quotes:

#1 Seeking happiness through personal growth, health, skill development: One day I will... “Love again and be loved, succeed and be successful become a madame, own my own business, get my boobs done, be comfortable with myself” & “Eat more greens”

#2 Expression of love for family and friends: One day I will... “make my son proud to call me father”

#3 The desire to be rich and famous: “One day I hope I have enough time to give you my autograph”

#4 Just being silly, non-sensical: One day I will... “Find the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, then it will be all mine” (beside a drawing of rainbow, shown in Figure 25)

#5 Words of wisdom “Those who dream by day are cognizant of many things that escape those who only dream by night - Edgar Allan Poe”

#6 Travel and see the world One day I will... “take the train across Canada then the trans-Siberian railway and then the Orient Express”

#7 In seeking belonging and love “Would like to meet or be with others like me”

#8 Political/activist statements “Don’t worry I won’t shut up” & “Harper is a cunt”

#9 Escape the DTES, regarding it as a transition spot One day I will... “move away from here”

#10 Morose and/or vulgar comments “THIRST AND STARVATION”

#11 Mourning death, missing loved ones “Today for Dolores Juny, I can’t believe you passed away”

#12 Reference to sex, drugs, and alcohol One day I will... “Have sex with Jonny’s wife”

Figure 25: Gentleman Writing on the Chalkboard

( Photo by Teréz Szőke)

Figure 26: The ‘I Have a Dream’ Chalkboard (Photos by Teréz Szőke)
Appendix D: Consent Forms

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

“Witnessing urban change and uneven development from the streets: Insights from informal waste recyclers in Vancouver, BC”

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Kate Parizeau, from the Geography Department at the University of Guelph.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Kate Parizeau at (519)731-5851 (cell), (519)824-4120 ext. 52174 (office), or kate.parizeau@uoguelph.ca and Teréz Szöke at tszoke@uoguelph.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand how urban change in Vancouver is experienced by people who work on the city streets on a daily basis. These experiences contribute an often unrecognized yet valuable perspective on how neighbourhood change and redevelopment affect Vancouver’s urban environment.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

You will be asked to participate in an individual interview that will take anywhere between 20-60 minutes. The interview will be recorded, and I will share with you the recordings from these recordings within the next 6 months, and before I release any of the information from our meeting to the public. The encrypted audio files will be stored in a password protected computer in a locked office in perpetuity. You can choose to refuse to answer any questions at any time during your interview.

We will begin to discuss whether you wish to be left anonymous in the final thesis before the start of your interview.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

You will not be asked to divulge sensitive material in this interview, but will be asked to share information about the day-to-day work of your organization and its operations and experiences in this neighbourhood. However, there is a potential for such information to be political in nature, and the publication of these political opinions and perspectives may cause conflict or discord with other local organizations or with funding agencies. You can choose not to answer any questions that you believe invite risk, and can also choose to keep your name and your organization’s name confidential in order to avoid such risks.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The information collected in this study may enable you to better address the impacts of urban change on marginalized community members in urban Vancouver. There are no other projected benefits to this study.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

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13 This study falls under a SSHRC funded research project lead by Dr. Kate Parizeau. Therefore, the title, “Witnessing urban change and uneven development from the streets: Insights from informal waste recyclers in Vancouver, BC” appears on all forms that concern the University of Guelph’s Research Ethics Board.
CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.
If you chose to be left unidentified, your name will not be released in association with this interview. Your organization name can also be kept confidential, if you wish. We will discuss what to what extent you wish to reveal your identity for this research. If your preference changes at any time before this project is complete please do not hesitate to contact me and I will make any changes.
Interview tapes will be stored in a password protected computer in a locked office or room.
I will share the transcripts with you within the next 6 months so you can check that the record of our conversation is accurate, and so you can add to and clarify any information that you shared in our original interview.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

Research Ethics Coordinator
University of Guelph
437 University Centre
Guelph, ON N1G 2W1
Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606
E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca
Fax: (519) 821-5236

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I have read the information provided for the study “Witnessing urban change and uneven development from the streets: Insights from informal waste recyclers in Vancouver, BC” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant (please print) ____________________________
Signature of Participant ____________________________ Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

Name of Witness (please print) ____________________________
Signature of Witness ____________________________ Date

☐ I wish to keep my name and organization’s name confidential in the final research report.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

“Witnessing urban change and uneven development from the streets: Insights from informal waste recyclers in Vancouver, BC”

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Kate Parizeau and Teréz Szöke, from the Geography Department at the University of Guelph.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Kate Parizeau at (519)731-5851 (cell), (519)824-4120 ext. 52174 (office), or kate.parizeau@uoguelph.ca and Teréz Szöke at tszoke@uoguelph.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand how urban change in Vancouver is experienced by people who work on the city streets on a daily basis. These experiences contribute an often unrecognized yet valuable perspective on how neighbourhood change and redevelopment affect Vancouver’s urban environment.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
You will be asked to participate in a group discussion with other art activists that will take about 60-90 minutes. Discussions will be recorded, and I will share with you the transcripts from these recordings within the next month, and before we release any of the information from our meeting to the public. We will keep the encrypted audio files in a password protected computer in a locked office in perpetuity. You can choose to skip any questions at any time during the session.

Discussion groups will expand on the topics discussed in your interview and provide the opportunity to become more involved in the research. The first group discussion groups will discuss the role of public art in the community and artists will discuss their intentions and motivations behind their work. This session will also collaboratively discuss the public intervention research design. The second group discussion will discuss the findings and discuss the role of public art and the art activist in the community.

I will prepare an art activist tool kit to summarize the main findings of this research. This is expected to be completed next year after the research data has been effectively organized and analyzed. I will share this information with you through email.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are minor risks of losing your privacy around your work and your experiences with the DTES community during the group interview. Participants of the group discussions are asked to keep information shared during the group discussions confidential. You will not be asked to divulge sensitive material in this interview, but will be asked to share information about the day-to-day work of you and your organization (if applicable) and its operations and experiences in this neighbourhood. However, there is a potential for such information to be political in nature, and the publication of these political opinions and perspectives may cause conflict or discord with other local organizations or with funding agencies. You can choose not to answer any questions that you believe invite risk, and can also choose to keep your name and your organization’s name confidential in order to avoid such risks.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The information collected in this study may enable you to better address the impacts of urban change on marginalized community members in urban Vancouver. The experience and knowledge you share will be incorporated into a toolkit for public art activists. This toolkit will summarize the research findings and aims to offer a valuable resource relating to your work. These group discussions also provide the opportunity to build connections among other public artists engaged in the Downtown Eastside community. There are no other projected benefits to this study.
PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Your name will not be released in association with this interview, and your organization name can also be kept confidential, if you wish. Interview tapes will be stored in a password protected computer in a locked office or room. I will share the transcripts of our interviews with you within the next month so you can check that the record of our conversation is accurate, and so you can add to and clarify any information that you shared in our original interview.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

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SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I have read the information provided for the study “Witnessing urban change and uneven development from the streets: Insights from informal waste recyclers in Vancouver, BC” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

______________________________
Name of Participant (please print)

______________________________
Signature of Participant

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Signature of Witness

______________________________
Date

☐ wish to keep my name and organization’s name confidential in the final research report
Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

“Witnessing urban change and uneven development from the streets: Insights from informal waste recyclers in Vancouver, BC”

You are being asked to assist in a research study conducted by Dr. Kate Parizeau and Teréz Szőke, from the Geography Department at the University of Guelph.

If you have any questions or concerns about your position as a research assistant please feel free to contact Kate Parizeau at kate.parizeau@uoguelph.ca and Teréz Szőke at tszoke@uoguelph.ca.

If you agree to participate in this project, it is important that you agree to keep everything you hear and see during the project confidential to protect the identity of all project participants.

By signing and returning this form you are agreeing to keep confidential all information obtained through the data collection phase of this research. This includes all identifying features (names, professions, life experiences, etc.), information about various organizations in the community, and all other details contained in the surveys. Besides my professor Kate Parizeau and I, you are the only person who is allowed to see the recordings. Therefore you are entrusted to keep information confidential and to only share recordings, observations and information gained during the onsite research with the research team.

Thank you for your involvement and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Teréz Szőke

I have read the above information and understand that I am being asked to assist Teréz in this research project. I understand that I am obligated to keep all information collected through public surveys confidential. I will discuss the information collected and my personal observations with the research team only.

____________________________________  ______________  ____________________
Signature of Assistant               Date

____________________________________  ______________  ____________________
Signature of Researcher              Date
Appendix F: Guiding Interview Questions

Guiding questions for artist interviews:

Please tell me a bit about yourself and what you do as an artist. Would you refer to yourself as an activist?

How would you define public art in the DTES? Does it play a role in the DTES community?

Are you working on any art projects currently? Can you tell me about them? (Who is involved? What is the project about?)
What art projects have you been involved with in the past? Do these any of these works still stand in the public sphere?
What inspires your work? What do you hope to achieve with public art? What audience are you speaking to?
How did you choose the location of this piece? What was involved in choosing a location?
Who or what governs the use of public space, prevents or enables art to be installed in the public?

Now thinking again about public art in general, How does public art transform public space? What kind of spaces does it create?
What role does art play in urban change? Does it accentuate and/or prevent gentrification?
Do you see public art influencing urban social policy? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

Is there a difference between the role of temporary vs permanent art installations in the DTES? If so, what are these differences?

Are you interested in continuing this conversation about art activism and urban change in a group interview environment?

Guiding questions for Key Informant Interviews:

Please tell me a bit about who you are and what you do.

In your own words how would you describe the Downtown Eastside community?

What is your view on the approved re-development ideas put forth by the City of Vancouver’s Planning and Development Department?

Do you feel that the voices of the community have been incorporated into the plans for the neighbourhood revitalization?

How would you define public art in the DTES? What impact does it have?

Has community-based public art projects influenced you (or your work) at all? Does it influence political decisions and/or urban life?

Do you think that there are barriers in place that prevent art from being an effective form of political involvement?
Appendix G: Codes and Subcodes