PICTURING SOCIAL INCLUSION: PHOTOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY

IN DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE VANCOUVER

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers an exploration of the relationship between photography and identity in the marginalised urban space. I focus specifically on the annual Hope in Shadows photography contest in Downtown Eastside Vancouver (DTES) and through field-based focus groups, engage with individuals in the DTES community to develop a deeper understanding of what resident-led photography means to them. I position urban photography as revealing "the entanglements of the individual and the city" (Lancione, 2011) and demonstrate how photographing and viewing photographs of the neighbourhood allows participants to articulate important links between space, place, self and community. Drawing on existing literature in visual sociology, my study explores the potential of resident-led photography in emancipating participant lifeworlds from their excluded status, opening up multiple avenues to social action. I argue for the potential of the camera in person-centred research: promoting a recognition of C.Wright Mills' (1959) "personal troubles" as "public issues", encouraging dialogical understandings between urban in-groups and out-groups, and enabling the (re)assertion of affirmative social presence for excluded communities. Focussing on the Hope in Shadows contest as case-study, I explore how community photography can create opportunities for identity representation, (re)creation and recognition, and promote social inclusion in the city.

For the residents of Downtown Eastside Vancouver

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

If I were a man – If this were my city…

In *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory & Identity* (1998), Celia Lury asserts: "Photography, more than merely representing, has contributed to the emergence of a way of seeing…this way of seeing informs contemporary self-understandings" (Lury, 1998, p.218). Through a theoretical and field-based exploration of the urban photography contest "Hope in Shadows", I seek to gain a deeper understanding of the perceived connection between photography and identity in the city. My thesis will explore the enabling potential of the camera for the (re)creation/assertion of individual and collective identities in Downtown Eastside Vancouver (DTES). A further aim of this study is to contribute to the development of visual, biographical methods in participant-led, policy-oriented research by positioning photographic practise as a creative avenue towards social inclusion.

The Hope in Shadows contest is an annual event in DTES Vancouver, involving the distribution of disposable cameras to low-income residents of the area with the brief to use photography to "document their own community" (Pivot Legal Society, 2012). The contest is coordinated by Pivot Legal Society, a community advocacy service promoting rights for vulnerable individuals, with campaigns for accountable policing, sex worker rights, safe and appropriate housing, harm reduction and legislative reform for drug users as well as running the Hope in Shadows photography contest on an annual basis, specifically for DTES residents (*ibid*).

John Richardson (Pivot Director: 2000– 2011) describes the neighbourhood as: "where our society's greatest fears - of poverty, abuse, crime - are anchored…often the result of misunderstanding" (cited in Cran and Jerome, 2008, p.31). It is this misunderstanding that the Hope in Shadows project seeks to resist – offering residents the opportunity to create a counter-discourse to media stereotypes. The contest offers a C$500 award for the best overall photograph, as well as four awards of $100 for Best Portrait, Best Urban Landscape, Best Colour and Best Black and White Photograph (Pivot prints all film submitted in colour and in black and white) to be judged by a panel of artists, photographers, community-workers and DTES residents. There are four Downtown Eastside Community Awards of $40, voted for by residents from the judges' selection of the "Top Forty". Winners are announced in October each year.

Photographs are exhibited across the city at galleries and community venues, and can also be accessed through an online archive (Flickr). The top twelve images are available to buy in calendars from street vendors in the city and a wider selection of photographs can be purchased in large print format with 50% of the proceeds (after costs) going directly to the photographer (Hope in Shadows, 2012). The contest celebrates its first decade in 2012 with the theme "What I value in my Downtown Eastside Community". The project will provide the focal point for this study into how photographic practice is used by, and might be liberating for, socially excluded individuals and groups.

My main research objectives are threefold: firstly, to explore how repeat visual representation can (re)create perceptions of individual and community identities; secondly, to understand the impact of photographic practice in areas with a high percentage of individuals labelled or self-

identifying as socially excluded; and finally, to make recommendations regarding the use of photography in social research.

This work will consist of three chapters – the first, an introduction and review of relevant literature, positioning my study in relation to debates in the field; followed in chapter two by a discussion of my methods, of ethical issues and of fieldwork undertaken in Downtown Eastside Vancouver. My conclusion explores what the findings might mean in relation to identity and advocacy. I end the thesis with recommendations for future (visual) methodological approaches.

My thesis is certainly not an attempt to universalise a site-specific research project, or a call for a generalizable understanding of the relationship between photography and identity. It is however, an endeavour to offer an analysis of the impact of repeat representation in a marginalised, Western urban space. It is my hope that the research will raise some important recommendations for the development of visual methodologies. This work explores how the Hope in Shadows community photography model might translate to impact-driven, person-centred social research, and promote the rights of those at the margins of accepted society.

There exists a wide body of literature around the themes of identity, photography and the urban space as well as a number of research studies specifically focussed on the Downtown Eastside area. The literature will be approached with regards to the extent to which the relevant books, journal articles and online content theoretically underpin and/or open up gaps for my own analysis of the relationship between photography and identity in DTES Vancouver.

The section headings are borrowed from George Stanley's *Vancouver: A Poem* (2009).

Stanley's poem is a record of his observations whilst travelling through Vancouver's urban

space, an exploration of the city and those who inhabit it. In the poem, Stanley makes his way

through various Vancouver neighbourhoods, including the Downtown Eastside - the focus of

this study. Stanley's work reveals how "the city enters his consciousness in unforeseen ways"

(Stanley, 2009). I feel that poetry, like photography, is shaped by and shapes the lives of those

it observes and touches. Creative exploration of this city pervades my work and as such

Stanley's words provide a fitting context for my own.

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BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH

With the Hope in Shadows contest as a point of departure, this chapter will focus on debates surrounding photography, identity and social exclusion in the city as well as examples of comparable yet distinct research, in order to position and develop my argument. While I cannot claim to have covered the wealth of existing titles comprehensively, the thematic sub-sections in this chapter constitute an attempt to consider a pertinent selection of work that will inform my own: a discussion of the conceptual frameworks informing my research, an exploration of the DTES and the Hope in Shadows project itself as apposite for study, methodological concerns informing fieldwork, and an introduction to the concept of urban place-identity as a means of explicating the motivation for my thesis.

1.1

Word on the Street

Conceptual Frameworks

This study sets out to foster an erosion of barriers between cultural studies and visual sociology – (sub) disciplines which remain relatively distant from each other despite a perceived "natural connection" due to their mutual dealings with the interpretation of (written or visual) texts (Harper, p.133, 2012). The approach taken in my thesis is deliberately positioned across sociology and cultural studies, as reflected in the literature and

methodological approach explored in this chapter. In his interview with Simon Dawes (2011) Zygmunt Bauman states that sociology's future lies in an effort "to re-establish itself as cultural politics in the service of human freedom" (Bauman, cited in Dawes, 2011, p.142); this prerogative underpins my work.

The work to date in the field of Visual Sociology informs my own. In "Visual Sociology: Expanding Sociological Vision", Douglas Harper (1988) discusses the use of the image in early editions of American Sociological Association journals. Harper points to "thirty-one articles using photographs as evidence and illustration" (1896-1916), the relative "absence of visual sociology" (1920-60), with the tentative re-emergence of the (sub) discipline thereafter. Indeed, the field is becoming increasingly popular today – with many keen advocates writing towards the use of the visual in research (Chaplin, 2002; Knowles and Sweetman, 2009; Margolis and Pauwals, 2011; Harper 2012; Milne et al., 2012), as well as utilising photography and film in field-based projects (Knowles, 2000; Radley et al., 2005; O'Neill, 2011; Blakey et al., 2012; Harper, 2012). Various visual techniques are employed by researchers, such as photo-elicitation - where participants are asked to discuss photographic content relevant to the research and/or use images as stimuli for debate, and photovoice - which involves participants taking their own photographs and then discussing these with the researcher (Wang & Burris, 1997; Purcell, 2009; Harper, 2012). In *Visual Sociology* (2012), Harper cites eighty-four published articles in fifty-four journals specifically using or regarding photo-elicitation methods (2012, p.179) and "just under ninety" articles published in fifty-seven journals using photovoice-type methods. Harper comments that "few if any" of these articles were from the mainstream of sociology or anthropology (2012, p.190). There is a case to be made for the visual as a vital methodological tool in the social sciences and related

fields, and as an approach ready to be shifted from the periphery to the centre of academic debate.

Contemporary Visual Sociology is widely represented by the work undertaken and shared by the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA), The International Sociological Association Thematic Group on Visual Sociology (TG05) and the British Sociological Association Visual Sociology Study Group – all of which promote a visual dialogue within the social sciences and beyond. For the IVSA, Visual Sociology includes, but is not limited to:

> documentary studies of everyday life in contemporary communities; the interpretive analysis of art and popular visual representations of society; studies of the messages, meanings, and social impact of advertising and the commercial use of images; the analysis of archival images as sources of data on society and culture*; the study of the purpose and meaning of image-making* such as recreational and family photography and videography.
>
> (IVSA, 2012, italics mine)

My work will focus on the latter (italicised) aspect of the field, with an emphasis on still photography, the medium used in the Hope in Shadows contest. My focus on photography does not intend to disregard the value of other visual methods - for example, participatory video (Ledford, 2011; Milne, 2012), participatory mapping (Emmel, 2008; O'Neill, 2011), and community arts practice (Goldbard, 2006). Although I do not explore the use of alternative visual methods in-depth, these will be discussed as avenues for further research and advocacy in chapter three.

The IVSA list the disciplines represented by the organisation as including: "sociology, anthropology, education, visual communication, photography, art, journalism" (IVSA, 2012). I seek specifically to expand upon the sociological work of Harper (1982, 2012), Wang and Burris (1997), Knowles (2000), Radley et al. (2005), and O'Neill (2011) – all of whom have utilised and discussed visual methods in their respective studies focussed on in/exclusion in the city. Work in the field has been largely researcher-led: visual methods have been utilised within the remit of organised projects involving the purposeful recruitment of participants.

In *Good Company* (1982) Harper presents an immersive study into the lives of American "rail tramps". Harper lived and travelled with the men he researched, and created a photographic record of the time spent with these individuals. In *Bedlam on the Streets* (2000) Caroline Knowles includes photographs to illustrate research undertaken with homeless and vulnerably-housed individuals in Montréal. The pictures were taken by professional photographer Ludovic Dabert, who was employed by Knowles for the project. Knowles describes her work as: "Assembling a collage of voices, visual images and text in an attempt to understand the life-world of the mad" (2000, p.x). Although both Harper and Knowles provide models for meaningful, involved ethnography, I maintain that a more democratic approach to visual research lies in allowing participants to take control of the camera and of their own representation.

Examples of participant-led photography can be seen in the work of Radley et al. (2005) and Wang et al. (2000) who worked with homeless individuals in photovoice projects in Bristol, UK and Ann Arbour, Michigan respectively. Though the photographs in these studies were

taken by participants, images were created explicitly for the research projects and therefore were positioned within an institutional agenda from the outset.

The advocacy of visual methods has been largely based on the findings of projects conceived with and driven by academic research agendas. The Hope in Shadows contest is professedly not policy-motivated nor a product of a research initiative: its only expressed aim is to enable individuals in the DTES to record their experiences (Wong, 2012). Brad Cran and Gillian Jerome's (2008) book *Hope in Shadows: Stories and Photographs of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside* focuses specifically on the annual photography contest – presenting photographs taken alongside personal responses to them and short biographies of the individual participants. The book is the only work published to date on the subject of Hope in Shadows and is identified by the editors as deliberately outside of the academic sphere (2008, p.16), opening up an opportunity for a scholarly reading of the event. Such an analysis will facilitate an increased, critical understanding of how individuals use photography and what this might mean for future developments in research – something that Cran and Jerome's text can only infer. My work will look to understand the contest process and its effect through the lens of cultural and sociological theory, and through my own qualitative fieldwork with individuals in the DTES who are labelled or self-identify as socially excluded.

The term "social exclusion" is defined by Chamberlayne et al. (2000) as recognising "disadvantage as a multidimensional social condition, and not merely one of material deprivation" (Chamberlayne et al., 2000, p.8). The definition takes into account the multiple exclusionary circumstances such as material poverty, mental and physical disability, drug addiction, and crime which are visible in the DTES area (Newnham, 2005, p.4). My study

takes a person-centred approach, involving members of the DTES community and concerned with the inclusion of participant voices. I am interested in how individuals understand the photography used in the Hope in Shadows contest and how they relate this to perceptions of identity.

My working definition of identity is informed by social psychology (symbolic interactionism), specifically George Herbert Mead's work on the self (1964). Mead places emphasis on the role of communication in the process of identity formation. For Mead, "the self is essentially a social structure, and it arises from social experience" (Mead, 1964, p.204). In *Social Identity* (1996) Richard Jenkins draws on Mead's theory, locating identities "within the ebb and flow of practice and process…things that people do" (Jenkins, 1998, p. 4). Jenkins proceeds to explore Erving Goffman's (1983) understanding of the self as "an embodied individual, with boundaries extending into interactional space" (cited in Jenkins, 1996, p.92). In my work, the relationship between the embodied individual and the urban space will be understood in terms of Alfred Schutz's (1973) conception of Lebenswelt, or the "lifeworld": "an intersubjective terrain in which people both created and were simultaneously constrained by those social and cultural structures already in place" (Ritzer, 2005, p.449). To understand the workings of lifeworld in an urban context implies a permeable relationship between the person and the city, with mutual, multidirectional influence. My exploration of the Hope in Shadows project endeavours to understand how photography encourages the extension of self-identity into the physical urban space. Harold M. Proshansky's (1978) notion of *place-identity* informs my exploration of the significance of the physical environment, and of visual accounts focussed on the city.

For Schutz (1973), the social world incorporates the lifeworlds of our predecessors, our consociates, our contemporaries, and our successors (cited in Barber, 2011). The Hope in Shadows contest seems to speak to all of these categories, drawing on the archive and exhibitions of predecessors to create new images of the neighbourhood annually, and using photography to affect outside (and future) perceptions of the DTES. Through developing a deeper understanding of DTES residents' relationship with photography, I seek to understand how the visual image enables DTES consociates to affect the trajectory of urban community life – to directly influence their lifeworlds, the lifeworlds of their contemporaries and of their successors.

Schutz divides his lifeworld into three further categories: the world within actual reach, the world within restorable reach, and the world within attainable reach (Schutz and Luckman, 1973, pp.36-39). In this study I explore how photography affects perception of "reach" (or scope) for personal agency and community action. For Schutz, the lifeworld is "that everyday reality in which reciprocal understanding is possible" (*ibid*, p.35).

My work is undertaken with the aim to nurture such reciprocal understanding between researcher and participants. My approach is also influenced by feminist theory, reflecting Mary Manyard's (1990) observation that: "it is only by listening to and recording women's own descriptions and accounts of their lives that researcher can achieve a better understanding of how their world is organised" (cited in Chaplin, 1994, p. 150). Although I do not undertake a gendered analysis, my thesis maintains that the personal is indeed political and explores photography as an avenue for participants to "enhance their public presence", as discussed by Wang et al. (2000, p.82). The gendered lens is widely discussed in visual sociology and

related fields (Chaplin, 1994; Pink, 2001; McIntyre, 2003; Robertson and Culhane, 2005; Moletsane et al., 2009) and understanding how perceptions of gendered identities might affect the approach to photography and the analysis of pictures is certainly something that would merit further research in the context of the Hope in Shadows project.

Discussion of ethnicity is similarly limited in my work. Aboriginal and Métis individuals make up approximately 21% of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel inhabitants and 14% of social housing tenancies in the DTES (Lewis et al., 2008, p.2). The area forms part of the Coast Salish Territory, something that I have endeavoured to recognise in my inclusive approach to participant research (encouraging open recruitment and monitoring/evaluating equality, diversity and inclusion (Appendices 4, 5, 10)). Nevertheless, a more in-depth, comparative study of cultural understandings of the contest would be extremely valuable, particularly with a focus on First Nations and Canadian approaches to photography and meaning-making.

Though I have brought to attention the over-researched nature of the Downtown Eastside area in my work, I have not comprehensively covered all research that has established the neighbourhood's reputation as such. It is important to note that the community has been the subject of wide-ranging academic, journalistic and artistic projects, often framing the area as an example of an abject urban dystopia. My own work approaches the community with this in mind – sensitively and with an attempt to give something back to the people through volunteering, through listening, through involving residents in my fieldwork and by including the voices of the Downtown Eastside area in this written analysis.

My thesis is a response to Chamberlayne et al.'s (2000) call for a "creative approach" to research, and for "a social policy and practice that are responsive to individuals' situations and enable them to mobilise their own aspirations and resources for change" (Chamberlayne et al., 2000, p.17). Through focussing on the Hope in Shadows project as case-study, I explore how socially excluded individuals approach photography in the city. The outcomes of my work will inform recommendations for the future development of a truly participant-led visual research model. Working with DTES residents, and drawing on the literature discussed, I explore how urban community photography might go some way to unify C.Wright Mills' (1959) "personal troubles" and "public issues". My study positions the practice and discussion of community photography as an enabling process, inviting individuals and groups to bring their personal troubles to the level of public issues by setting their lifeworlds in a wider visual context.

1.2

The beginning of knowing this city

Downtown Eastside Vancouver

Within Downtown Eastside Vancouver (DTES) there exists a large population of individuals labelled or self-identifying as socially excluded. Media representations of the area and the people who live there are often negative (Smith, 2000; Robertson and Culhane, 2005; Cran and Jerome, 2008; Walls, 2011), and travel literature/internet travel sites warn against visiting, identifying the DTES as a place synonymous with deviance, framed in the forms of poverty, drug addiction and crime (Best Vancouver Guide; Lonely Planet; Tripadvisor; Virtual Tourist, 2012). The area is notorious for being the poorest postal code in Canada

(Newnham, 2005, p.4), sitting in contrast to the affluent living standards of the rest of Vancouver, a city that has been cited as the world's most liveable by the Economist Intelligence Unit survey numerous times over the past decade (The Economist, 2011).

The Canadian Policy Research Networks' study "Social Sustainability in Vancouver" (Cooper, 2006) cites the city of Vancouver's poverty levels as "among the highest in Canada". The report defines a "poor quality neighbourhood" as characterised by high rates of concentrated poverty, unemployment, residential mobility, (sometimes) ethnic diversity, density of single parent households, and crime. The report situates the city's lowest-income neighbourhoods "downtown", with 80% of residents in the DTES as living below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) (Cooper, 2006, pp.30-32). The "2007 Survey of Low Income Housing in the Downtown Core" (Raynor and Johnson, 2007) estimates approximately 4993 SROs and 5171 social housing units in the DTES area (cited in Lewis et al., 2008, p.3). Using a stratified random sample of 628 SRO residents and 658 social housing tenants, the "Demographic Study of Downtown Eastside SRO and Social Housing Tenants" (Lewis et al., 2008) recorded the SRO demographic as: 79% male, 20% female, 1% transgender; 68% Caucasian and 21% Aboriginal or Métis. Of this sample 79% reported health concerns, 47% identified as having multiple concerns; 52% confirmed using drugs and 28% identified as frequent users; 45% had lived in the DTES for five years or more. The average age was forty-six. The social housing sample detailed: 56% male, 44% female; 43% Caucasian, 38% Asian and 14% Aboriginal or Métis. Of this sample 75% reported health concerns; 47% identified as having multiple concerns; 15% reported using drugs and 7% identified as frequent users; 69% had lived in the DTES for five years or more. The average age was fifty-eight. (Lewis et al.,

2008, p.2). This data will be used to situate my own focus groups within the wider DTES population and contextualise the community in focus.

Smith (2000) provides a geographic definition of "community" that forms the basis for my own definition used throughout this work. I will talk about the DTES as a community based on an affiliation with the particular spatial location. I will add that the DTES community is somewhat defined by the service provision across the neighbourhood, with individuals self-identifying in categories which are "catered for". From my own observation, the community seems to define itself as a whole through spatial, economic (low-income) boundaries, identifying members as individuals who live or spend the majority of their time in the area.

Jodi Newnham states:

> The Downtown Eastside is a *community of communities* that struggle with a high concentration of social problems: poverty, mental illness, open substance use and addiction, drug dealing, prostitution, crime, inadequate and insecure housing, high prevalence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and tuberculosis, and lack of access to meaningful employment.
>
> (Newnham, 2005, p4, italics mine)

This community of communities sub-divides into groups including but not limited to: homeless; sex workers; transgender; transvestite; drug addicts; alcoholics and individuals with mental or physical health issues. The sub-divisions are by no-means mutually exclusive, but distinct nonetheless and can be seen through various services that categorise their provision (and individuals) in this way. Whether identification in these categories is a response to the existence of these sub-communities, or whether the sub-communities evolve as a result of

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service provision is an interesting investigation that my thesis does not deal with directly, but is nevertheless mindful of. Culture and ethnicity also provide strong communities for identification – with notable percentages of First Nations, Chinese and Caucasian Canadian individuals living in SROs and Social Housing in the area (Lewis et al., 2008).

I suggest, like Smith (2000), that the Downtown Eastside itself provides a route for place-based community identification. Those identifying as community members might not necessarily live in the area, but access services, support or other facilities, and/or have personal connections in the Downtown Eastside, therefore spending a great deal of time in and self-identifying as part of the neighbourhood. Such connections constitute the fulfilment criteria for participation in the photography contest (Appendix 1). The area is typically described as ranging from Cambie to Clark; Union to Waterfront– the parameters of the Hope in Shadows contest (Appendix 12). Cooper states: "The Downtown Eastside is well known as Canada's most impoverished neighbourhood… in the midst of an otherwise flourishing urban environment" (Cooper, 2006, p.34). The DTES is at once within the city and apart from it.

In her PhD thesis "Where Worlds Collide: Social Polarisation at the Community Level in Vancouver's Gastown/Downtown Eastside", Heather Smith (2000) discusses neighbourhood polarisation, focussed on Vancouver's affluent Gastown area and the adjoining DTES, stating: "this is an area where gentrification collides head on with ghettoization" (Smith, 2000, p.16). Where Gastown is a popular tourist destination - an area that is known for its attractive cobbled streets, heritage and affluent bars/shopping experience - the DTES is an area known for the visibility of poverty and drug abuse. The widely observed dichotomy between

differential visual experiences in the same city positions the DTES as a significant site for a study into identity and photography.

It might be argued that Smith's work is an economically reductive analysis of the areas in focus. Smith appears to juxtapose the concepts of gentrification and ghettoization as "upgrading and downgrading", as if they are conceptually opposite. The people of the DTES are generally against the gentrification process, with events such as "Shout Out Against Gentrification" (June, 2012) well attended by community members vocalising their opposition to the process and the associated displacement. During this event, gentrification was described as "a war on the poor and on rights" pushing individuals out of their homes and out of their neighbourhood, shattering working-class, low-income communities (Bee, 2012). It was acknowledged that the DTES was largely made up of individuals living below the LICO, individuals on welfare and disability, often with drug addictions and/or suffering mental health problems. The DTES was simultaneously referred to as "a community of acceptance, of refuge for those who do not fit in economically with the rest of the city" (*ibid*). The area was repeatedly praised by audience members for the "creative and artistic" nature of the community.

I suggest that there is no clear dichotomy between gentrification and ghettoization – terms that suggest a positive and negative pole (i.e.: good vs evil). The opposite of gentrification is not ghettoization but the (desired) maintenance of affordability in low-income, inner city areas. The DTES can simultaneously suffer and flourish - something that the reductive notion of economic downgrading does not adequately take into account. Representational notions of the DTES are arguably more complex than Smith's discussion of polarisation and this will be

explored in my subsequent chapters, through a discussion of visual accounts of individual experiences of life in the DTES neighbourhood.

In "Social Justice and Video: *Imagining* as a Right in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside" (2010) Jessica Hallenbeck reports on the video project "Wishlist", formed as part of a package of short films under the umbrella of Carrall Street Participatory Video Project (CSPVP). The film was made with an aim of expressing DTES residents' aspirations for the street's development into a "Greenway" – a more environment-friendly and increasingly gentrified area. The video was facilitated by urban planning students, with a view to promoting dialogue through utopian thinking: "for people to claim their rights to participation and appropriation through engaging them in a dialogue based on imaginatively reinterpreting their present" (Hallenbeck, 2010, p.141). The limitations of the video were, for Hallenbeck, the lack of institutional support for the project that ultimately limited the policy impact and public viewing opportunities (2010, pp.146-147). Through an analysis of the Hope in Shadows contest, I will seek to provide a justification for the increased use of projects like Hallenbeck's in future policy-oriented research and advocate the levelling up of visual, biographical methods, to the perceived status of quantitative measures.

The DTES area has been the focus of a multiplicity of social and cultural research projects over the past decade. The proliferation of research in the area coupled with media scrutiny is something that has been widely criticised (Walls, 2011; Jerome, 2012; O'Neill and Seal, 2012). Researchers have made the DTES the focal point of studies into urban degeneration (Smith, 2000), for medical/health purposes (Benoit, 2001; Kerr et al, 2003), sociological and

criminological studies (Park et al., 2008; O'Neill, 2011) and artistic enterprise (Masik, 2011; Parkatti, 2011; Woodin, 2012).

National and provincial newspapers and magazines have covered the neighbourhood prolifically, often running stories that highlight the crime and deviance associated with the area. Headlines include: "Canada's Worst Neighbourhood" (Gatehouse, 2007), "Hooked on Crime" (MacQueen, 2004), and "The Stubborn Open Air Drug Market" (Matas, 2009). The Globe and Mail proclaims: "The neighbourhood remains a vortex that sucks in junkies, the mentally ill and other desperate souls from across the country" (*ibid*). One particular CTV broadcast series, entitled "Canada's Slum: The Fix" (2009) offered a number of differential "solutions" to the problems of the DTES, pathologising behaviours and demonising the neighbourhood. Images of individuals injecting heroin and smoking crack cocaine are frequent visual representations published in print and online; images are often "negative, over-simplified and sensationalised" (Smith, 2000, p.357). In 1996 the Canadian Broadcasting Company aired a video of a heroin addict shooting up in the street. Smith asserts: "a line had definitely been crossed" making reference to the concept of "poornography" (*ibid*). The concept of "poornography" was coined by Downtown Eastside worker and artist Patricia Chauncey to "to describe the media's portrayal of the poor as victims, and its failure to criticise the societal structures that create poverty or suggest what might be done to alleviate such suffering" (Walls, 2011, p.144). The term essentially describes a voyeuristic aestheticisation of low-income, marginalised neighbourhoods, as a "decaying and decadent urban spectacle" (Robertson and Culhane, 2005, p.18). This national, visual obsession with DTES "deviance" can be seen explicitly through the Vancouver-based reality television show "The Beat" which follows the policing of the community: "The show is a behind-the-scenes

look at policing Vancouver's notorious 12-block neighbourhood: a 'violence-filled waste of human potential,' according to Sgt. Mark Steinkampf, another black belt and BET top cop" (Macdonald, 2010).

My own study hopes to locate the possibilities of community photography as a medium resisting misrepresentation, and enabling the democratisation of future studies. Rather than creating a new project, I focus on a pre-existing, resident-led photography contest as a case study, with the awareness that the DTES is an over-researched area. The "visibility of stigmatised identities" in the DTES, as described by Newnham (2005, p.4), positions the Hope in Shadows contest as a relevant route for residents to reclaim representation in the neighbourhood. This work will seek to understand how the photographic model might represent and also promote the recognition of community values and/or issues.

1.3

I am not a man and this is not my city

Methodological Concerns

My research fieldwork is informed by Sarah Pink's (2001) reflexive approach, which recognises "the centrality of the subjectivity of the researcher to the production of ethnographic knowledge" (Pink, 2001, p.20). I strived to maintain an awareness of my position as researcher, and the contentious nature of this role in an over-researched community. I was conscious that I have no direct connection with the DTES preceding my involvement with the Hope in Shadows contest; I am not a resident of Vancouver, nor am I Canadian. I endeavoured to approach the community on equal terms – encouraging

discussion, limiting my directive role in facilitation and showing a genuine interest in the individuals I worked with, above and beyond the thematic focus of my research. I made a conscious effort to clearly explain my position, research interests and intentions to all involved. I am unable to separate myself completely from the work undertaken and do not claim, nor desire to have created an objective account, but a person-centred exploration that relies on communication with and involvement in the community in focus.

The reflexive approach taken is simultaneously informed by the work of Douglas Harper as discussed in *Visual Sociology* (2012). Harper defines a reflexive ethnography as including "the account of its creation" (2012, p.47). For Harper, the reflexive approach breaks down any illusion of the researcher as expert, and the distinction between researcher and the traditional notion of the research subject. Working and living with "rail tramps" in North America, Harper (1982) positioned himself literally and lexically as one of the men: "At noon we lined up for a chit to enter the mission at 5pm and a free bowl of chicken soup" (cited in Harper, 2012, Figure 3.5, p.44). This reflexive approach can also be seen in Bourgois and Schonberg's *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009). Bourgois and Schonberg spent over a decade working with homeless drug addicts in San Francisco, combining in-depth fieldnotes, participant dialogue, and black and white photographs to express the experiences of individuals. I hope to capture the spirit of such reflexive ethnography in my own study, albeit limited by time and financial constraints. To this end, I involved myself in the Hope in Shadows contest camera hand-out and collection, meeting community members in the process. I attended various community-run events in the DTES, and spent time in the area, in local cafes and in Oppenheimer Park. My focus groups were held in Carnegie Community Centre – a key community hub, to ensure accessibility and approachability. I adopted an open

and inclusive approach to fieldwork recruitment (Appendices 4, 5, 10), conscious that on many occasions, individuals in the DTES have been silenced due to sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religious beliefs and/or perceived "lifestyles choices" (Robertson and Culhane, 2005; Guimond et al., 2009).

Research involved a field-based, participant-centred study. I facilitated two focus groups in the DTES, utilising images from the Hope in Shadows archive as stimuli for discussion. The focus groups involved talking about what the contest process, images and exhibition have meant for individuals and their community. Harper (2002) states: "when two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs they are trying to figure something out together. This is, I believe, the ideal model for research" (Harper, 2002, p.23).

Like Harper, I hope that the use of images in research may go some way towards democratising dialogue between participant and researcher/policy audiences. I suggest that talking about an image nurtures perspective through providing a stimulus for thought, a deliberate call for an individual to take a moment to pause and think about the detail before them. The image can be read subjectively, interpreted and analysed from multiple points of view; it does not bring an impenetrable idea to the table. Through participant-led photography, even the most disenfranchised individual can be given an opportunity to provide stimuli for debate – by putting themselves, their community, space and place in the spotlight. The image allows a platform for the marginalised and silenced to articulate-by-other-means, a subject matter that they find important. The work of Caroline Wang et al. (2000) supports the use of photography in advocacy. Wang et al.'s definition of photovoice as participant-led photographic practice in research sets out the following objectives:

(1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers and people who can be mobilized for change.

(Wang et al, 2000, p.82)

Through my fieldwork, I explore how photography is used by individuals who do not necessarily have a policy-oriented agenda, but who do have an opinion about their identity and community. I look to develop Wang's method, by further understanding the processes of recording and reflecting the urban neighbourhood – how and why people take certain photographs and what these mean to the individual and to the DTES community.

In their (2005) study, Radley et al. divide photographs taken by homeless participants into the following categories: self, homeless friends, homeless strangers, streets, places used by homeless people, details of hostel or life of homeless people, own room or possessions, buildings, space primarily used by others (Radley et al, 2005, Table 1, p.280). The Hope in Shadows contest photography shows a similar range of photographs, of people and of buildings in the community, often focussing on shared spaces in the neighbourhood – the street, the park and shelters.

I do not wish to code the Hope in Shadows photographs – the intention of this work is not to analyse or evaluate the Hope in Shadows photography from my own point of view. The creation of my own archival categories through analysis would present a loaded account of the images over the past decade.

In an article for the *Guardian* newspaper, Stuart Hall discusses the status of the image:

> What signifies is not the photographic text in isolation but the way it is caught up in a network of chains of signification that "overprint" it, its inscription into the currency of other discourses, which bring out different meanings. Its meaning can only be completed by the ways we interrogate it.
>
> (Hall, 2007)

With Hall's statement in mind, I focus on the subjective interpretations of those who have a direct claim to meaning: the residents of the DTES.

Focus groups were undertaken with a relatively loose format – in the style of semi-structured interviews. I used pre-made notes to direct conversations thematically (Appendix 11), though allowed this to deviate to enable individuals to discuss issues that were meaningful to them, and not simply my own assumptions. The semi-structured approach was partly influenced by the "SHOWeD" model, as discussed by Harper (2012). The SHOWeD acronym invites participants to a discussion based on the following framework:

> What do you SEE here? What is really HAPPENING here? How does this relate to OUR lives? WHY does this situation exist? How can we become EMPOWERED by our new social understanding? What can we DO to address these issues?
>
> (Harper, 2012, p.202)

My reason for only loosely following the model is due to my recognition of the acronym as "over-directive and inimical to more natural discussions of images" (Harper, 2012, p.202). To stimulate a more personal and spontaneous dialogue, I introduced photographs from the Hope

in Shadows archive into the group, to be considered and discussed. This hopefully encouraged individuals to move away from the biographical "spiel" that is often demanded by services in their standardised risk and needs assessments. Though I am unaware if any of my participants were service users, it was informally discussed that self-identification as individuals with "multiple needs" was common across both groups.

My study adheres to the University of Birmingham's Code of Practice for Research (2012-2013). My ethical approach is simultaneously informed by the International Visual Sociology Association's Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines (Papademas, 2009), following the principles of professional competence, integrity, respect for people's rights, dignity and diversity, and social responsibility. I adhere to the ethical standards with regards to confidentiality and informed consent (Papademas, 2009, pp.252-3). My approach to fieldwork was transparent in nature, with all information disclosed to participants prior to and post research. The right to withdraw from the study prior to, during and post research was made clear to participants verbally and in writing (Appendices 6, 7, 8).

1.4

It rains on my heart as it rains on this city

Self-Identity / Place-Identity

To further understand how photography represents and (re)creates perceptions of identity in the DTES, we must first look at how perceptions of identity are intrinsically linked to a sense of space and place.

In *The City and Self Identity* (1978), Harold M. Proshansky defines his concept of "place-identity" as "those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal-identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioural tendencies relevant to this environment" (1978, p.155). Proshansky's work is located within the interdisciplinary field of environmental psychology, with "the clear recognition that there is no physical setting that is not also a social, cultural setting" (*ibid*, p.150). Proshansky asserts a distinct "urban place-identity" and explores this idea with notable references to the visual. Proshansky describes the city neighbourhood as "a community setting based on a kaleidoscope of sights, sounds, and even smells that are experienced and internalised by long-time residents and others who visit it" (*ibid*, p.161). For Proshansky, this "total" sensory quality of the city is "the ambience of urban life" (*ibid*, p.165). I suggest that the literal act of photographing the neighbourhood will provide an account of the how individuals in the DTES respond to their world, in past, present and aspirational terms. This thesis goes someway to respond to Proshansky's call to deepen and extend his own discussion: "to explore by means of an appropriate methodology the urban place-identities of some sample of residents of an urban metropolis" (*ibid*, p.168).

My study is necessarily tied up in questions of space and place, underlined by the inescapable community focus on issues surrounding the people's right to the DTES - a theme consistent in my fieldwork observations. I suggest that using the camera to capture one's environment can be understood as a symbolic repossession of the city, as a means of framing space and place as you see or wish others to view it. The relationship between the individual and the city and the place-attachment that develops are described by Mary P. Corcoran (2002) as "connected to the microcommunities of which they form a part." Corcoran suggests: "This might be an

area as small as the street on which they live or the balcony they share in a block of flats" (Corcoran, 2002, p.63). The link between urban space, place and identity will be explored through the analysis of my fieldwork in the DTES.

1.5

There is more here than memory

Picturing Social Inclusion

In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (1994) Charles Taylor describes the making and sustaining of identity as dialogical in nature:

> People do not acquire the languages needed for self-definition on their own. Rather, we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us.
>
> (Taylor, 1994, p.32)

The ability to create and share photographs in galleries, through calendars and online can be seen as opening up multiple dialogical spaces to a wider audience of "significant others" (Mead, 1964). The increasing audience – local, national and international, raises questions concerning who is significant to the mediation of personal and collective identities, and what this means for DTES residents.

The Hope in Shadows contest photography as exhibition or as archive provides an example of an arrangement that indicates how people respond to their physical environment. Looking through these photographs it is possible to build up a picture of the DTES from multiple

perspectives; the archive offers a collage of images that form a non-linear, visual account of fragmented human experience. In his toolkit for photovoice methods, Tony Webb (2004) positions the exhibition as a start-point for strategically planned action to implement change (Webb, 2004, p.4). Through my work, I seek to explore how photography as such a dialogical tool, might be enabling and even emancipating for marginalized individuals and researchers alike:

> [t]o multiply voices, rather than reducing their number; to widen the set of possibilities, rather than aiming at wholesale consensus; to jointly pursue understanding…and all in all being animated by the wish to keep the conversation going.
>
> (Bauman, cited in Dawes, 2011, p.143)

In this thesis, I argue, with Bauman, that photography is a medium that can enable the "experiences which are lived through as thoroughly personal and subjective" and "problems fit to be inscribed into the public agenda and become matters of public policy" (Bauman, 2000, pp.78-79) to reconnect. In other words, photography can be a useful tool for elevating Mills' notion of "personal troubles" to the status of "public issues" (Mills, 1959, p.8).

I position my study of the Hope in Shadows project as a theoretically-framed, timely investigation. I endeavour to gain a deeper understanding of how and why residents of a socially marginalised neighbourhood create and share visual images, and what this means for their sense of space, place and self. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006) Paulo Friere asserts: "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it" (Friere, 2006, p.88). Through the subsequent discussion of fieldwork in the DTES and analysis of findings, I seek to provide

an argument towards photography as constituting statements about individual and collective

urban identities, with the propensity to spark social action.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

This chapter will provide a discussion of field-based research in Downtown Eastside Vancouver. The use of photography in the Hope in Shadows contest will be explored in terms of individual and collective identity representation and (re)creation. The chapter is divided into eight subsections, beginning with my route into research and involvement with the community in focus. The focus group demographics will be discussed and contextualised through comparison with the observations of Smith (2000), Cooper (2006) and Lewis et al. (2008). The Hope in Shadows contest is positioned as a potential counter discourse to externally-led (mis)representation, encouraging individuals and groups to become "architects of their own meaning" (Snow and Anderson, 2001, p.221). The chapter calls for dialogical understandings of urban out-groups, recommending a visual model as a route to affirmative representation.

2.1

We meet here

Fieldwork in the DTES

Fieldwork involved semi-structured interviews with Hope in Shadows project coordinators, members of the community, and academics, as well as the facilitation of two focus groups on the theme of "Photography, Identity and Community". My visit to the city deliberately

coincided with the 10th annual photography-contest, and as such I was able to observe the process first-hand.

The understanding of the DTES as an over-researched community informed my approach to fieldwork in the neighbourhood; building relationships in my limited time in the area was extremely important. I endeavoured to meet with those involved in the community and the Hope in Shadows project itself, prior to undertaking research. Gillian Jerome (2012) made recommendations regarding ethical approaches to the area – taking me though her (2008) work and allowing me access to information regarding individuals featured in the book who might be approachable in the context of my own research, individuals who might be reluctant to participate, and which individuals were unavailable or had unfortunately passed away since the date of publication. This was extremely useful in ensuring a sensitive approach to members of the community – many of whom live chaotic lives and are recognised as vulnerable by service providers.

I proactively involved myself in the Hope in Shadows contest, volunteering for the camera-handout and collection at Pivot Legal Society. This experience was invaluable - allowing me to meet staff, interns and members of the community and enabling me to gain a deeper insight into the event process. The camera hand-out took place at the Pivot Legal Society office on Heatley Avenue in the DTES (Appendix 12). My role involved encouraging participants to write down their feelings on the theme "What I value in my DTES community" (Appendix 3) to get ideas circulating prior to the contest, which would begin as soon as people had their cameras, and would last for three days.

Thoughts shared included:

> "My four walls, floor and ceiling"
>
> "Friends and family"
>
> "Able to be myself"
>
> "VANDU" (Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users)
>
> "My support worker"
>
> "Volunteers in the Downtown Eastside"
>
> "Community of survivors"
>
> "Nature"
>
> "Community Gardens"
>
> "One stop heroin shop"
>
> "Respect, compassion, sharing, resiliance [sic]"

Individuals cited friends, family and service-staff in the area as important. Several individuals made reference to the neighbourhood's "Missing and Murdered Women" and related memorial events. Also mentioned were neighbourhood landmarks, the feelings that the DTES evoked and descriptive statements about meaningful urban features. The exercise gave an insight into the relationship between individuals and their community prior to the facilitation of the focus groups.

I assisted the Pivot team with camera-handout and collection paperwork at the main event at the organisation's office, and at a smaller handout at Oppenheimer Park (Appendix 12). Paperwork involved collecting individual contact details so that they could be informed of contest outcomes. In many cases individuals did not have access to a personal phone or email account, and instead detailed where they could be found in the neighbourhood (e.g.: at the Oppenheimer Park centre) or provided the contact number of a friend or relative. The release

form explained contest rules, the fact that by signing the document, participants were consenting to giving the rights of their photographs to Pivot and Hope in Shadows, understood their right to withdraw at any time, and agreed to follow ethical procedures when taking their own photographs (Appendices 1, 2). Individuals were given the opportunity to consent to being credited by their own name, a street name or alias, or remain anonymous should their photograph be exhibited.

Greg Masuda, a professional photographer who has attended the contest for the last three years was present to document the hand-out and to run a short photography-skills workshop for those who wished to attend. This year, approximately fifteen individuals turned up to his session and listened intently as Greg explained some basics about taking a "good" photograph. Out of two-hundred individuals who collected cameras and thus signed up to participate, this represented a relatively small turn-out of dedicated individuals. Topics covered included lighting, positioning, focus, and theme. This mini-masterclass was facilitated with the aim of giving individuals the opportunity to approach the contest feeling more confident, with an increased technical understanding of the camera.

Three days later, at the camera-collection, I helped facilitate another paper-based exercise – this time on the topic "What the Hope in Shadows contest meant to me".

Responses included:

"So much beauty, not enough frames in my camera!"
"The importance of believing in myself"
"A great way to see the community through a different lens!"

"Help with self-esteem. Free fun is always best for low–income people, thank you."

"Find the smile in life"

"Exhilarating"

"Thank you. This contest gives us all something to look forward to and belong to."

The Hope in Shadows contest was positioned by the DTES community as a meaningful event, extremely positive for those involved. Individuals were proactively participating in the contest procedures (line-up, paperwork etc) and in these optional written exercise activities. For many individuals, this was not the first time that they had participated – a large number of contestants had taken part for several years, some since the very beginning (2003). The possibility of individuals approaching the above exercise with "ready-made" responses, in line with perceived expectations of what Pivot Legal society "required" must be considered, due to the location of the response-banner (inside the Pivot building, in front of project staff).

While the Hope in Shadows project does not have an explicit agenda, it does invite a certain kind of representation. The "Hope in Shadows" name positions an ideal-type approach to the contest, focussing on positive aspects of the community despite negative circumstances. The ideal-type as discussed by Max Weber (1949) is put forward as:

(formed by) the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.

(Weber, 1949, p.90)

The Hope in Shadows "ideal-type" stresses common elements through archive and exhibition, creating a degree of order out of perceived chaos through showcasing similar photographs, and by unifying distinct pictures under the broad category of the Hope in Shadows brand. Such homogenization can also be seen in the contest awards process, mediating participant representations into distinct categories. Though the online archive depicts a range of pictures, the collection is reflective of the Hope in Shadows theme. We are encouraged to view the contest photography with this theme in mind and look for the binaries that the name suggests. The Hope in Shadows contest might not have an attached research or policy agenda, but it certainly has its own dictate, locating the neighbourhood as "in the shadows". Participants in the 10th annual contest might be inclined to take photographs that fit within the archival repertoire. Regardless of photographer-intention, once positioned under the Hope in Shadows umbrella, pictures are understood as depicting the contest theme. The Hope in Shadows contest, by virtue of name alone, influences intention and reception.

The potential influence of the contest motivation was taken into account in focus group approach and analysis. My focus groups were intentionally distinct from the Hope in Shadows project itself, with the aim of reducing participant confusion that might arise from the assumption that I was working with Pivot. Pivot asked that I clearly separate the focus groups from their organisation due to their prerogative to remain unaffiliated with research (or any other) agenda. Focus groups took place in separate space, in an openly unaffiliated context (as advertised on event posters and explained to participants) (Appendices 4, 5, 11) to stimulate as far as possible a genuine, spontaneous dialogue.

2.2

The city is not unknowable

Focus Groups in the DTES

Focus groups took place at Carnegie Community Centre, located in the heart of the Downtown Eastside (Appendix 12). Carnegie Community Centre is an example of a service designed to meet the needs of DTES neighbourhood residents by providing affordable meals and an array of activities run for and by community members.

During my time in Vancouver, the neighbourhood intersection of Main and Hastings was described to me by city residents as forming part of "the four corners of Hell" due to the perceived and much publicised visibility of "unsavoury" individuals in the area. Located on the corner of Main and Hastings, Carnegie is a geographically central DTES landmark and as such, a tangible target for media-attention. There is a clear tension between the centre as a positive, welcomed resource for residents and a site to be avoided by the wider Vancouver population. The negative viewpoint is widely shared and easily accessible when attempting to find out more about the area:

> Main Street and Hastings Street is the epicenter of the drug and disease problem in Vancouver. Nowhere else will you see such a concentration of junkies and crackheads. Day and night you will find hundreds of people scurrying around like rats, looking for a fix or for something to steal to buy some crack or heroin.
>
> (bestvancouverguide.com, 2012)

Many individuals utilise and value the resources that Carnegie and the surrounding services provide – an attitude reflected in focus group responses, describing the community space as extremely important to DTES residents, playing a large part in their lives.

Posters were displayed and leaflets were handed out in the local area. These clearly advertised the time, date, and topic of the focus groups (Appendices 4, 5). Four individuals participated in each "discussion group" – labelled as such as I felt that the term "discussion" was in-keeping with the kind of democratic, participant-led dialogue that I hoped the sessions would stimulate. I chose to run an afternoon session and an evening session, to encourage the involvement of individuals who attended the centre at different times of day. Indeed, most participants who attended did so after receiving leaflets given out immediately prior to the event.

Participants were fully briefed with regards to theme, the reasons for my interest in the area, my position as researcher and how their responses would be used (Appendices 6, 7). I ensured participant consent to research participation (Appendix 8), audio-recording (Appendix 9) and made clear the right to withdraw at any point prior to, during or post-research (Appendices 6, 7, 8). Participants voluntarily filled out Diversity Monitoring Sheets provided (Appendix 10). There was 67% male (6 participants) and 33% female attendance (2 participants); 67% identifying as White Canadian and 33% identifying as "other", including First Nations and English (Commonwealth) origin. This is reflective of the diverse DTES demographic (Cooper, 2006, Lewis et al., 2008) though due to the random selection process does not represent an entirely accurate population snapshot. The first Focus Group included Danny, Jack, Carl and Ron; the second focus group included Sam, Sarah, David and Clare. Laura was

interviewed independently. Participants were aged between thirty-three and sixty-five. Danny identified as First Nations, and Sam identified in three ethnic groups (Chinese, First Nations and other (Norman)) with the rest of the participants as White Canadian or other (various). All names have been changed to preserve anonymity as far as possible.

2.3

To see the sun through the murk of ideologies

The Politics of (Mis)representation

As discussed in chapter one, the Downtown Eastside is widely understood as a community that is negatively represented by local, provincial and national media (Smith, 2000; Walls, 2011; Jerome, 2012; O'Neill and Seal, 2012). This was reflected in the focus group discussion:

> Jack: There's a history of people wanting to come here for a real Downtown Eastside dirty snapshot.

The idea of a "dirty snapshot" implies outsiders using the camera to capture a shocking or controversial image of the area which is seen as typifying the neighbourhood. The idea of the snapshot suggests the fast-paced work of journalists, with no real investment in the community in focus. The "dirty snapshot" can be understood as a realisation of Chauncey's concept of "poornography", which, "depends on voyeurism and connotes exploitation" (Walls, 2011, p.144).

There is a twofold notion of othering in the DTES community: an understanding of themselves and their community as othered by the wider Vancouver population, and a positioning of this wider community as the external-Other. Within the DTES, the residents appear to form an in-group based on shared space and overlapping needs. There is a sense that these needs are vastly different to those of the wider population. For example, at Carnegie Community Centre you are considered a senior at the age of forty:

> Clare: Because there's so many drug addicts so if you live to be *forty*...like they say the average drug addict dies at the age of forty so if you can make it to the age of forty or fifty then you've like *outlived*.

The normal age to be recognised (officially) as a senior in the city is sixty-five (SeniorsBC.ca, 2012).

There was a sense of awareness in the focus group that DTES residents are individuals and collectively positioned as Other, a feeling that they are judged by the world outside neighbourhood boundaries. This (perceived and actual) judgement is perpetuated through images that connote deviance. In my (2012) interview, Gillian Jerome referred to an influx of researchers, journalists and art students into the area, trying to take photographs that encapsulate the "gritty" nature of the community.

Participant discussion of the media focussed on the exploitative nature of journalists who were perceived to be looking for a shocking story for entertainment purposes, often at the expense of the residents themselves:

Danny: Yeah. My mum's been exploited quite a bit by the…the Globe and Mail and a few different newspapers. They came…they came down here before the Olympics and they took her picture and did an article on her, but they said…they said they were going to do the positive side and so she told them her story and everything and they totally flipped it negative…everything she said. They flipped everything and it was very damaging. It actually hurt her very very badly. Because she thought it was going to be very positive and then when the paper came out it was just…it was so negative.

Danny's description of the media portrayal of his mother as "damaging" implies a significant impact on her self-perception and/or other's perceptions of her. The other focus group participants added comments about the neighbourhood and its residents being consistent targets for negatively framed press. The noted effect of negative media portrayal on DTES identities opens up a space for a counter-discourse framed in more positive terms.

My own work seeks to move away from the connotations of the "dirty snapshot" and focus on community approaches that imply more democratic intentions. Hope in Shadows (2012) refers to "portraits of our community", pre-empting the casting of the neighbourhood in a fundamentally positive light. Residents are invited to take thoughtful, artistic images of their community. Rather than call for a hierarchy of meaning, I suggest that the representations of the DTES by DTES residents can exist alongside media images, providing an increasingly nuanced version of events. The avenues that might be followed to ensure that such resident-led messages do not become obscured or subsumed by the powerful media-text will be discussed in chapter three.

The feeling that the DTES is misrepresented was emphasised by focus group participants who juxtaposed media images against resident-led photography in the Hope in Shadows contest.

Focus group participants verbally contrasted the negative "lies" of the media with the "truth" of particular images taken by DTES residents, thereby challenging the dominant (external) definitions of their community. When shown a selection of photographs from the online archive, focus group participants showed particular interest in "The Hug" (Bronwyn Elko, 2003) (Appendix 13) - a photograph of a man hugging a child in the street, which they mutually agreed was representational of "the truth":

> Danny: …because there's love on the streets, right? And I think that kind of captures it, that picture ("The Hug") … And that's what…that's what I like to see, I like to see pictures like that picture.

> Carl: When that picture came round that table, I thought that's something I don't see enough…That was the first thing that came into my mind, it is the truth – when you see this on the streets, because I've seen it lots of times. But my first thought when it came round to us this time was wow that's something…I don't see that enough anymore.

This discussion between Danny and Carl positions the photograph as depicting "truth" despite Carl's assertion that demonstrations such as the hug pictured are no longer seen enough. For Carl, the truth is not represented through the regularity or consistency of street images, but through a normative claim. I argue that the photographs taken in the contest context are not a completely accurate depiction of life in the DTES since no one image can ever illustrate an objective reality; the photograph is a product of perspective. However, the shared understanding of "The Hug" as "pure" points to a collective understanding of how the DTES *should* be represented. The image is simultaneously coded and deciphered by residents of the DTES to represent their own truth: the photograph provides clear visual cues to suggest love and compassion. The photograph's widely acknowledged semiotic value positions it as an

emblematic image of the human reality of the DTES community. This might be understood as a direct response to external stereotypes: presented in the binary language of the media.

Moving from collective to individual representations, I asked participants how they would use photography to portray self-identity. Carl's response prompted further debate regarding the understanding of "truth":

> Me with a blank piece of paper with one sentence saying something along the lines of "the truth from my point of view"…"The truth as I see it" - because each of us see it a little different, right?

Carl presents an understanding of truth claims as situated and partial, reflecting the work of Harper (2012, p.110). In the context of this understanding, Carl's reference to the image of "The Hug" as "truth" seems to be informed by an understanding that the concept is fluid, transient and dependent on the standpoint of the individual.

There was a sense that "truthful" images could only be manipulated with the addition of language:

> Sam: When you add a social or political or religious connotation to a shot and there's words attached to it, it's the *words* that dilute the photo because they take you on a different journey.

Sam comments on the differential levels of language-based meaning and visual meaning. He appears to express the opinion that the photograph presents a social reality, while words distort it. Sam discussed the fact that he was illiterate until a relatively late age (thirty-eight).

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As a First Nations individual, this is not uncommon. Sam expresses a connection with nature and with the visual, bringing him closer to the image as a medium for understanding. Until relatively recently, the written word was a privilege of the external Other. For Sam, the text is a weapon that can be used to distort images negatively. Sam locates text in terms of mainstream print media, rather than as a tool for DTES resident voices.

Shifting the understanding of text from a weapon of the Other to a tool for community, I suggest that the addition of written or spoken narrative can enhance meaning and communicate an intended message more clearly. Though this can be deemed unnecessary in art-photography, it is a useful approach if photographs are to be used to promote community values and/or needs to an external audience. For example, the image of the heroin user shooting up, with the addition of Carl's focus group commentary can change perception, removing the stigma of the "dirty snapshot":

> There was a young lady who would come to InSite….she came to me and said you know "You're gonna be so mad at me - I'm using again" and I said "Look dear, I don't care whether you use or whether you don't, it doesn't matter to me. Like, just don't quit trying to quit and that is all I ask, and I love you just as much standing here now as I did when you were first trying to get help".

The addition of this text re-contextualises the "dirty snapshot", reframing it through compassionate, resident-led understanding. The importance of *who* is speaking about an image when establishing meaning is apparent in this example. One picture can represent multiple realities and reception of an image is dependent on how meaning is interpreted and communicated.

The assertion of multiple representational realities throws the idea of *mis*representation into flux. This becomes problematic when used in defence of the "dirty-snapshot". I suggest an understanding of misrepresentation as any one-dimensional response, omitting or distorting the voices of the individual or group in focus. A definition is needed that bypasses polarised conceptions of "truth" and "falsity" and takes into account a more complex understanding of representation. I suggest that a sense of ownership is crucial to a sense of affirmative representation. The community-led nature of the Hope in Shadows contest enables those involved to enact reclamation of space and place through photography. The focus group participants actively contrast the images produced with those of the media and in doing so create a renewed, reclaimed sense of identity.

The style of representation offered through the Hope in Shadows contest model invites DTES residents - many of whom live chaotic lives - to represent themselves and their community through a creative mosaic of pictures and of text. Rather than creating a linear narrative of a community over ten years, the Hope in Shadows contest, in process and as an archive, offers a fragmented account of multiple truths.

2.4

To begin the exposure

Photography and Identity in the DTES

The focus group discussions pointed to the participants' recognition of the existence of a link between photography and identity:

Danny: In the Hope in Shadows I did use the photography to define, kinda to define what… a little bit of what I'm about.

Danny, a first-time entrant in the contest, took the opportunity to show the positive, or what he interpreted as the "angelic" side of his community:

Danny: I'll tell you what I did, I made some angel wings and I wore them around the Downtown Eastside for a couple of days and I just asked people if they would like to have a picture taken with the angel wings on and erm I got a really good response, everybody was …everybody liked it, everybody wanted to wear the wings. And so…and so I was trying to say like in this bad area there…there is angels and there could be angels, and there's good… where, where everybody thinks is maybe not so good, you know?

Danny uses angel wings as props to alter the presence of individuals in his neighbourhood, actively casting the community in a positive light. The home-made angel wings (made using hanger-wire and white paper) are used to create a visual metaphor. Danny uses the wings to challenge a presumed perception of the neighbourhood as "hell". Danny's involvement of other community members in his imaginative visual metaphor nurtures a participatory, inclusive culture. His approach works in contrast to the media-made images of the neighbourhood due to his insider-status.

When asked what photograph Danny felt would represent his self-identity, he chose a picture of himself, wearing the same wings. For Danny, this represented the kind of person he tried to be in the DTES. Through a staged enactment of the angelic, Danny creates or recreates identities for himself and for his community. These identities may be transient – dependent on and created for contrived scenarios. However, when understood as part of the much larger

Hope in Shadows archive, Danny's approach contributes to a legacy of repeat-representation, going some way to secure and make permanent the positive framing of individuals. This can be understood as an example of Phillip Blumstein's "Ossification" (2001): "Ossification means that we enact identities with great frequency and we become the person whom we have enacted" (Blumstein, 2001, p.185). Through the long-running Hope in Shadows contest, photographs in and of the neighbourhood play a part in (re)creating identities.

Through the Hope in Shadows contest, the positive understanding and (re)creation of identity was mediated through a recurring theme of "in the midst of". Describing "Eastside Magic" (Washburn, 2011) a winning photograph in the contest, picturing a woman leaning out of Carnegie Community Centre's window, smelling some flowers (Appendix 13), Carl states:

> There was kind of a bright spot in a harsh reality and you just stop and smell the roses for a minute –and you go wow – there's somebody's grandmother there, smelling the roses, in amongst all of this ugliness that we sometimes have a tendency to see.

For Carl, the human subject of the photograph and her actions define the "bright spot". Carl describes the woman in the picture as "somebody's grandmother", assigning her a social role that he can identify with. Throughout the focus group discussion, Carl described DTES residents in familial terms – as sons, daughters, aunts and grandmothers. Carl brings individuals closer to himself through these definitions, emphasising the human connections in the community. There seems to be an inclination to contrast the positivity and potential of DTES residents against a more negatively framed urban landscape.

Drawing on the same theme, Laura describes a photograph of herself, taken against a graffiti backdrop. She talks about the reaction to the image from community members and individuals in the wider Vancouver area:

> I was called beautiful in the photograph in the Downtown Eastside amongst rubble and drugs and grief – but they see beauty, they see me.

The depiction of "Hope in Shadows" for Carl and for Laura is almost literal. For both participants, the neighbourhood is constructed through positioning something "good" against something "bad". Laura's response is very much concerned with how others might view her image. Laura was not the photographer, but the subject of the photograph she discusses. She concentrates on her own visibility and how she is externally perceived. Laura's binary understanding of herself against the DTES backdrop is arguably shaped by the rhetoric of the contest itself. While the DTES residents are positioned as the "Hope" – a perception that encourages agency in the individual, the perpetual framing of the neighbourhood as negative might enforce a feeling of being trapped by circumstance. This might be recognised as a limitation of the contest, problematizing the neighbourhood through framing space and place as undesirable.

The focus group responses indicate that people did make a connection between still photography and personal identity. They felt that the camera enabled them to capture pictures that were meaningful to them. Responses to the contest photographs shown in the focus groups might be understood in terms of Roland Barthes' (2000) concept of "punctum". In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (2000), Barthes explores the essence of photography, discussing the lasting emotional effect of certain photographs. For Barthes,

where "studium" involves cultural, linguistic and political interpretations of a photograph, "punctum" involves the recognition of a "wounding" detail, establishing a direct relationship between the object(s) or person(s) in the picture (Barthes, 2000, pp.43-49). In "Crime, Poverty and Resistance on Skid Row" (2012) Maggie O'Neill and Lizzie Seal discuss Barthes' work in the context of DTES images: "certain photographs and social media are able to 'pierce' us, bring us in touch with intractable reality in ways that we cannot forget" (O'Neill and Seal, 2012, p.138). In the case of Hope in Shadows, identity is (re)created and maintained through the contest, exhibition and online archive. Focus group responses using emotive language – or the language of "punctum"- indicate a proximity to the pictures on the part of the photographer or spectator that blurs the line between identity representation and identity formation. The term "(re)creation" describes how personal identities simultaneously influence and are influenced by photography. Aspects of personal identity can be represented by images, for example, Danny's use of the angel wings to depict aspirational behaviour in the community. The photographs can give rise to meaning making that manifests itself in the development of self-perception and presentation. Photographs might lend perceived authority to ideas about the self and/or community that are in process of formulation. The Hope in Shadows contest promotes a fragmented, partial account of the neighbourhood - a living notion of the DTES – in contrast to the mass media images which imply fixed circumstances and restricted resident agency. For a community so often associated with such limiting images, this route to self-representation is welcomed by many neighbourhood residents.

Negative representations of the community at large were seen to have implications on individuals living in the DTES area: David discussed the high percentage of drug users in the neighbourhood, the provision of related services and media interest. He was quick to state that

he himself was not in the category of addicts – though people "often make assumptions" due to the particularly notorious SRO or "crack-hotel" in which he lives. David's response indicates a conflicting sense of self in the community, trying to embrace and involve himself in his community through Carnegie-based activities but at the same time distancing himself from the addiction in the neighbourhood. David emphasised that he is certainly not judgemental, through an anecdote about his role as former landlord to a heroin-user, who he stressed was a good tenant: "she was about the most reliable person I ever rented to." David's defence of his identity perhaps instead provides an example of self-definition in service-user terms: defining himself in terms of who he "is not" in typical DTES categories in order to establish who he is.

Negative representations of individuals in the community were understood as reflecting badly on the community as a whole. Danny's discussion of the media treatment of his mother was met by sympathy within the focus group and with similar stories of their own experiences, or the experiences of friends, family and/or acquaintances. For example, in Carl's discussion of a female friend who is a drug-user (whom he loves in spite of her problems), and a story about the death of a resident known in the neighbourhood as "a fall down drunk" but also as a "stand-up guy". Personal incidents are simultaneously understood as significant within a wider community context. For the individuals in the focus groups, private troubles are always already community issues.

The service-led nature of the community may contribute to a sense of categorisation that detracts from the individual as a point of focus, instead automatically positioning the individual in a wider group associated with their needs. Individuals actively performing these

group identities may be more inclined to frame personal issues in collective terms. There was no marked differentiation between focus group perceptions of individual and community identity; the sense was that self and community identities were intrinsically tied up in one another. I suggest that events such as the Hope in Shadows help to create and maintain such a sense of community cohesion. The repeated nature of an event utilising the rhetoric of community values increases an awareness of the neighbourhood as an interconnected group.

2.5

The mind is this street

Urban Photography as Identity Portraiture

On asking individuals what photograph they would take to represent community identity, the following responses were elicited:

> Jack: I would take a picture downstairs in the kitchen – but empty, you know, I – just so because, that's what I do, you know – I'm one of the chefs here…it's my community.

> Carl: I'd think more about an aerial photo from 100 feet above, probably using…probably Carrall and the centre up to Gore from one edge and the Victory Square at another edge and just Hastings and that alleyway… Just a long panoramic shot of just everything going on.

Jack declared that he would use the same image to represent his personal identity, emphasising the point that the kitchen would be empty. In the second focus group, Sam stated:

I'd take a picture of Chinatown looking out Main Street past the Carnegie and the mountains. Because that's where I came from. It's part of my blood.

Notably, when asked to depict collective and/or personal identity, Jack, Carl and Sam referenced a photograph of the urban space and place without any people in the frame. Carl added: "Sometimes the picture without any people in it, it gives it just the rawness". The choices of pictures without people arguably go some way to provide an imaginative response to the media images that explicitly depict people, often in a negative light and often at their most vulnerable. The "empty" images simultaneously subvert the binary opposition implied by the Hope in Shadows contest name.

There is a sense articulated by the focus group participants that urban photography is intrinsically emotive and associated with individuals and groups regardless of whether people are included in the picture. Photographs of the neighbourhood were discussed in terms of psychological wellbeing, aspirations and personal feelings about the community.

In *Hope in Shadows: Stories and Photographs of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside* (Cran & Jerome, 2008), Edie Wild's description of her space becomes similarly interwoven with a statement about her outlook, her personal agency:

I mean, look at the state of my windowsill. They won't fix a thing. I've got bedbugs, cockroaches and holes in the wall. These people can't even give me paint or fix my sink.

But look at the sheer I put up for a curtain. It's about twelve feet and it's beautiful. Its one of the few things that I kept, so I hung it up and it was pure elegance, and I've got this beautiful molding that goes around the room. They won't give me paint so fuck 'em. I'll pick up paint myself. *It's for me and the answer is simple: I can live in depression or I can change it.*

(Wild, in Cran and Jerome, 2008, p.61, italics mine)

For Wild, the photograph of her bedroom is at least as intimate as a photograph of the self. Despite a human absence from the picture, Wild continues to utilise the camera to capture something of her identity.

Wild's words are integral to an understanding of her photograph, and the meaning attached to it. Without her commentary, the photograph becomes open to outsider reification. The image can exist independently from explanation, but in such a status would lose the social impact that Wild's personal monologue invites. The inclusion of resident voices places emphasis on *who* is speaking, and can inform the reception of images. Like the focus group participant responses, Wild's discussion of her photograph indicates that the category of self-portraiture is not necessarily contingent on the physical presence of the human subject, indicating how the urban space can become a metaphor for self-identity.

In his (2001) work *Tearing Down the Streets: Adventures in Urban Anarchy.* Jeff Ferrell states:

Questions of meaning, beauty and emotion can of course be answered theologically or epistemically. But, especially in the shared experience of the city, they must also be answered spatially. (Ferrell, 2001, p. 224)

Using the camera to capture one's environment can arguably be understood as a symbolic repossession of the city, as a means of framing space and place as you see or wish others to view it. Celia Lury's concept of "outcontextualisation" describes how photography can enable contexts to be "multiplied and rendered a matter of apparent choice or selective framing" (Lury, 1994, p.3). The camera allows a (re)framing of the self and community without preconceptions associated with prior (external) representations. This facilitates the rebuilding of identities through the photograph itself as a metaphor for a new beginning.

Harper (2002) suggests that new photographic framing of taken-for-granted-experiences enables individuals to "deconstruct their own phenomenological assumptions" (Harper, 2002, p.21). The deconstruction of the city space through the outcontextualisation of the image arguably transfers to an approach to identity. Like Barthes (2000), Lury and Harper position the photographic act as enabling a powerful reassertion of identity. Urban photography opens up avenues for people to begin to answer very personal questions via descriptions of their space and place and, in doing so, illuminating understandings of the self.

2.6

The W

turned against the sky

Signs of the City

My interview with Laura took place in the W2 Media Café, in the Woodward's building on Hastings (Appendix 12). Following our conversation, Laura asked me if she might take me outside and show me something important. She pointed to the former sign of the department

store, now encased and exhibited outside as a symbol of the old Woodward's, replaced by, in Laura's words: "a crass, neon version." The site has a controversial history and is seen by many as a once-valued, formerly inviting and affordable department store; a landmark of the DTES, now becoming an increasingly developed marker for gentrification in the area. For Laura, the relic "W" stood for the "Woodward's in her heart" and the new sign, for the ongoing and accelerating (exclusionary) transformation of the area. The positioning of this urban signifier as rooted in personal memory and contemporary social concern emphasises the meaning attached by individuals to space, and place and the many signs of the city. It is this meaningfulness of place that makes Smith's (2000) polarisation of gentrification/ economic downgrading a reductionist notion – the contrasting of terms assuming positive and negative outcomes respectively. Laura's attachment to place highlights how the redevelopment of the city can be far more complex than an economic model allows for. The urban landscape is imbued with personal and community significance and the city space is understood a site of human emotion. Reshaping of place is therefore intrinsically connected to notions of identity. The city, as Robert E. Park suggests, is a "state of mind" (1952, p.3).

I suggest that photography can enable a symbolic reclamation of lost space - making visible the invisible through the preservation of landmarks that are later physically destroyed. Discussing a picture of graffiti in the DTES that was removed due to construction work, Laura states:

> [The photograph] saved the graffiti piece forever. They started tearing down the building but we had already captured it.

The importance of capturing an image to preserve a memory of space is particularly pertinent in the wake of destruction. This particular image preserves self-expression in the form of street-art, making it a poignant visual statement. The value that Laura places on the photograph suggests the value placed on the neighbourhood and the perceived lack of community control in the gentrification process. For Laura, the image represents a quiet resistance, a symbolic victory.

The pictures that individuals took in the Hope in Shadows contest often depicted what had disappeared, marking out a significant absence that could only be understood by others in the neighbourhood who were aware of the meaning, or explained through talking about their images:

> Carl: I was trying to think about it. The first one I took…because it was the first one, it always seems to be the first one you get. It was just of an object. Oh, I know what it was. It was just of a police station – the sign was gone. On Main Street I'm so used to sitting at the Wave looking over Vancouver Police Department and…it disappeared! I don't know how, because I'm there every day and I said to these people "Where'd the sign go?" and they said "What do you mean?" and I said "Well they're finally gone." The Vancouver police had been leaving there for over a year…I said "Their sign's gone" and started taking pictures of this sign being gone.

Picturing the disappeared enables community photography to establish itself as an "insider" practice. The need for accompanying explanation as to why an image is significant, and what it means, can be empowering for the photographer. The discussion of symbolic urban landscape images seems to imply that DTES residents share a visual language at a community level. The impact of a photograph becomes contingent on and controlled by those who

55

understand its symbolic value, necessitating further involvement of "insiders" to enable "outsider" understanding.

Through repeat representation, the Hope in Shadows contest becomes a mediator of identity in the neighbourhood. The event asserts a common ground amongst differential service-users, positioning the urban neighbourhood as a shared space that, through the collective act of photography can symbolise a collective DTES identity. The name of the photography contest invites meaning-making, encouraging individuals to re-think semiotic-cues. The "Hope in Shadows" title encourages individuals to picture something good against something bad, and is taken up by many individuals who participate in the contest – with Danny's angel wings providing an explicit example of this. Carl's picturing of the disappeared does not follow this theme: his photograph is ambiguous to the outsider, it does not explicitly locate a positive or negative image. His picture asserts an ownership of his space and reclamation of meaning that extends beyond any perceived confines of the contest theme. These differential approaches to the contest emphasis the multiple roads to empowerment that community-photography can facilitate.

2.7

And knowing all this is important

Pictures for Community Advocacy

The impact of the Hope in Shadows Contest on the DTES community opens up an argument for the potentiality of participant-led photography for advocacy. The Hope in Shadows contest demonstrates why Wang and Burris' (2000) model of photovoice can be an example of a

democratic, meaningful, policy-oriented approach. The case-study also raises more questions about how photovoice might be developed in future work.

When discussing the wider neighbourhood, political, and community issues with participants, gentrification, policing and service-provision were key themes, raised repeatedly. The perception of the camera as a powerful tool for related advocacy was explored in the focus groups. I asked participants how they might use photography to express community issues to policy-makers. Sam immediately discussed the need in the community for a First Nations neighbourhood house – specifically for children and for Elders, to encourage relationships and meet social needs. When asked if photography might be a useful way to increase outside understanding of this, he replied "Definitely" and went on to explain how he would approach this:

> Well, I'd take pictures of children interacting with Elders you know – outdoors and indoors – like storytelling and then, then playful activity, nature walks…

The value of the camera as a tool to express the requirements of a complex community with multiple needs seems clear. Photography can be used to capture the community in action – humanising the meanings of statistical data, elucidating quantitative abstraction.

Carl spoke about a project run by DTES residents, involving using photography to record questionable policing in the neighbourhood:

> I worked on 'Cop Watch' – taking photos of cops jacking people up and just …we don't get in their way we just take their pictures. We don't ask – we don't care. It's

happening on the sidewalk, this man's getting himself busted for something, I mean we just want to make sure he's not getting his arm twisted up around his ass and not getting hauled off to jail for something that's unwarranted… I try not to get *his* picture, I try to get a picture of the cops that are…that are dealing with him, right?

Carl recognises the position of power that the camera puts him in and how this contrasts with the vulnerable position of the individual being arrested. The Hope in Shadows contest itself involves a strict etiquette of consent when taking pictures of people in the community (Appendix 2). In Carnegie Community Centre, photographing individuals is banned. It is how the image can be used that becomes contentious, particularly when involving socially excluded individuals. I suggest that in certain circumstances, pictures without people in them might have the desired impact, without the ethical issues that picturing people can involve. Focus group discussion has indicated how the image of the urban space, with the inclusion of individual accounts, can convey personal issues through visual metaphor and symbolic meaning. This style of photography offers a potential alternative route for visual advocacy.

Images for community advocacy allow the involvement of community members at a grassroots level – enabling individuals to provide the initial catalyst for debate in a language that is arguably far more accessible than the formalised, traditional written rhetoric of policy. Photography can enable individuals to reshape, redefine or reclaim their social reality (Chatman, 1996, p.195), removing barriers of hierarchical knowledge or social standing. The Hope in Shadows project is a platform for community access to public representation, Laura states: "The click of the camera, it changed my life – it got me into places I would never, ever be otherwise. I've met politicians." Laura's involvement in the community project allowed her access to the public political realm - an area from which low income individuals are so often excluded.

I suggest that the Hope in Shadows contest does not simply document spaces and places, but creates visual narratives of the DTES that are meaningful to individuals and to groups in both personal and political ways and that these visual narratives can be used to influence positive outcomes for the community.

2.8

These are *Canadian* streets

Pictures for Understanding

There was a general feeling across both discussion groups that the DTES community was positioned as "Other" by the wider Vancouver population:

> David: You get people driving through Hastings Street and Main Street, and all the main streets, at high speed and the vast majority of these people – I don't want to be classist – but the vast majority of these people, they don't even notice what's going on down here, they don't interact with them. It's like...it's like they're driving through some fantasy world that they can't even physically relate to. A very important point - or they don't *want* to, don't *ever* want to.

On asking how photography might be used in a positive way for the community, David responds:

> [To] educate people who don't know about this neighbourhood – maybe never been in an SRO, maybe never been in Carnegie, never been to the UGM (Union Gospel Mission) or Salvation Army, educate them a little bit as to the…the vast majority of people here are ordinary human beings with fears, hopes, desires, pain…they suffer, they feel, and as I said a lot of the people down here are very rich culturally – a lot of

artists. They may not be rich artists but they're – I jokingly refer to myself as a starving poet - but…the best way to educate people is a combination of writing, which is like poetry I do and other stuff. And photography too – good, good well-chosen photographs that are positive – and realistic, you don't wanna set the stage or anything. Realistically, it could help to educate people a lot. The kind of people who make assumptions about this neighbourhood, you know…

The kind of people who know the Downtown Eastside know that it's a mix of good and bad, it's a mix of health and unhealthy…like everywhere in life, it's in every other geographic location on this planet, it's a mix of things. And that's what we are. I'm not…I'm not saying we're super special, that we're all saints down here but we're just a mix of good and bad and healthy and unhealthy, and *that's* what photography can maybe help with.

There is an expressed desire from all who attended the focus groups, for a qualitatively better understanding of the DTES community to be somehow inspired in non-DTES residents. David's commentary emphases the collective desire to be understood as ordinary, complicated human beings. The positioning of themselves in relation to the wider Vancouver population indicates a perceived, unwanted othering of the DTES community enacted by those who do not live in the area. There is a deep-seated feeling that their community is misunderstood, misrepresented and feared by those who live outside neighbourhood borders (Appendix 12). David suggests photography as a medium that might bridge the divide between insider/outsider communities, offering a nuanced understanding of the DTES and resisting the negative media portrayal with realism rather than with an opposing binary.

With the Hope in Shadows contest running for ten years, it might be apposite to look for tangible outcomes – an increasingly visible community with a palpable sense of personal and collective identities, and the development of positive relationships within and outside the

neighbourhood. Talking informally to participants at the camera hand-out and collection, it was clear that the contest has impacted many lives in a positive way by giving residents something to "belong to" and "look forward to", and encouraging residents to see their community "though a new lens" . The Hope in Shadows contest offers a break from first order concerns (Archer, 2003 p.22) such as food, money or the "next fix", encouraging creative thinking and a common community interest.

The focus group responses however, still elicit painful stories and exclusionary experiences. Ron and Danny's exchange expresses a persisting notion of the DTES as a forgotten community:

> Ron: We've all gotta be helping each other because this is the last stop.
>
> Danny: Yeah. There's only ocean now.

Ron and Danny express a feeling that the DTES community remains cut off from the rest of the city and will gain strength only through increased insularity and self-reliance. The idea of the DTES as "the last stop" positions the neighbourhood as a final destination with no further journey to make.

Ron asked the pertinent question: So why hasn't anything changed?

The Hope in Shadows contest provides a platform for communication with the wider city through the presence of the online archive, city exhibitions and calendar sales. The contest goes some way to provide a voice for individuals positioned and/or self-identifying as socially

marginalized and to increase visibility on residents' terms. Nevertheless the community remains excluded, with little evidence of social change as a direct result of the contest and the repeated community representations that it facilitates.

The Hope in Shadows project does not promise change or directly challenge policy. In fact the organisers deliberately position it as being itself outside any direct agenda. My study is undertaken with the aim of learning from the Hope in Shadows model as a template for future participant-led visual work with the propensity to challenge exclusionary norms and work towards tangible, social outcomes. Routes from representation to recognition will be explored in chapter three, with a focus on how the Hope in Shadows contest might provide a model for such impact-driven research and advocacy.

DISCUSSION

The focus group discussions with DTES residents around the Hope in Shadows contest illustrate some of the ways that individuals use photography to represent and (re)assert notions of self and community identity. This chapter explores what this means for the potential of resident-led photography in promoting social inclusion. I discuss how a participatory visual model might enable socially excluded individuals to enter and influence the public sphere – actively claiming recognition within and outside of the DTES neighbourhood. I discuss the already-present avenues taken by the Hope in Shadows project: the online archive, internet /street-calendar sales and city exhibitions, and explore further possibilities offered through citizen journalism and external collaboration with researchers and organisations. This final section of my thesis concludes with my own recommendations for future (visual) community projects in the marginalised urban space.

3.1

The horizon of meaning

Focus Group Reflections

Understanding the intention and reception of images in participant terms is fundamental to understanding community values, issues and aspirations. Writing about photovoice, Harper (2012) states: "The photographs are not important by themselves, but they are important for their role in the lives of those who make them" (Harper, 2012, p.202). My reticence to

undertake my own analysis of the Hope in Shadows archive reflects a realisation that my reception of the photographs cannot transcend the level of Barthes' (2000) "studium" – cultural and/or political interpretations of images. In other words, as a non-DTES resident, I am unable to fully understand what a photograph of the place or of the people means to those who have connections to the neighbourhood. A more nuanced understanding of meaning is contingent on participatory analysis with those closest to the photographs. In the focus groups, participants expressed what might be understood as Barthes' (2000) concept of "punctum", articulated in the emotive responses to the Hope in Shadows images. Participants linked images to their own circumstances, with an understanding that the contest images depicted their own lifeworlds, and the lifeworlds of their family, friends and neighbours. A study of community images, without the inclusion of participant voices would be based on assumption and potential (mis)interpretation. Supporting continued participant involvement, beyond the taking and developing of photographs fosters a culture of inclusion at the level of analysis, setting a precedent for continued involvement in any subsequent development.

The focus groups in the DTES opened up a forum for meaningful discussion around images taken in and of their neighbourhood and community. Discussing community images and personal practice (both within and outside of the Hope in Shadows contest), participants approached meaning-making in the following ways:

- Through directly countering external definitions.
- Through proactive (re)visualisations of the community.
- Through the creation of a (visual) community language.

Photography is understood by focus group participants as a means by which to communicate and understand notions of identity: through pictures taken with the intention to convey an already perceived sense of self, and photographs that can generate a sense of self. These approaches are not mutually exclusive: one image can simultaneously express and inform identities. For example, Danny's angel wings were used to express the good that he sees in his neighbourhood and in himself. At the same time, Danny's sense of self and of his community is (re)asserted and renewed through the photographic act, and through talking about the images produced. I suggest that Proshansky's (1978) concept of place-identity is affirmed through urban photography: connecting the embodied, psychological self to the environment through visual metaphor. This can be seen in Carl and John's reference to pictures without people in the frame, when asked what kind of photograph could represent their own identities. The place-identities of neighbourhood residents are formed through mutual affiliations with the DTES space and place, creating a common ground for community.

In the focus groups, perceptions of the neighbourhood as a marginalised and contested space informed discussions around personal photography and archival images. The excluded status of the neighbourhood was largely attributed to external (mis)representations, driven by the local, provincial and national media. For focus group participants, resident-led photography necessarily becomes an act of social activism, imbued with the potential energy to challenge the "dirty snapshot". The Hope in Shadows contest enables the reclamation of identity, through a photographic reclamation of neighbourhood images. This symbolic act allows representation on resident's terms, nurturing a collective sense of empowerment and creating what I posit as ideal conditions for social action.

3.2

You better have some change on you

Routes to Recognition

To achieve image-based impact outside the DTES, the community must not only be represented, but recognised on their own terms, by "significant others" (Mead, 1964). I define significant others as the wider Vancouver population, service-providers, policy-makers, and local and national media, as identified by focus group participants. The Hope in Shadows project offers distinct avenues to recognition: the archive and online content, street vendor calendar sales and city-wide exhibition.

The Hope in Shadows archive contains the contest photographs in an accessible format. The online archive can be accessed through Flickr directly, through the Hope in Shadows website, and through key word searches in most search engines. The archive allows anybody who is interested in the contest to view images created by DTES residents over the past decade. It is possible to search for specific pictures by photograph name or photographer, and also simply to browse through selections by year. To access the archive one must have a certain level of knowledge about the Hope in Shadows contest (i.e.: that it exists/takes place). Images are often accompanied by text extracts composed by the photographer, some describing content on a basic level with others giving more in-depth detail about intention.

The archive, whether intentionally or incidentally, presents an example of "rephotography" (Harper, 2012) - a visual narrative of the DTES neighbourhood and how it has changed (or not) over the past decade. Barbara Johnstone (1990) describes how the process of telling and

retelling can lead to the universalising of concepts: "A story originally about something that happened to an actual named person, at a particular place and time, gradually becomes a tale which illustrates the sorts of things that can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time" (Johnstone, 1990, p.133). The repeat representation of the DTES through the Hope in Shadows photography invites an understanding of the visual narratives as simultaneously personal and public.

The top twelve images are sold as part of the Hope in Shadows calendar, by street-vendors in the city each year. This is perhaps the most well known circulation of Hope in Shadows images in Vancouver. Individuals buying the calendars range from dedicated customers of street-vendors (who also sell the Megaphone magazine, or who have sold calendars in previous years) to opportunistic customers who chance upon a vendor. Calendars are purchased by individual vendors for $10 and sold on for $20, allowing residents to be involved in the circulation of the community images. While the Hope in Shadows contest offers a break from Archer's first order concerns (2003 p.22) the project simultaneously recognises the low-income community need to make a living from their collective endeavours. The Pivot Legal Society website affirms: "The impact of this project on the financial standing of people living in poverty is significant, with street vendors earning over £0.5 million through calendar sales since 2003." (Pivot Legal Society, 2012) The vendor programme places the distribution and remuneration of the community product in the hands of DTES residents.

The Hope in Shadows website also allows individuals to purchase photographs (from $165). The photograph will be framed and posted out to the customer, with 50% of the profit

received by the photographer. This adds to the entrepreneurial aspect of the contest, which can be simultaneously empowering and restrictive. Images created by participants may generate personal income, but at the same time might create a market-oriented culture, with contestants considering what an outside-consumer may be interested in buying. In turn, this might shape a photographer's motivation and intention when capturing an image for the contest.

Photographs are exhibited in the DTES and in art galleries across the city, following prizes awarded to individuals (October of each year). The exhibition of contest photography moves the resident-made images beyond the sphere of the DTES, out into wider Vancouver. Exhibitions take place in galleries around the city – opening up dialogue with politicians and other influential figures, but remaining largely within the situational context of arts-oriented environments. This approach may arguably perpetuate a surface appreciation or aesthetisication of photographs, an understanding of the project's artistic contribution as an end in itself.

A desire for the images to make increased impact outside the neighbourhood was discussed by focus group participants. The calendars go some way to generate interest and awareness outside the DTES. However, from my own limited conversations with individuals in the wider Vancouver community, knowledge of the contest is restricted. I reiterate that the Hope in Shadows project has no explicit agenda other than the representation of the DTES community – something that it doubtlessly achieves. What I am suggesting, is a case for the process to be opened out and extended, as a useful model for community advocacy - to provide a voice to achieve value-based, resident-led outcomes in local and national contexts.

While the Hope in Shadows contest offers a counter discourse to media (mis)representation, mass-media is accessed more widely by the city, provincial and national population due to circulation and distribution advantages. Mainstream print, broadcast and online media brands are in receipt of funds that DTES residents and most charitable advocacy organisations simply do not have access to and unfortunately, this often correlates to impact.

O'Neill and Seal (2012) explore the use of alternative media in the DTES as offering a counter-discourse to the (negative) dominant tropes of fictive texts and mainstream media (2012, p.138). O'Neill and Seal look specifically at DTES-based AHA media (Vancouver-based social media, created and managed by DTES residents), and Megaphone (the street-level printed newspaper run by Pivot Legal Society). The work explores the fragmented stories of those who live in the neighbourhood, with an emphasis on ideas of resistance and recognition, and highlights the importance of images: "just as the trials, tribulation, joys and successes experienced by an individual become inscribed in his or her face, the same could be said of a community, and that the wellbeing (or otherwise) of a community can be read from the visual images of it" (O'Neill and Stenning, 2011 cited in O'Neill and Seal, 2012, p.154). I suggest that just as we are unable to contextualise a photograph of an individual without hearing their story, we are similarly unable to understand the important intricacies of a community image without taking into account the interpretations of those involved. Citizen journalism can use descriptive dialogue to explain meanings of images on resident terms, to express meaning that might be otherwise lost, either in error or intentionally by outsider-journalists. By virtue of being part of the community in focus, citizen journalists can gain access to images that mainstream media cannot, or will not publish.

Hope in Shadows utilises social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to share information about the annual contest, outcomes and various events. The internet can be used by community members to communicate effectively, using their own language to explain the meanings behind images. However, there are several limitations of utilising the internet, particularly when marginalised communities are concerned. Access to the internet remains a privilege and many low-income DTES residents do not have means of getting online frequently, if at all. Barriers to understanding cannot be broken down overnight, and require a commitment to learning initiatives to support individuals with basic computer-skills. Once online, the increasing commercialisation of free social networking means that information can be filtered through corporate agendas. The phenomenon of the You Tube celebrity - a person whose online presence can be revered, or vilified by a large number of people - could be damaging for individuals who are simply trying to express individual or community ideas. The internet is certainly not free from the dangers of negative framing and misrepresentation, even when the content is ostensibly controlled by community members. Increasing the accessibility and understanding of the internet is integral to the development of online visual initiatives.

3.3

In complex light

Alternative Visual Methods

While still photography has been the focus of this study, it is important to consider alternative participatory visual methods that might be similarly useful in a marginalised urban context.

Focus group participants discussed their neighbourhood and identity in spatial terms – i.e.: Carl's description of how aerial photography could capture community identity, and Sam's description of "looking down Main Street to the mountains" as representing his personal identity. I suggest that participatory video (PV) is an important route to explore in future work. PV involves the creation of collaborative films to communicate community concerns and might allow for a more complex insight into the ways that DTES residents negotiate their urban environment. Unlike photography, film enables a three-dimensional exploration of the urban space, creating a visual, spatial account that allows for the addition of (audible) participant voices.

In her (2011) research project "Community, Politics and Resistance in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside", Maggie O'Neill (2011) used participatory mapping, asking individuals to "draw a map from a place you call home to a special place". This technique allows people to think visually about what is meaningful to them in their neighbourhood and, like urban photography, might encourage explorations of identity that are interlinked with perceptions of place and space. Harper notes: "it is possible in a drawing to leave out information included in a photograph" (2012, p.151). Participant drawings of space and place allow individuals to reimagine their environment and recreate an image without the restrictions of the camera, which to some extent at least, mirrors a setting that must be physically present.

A third example of an alternative visual strategy can be found in the community-arts based approach advocated by Arlene Goldbard (2006). The approach involves the mutual creation of a cultural product, encourages collaboration between arts practitioners and community members. The community artwork is a visual enterprise that can amplify counter-hegemonic

voices, with a physical outcome – for example, in the forms of theatre, mosaic murals and photography.

I contend that while alternative visual methods are available, creative avenues for participatory research and advocacy, still photography lends itself particularly well to participatory visual work. Disposable cameras are relatively inexpensive and can be used by the individual and in a group setting. Unlike PV, still photography allows participants to "frame, freeze and fix" moments in time (Lury, 1998, p.3) inviting a contemplation of the lifeworld that is quite possibly unique to the photographic action.

All methods discussed have one important thing in common: visual work undertaken with participants who self-identify or are labelled as socially excluded can stop short at the stage of representation. Giving somebody a pencil to draw "aspirationally", handing them a video-camera to assert collective issues, or offering them a camera to explore notions of identity will remain a representational exercise if the study stops at the level of analysis. This thesis is deliberately positioned as a call to encourage visual sociology to actively promote the recognition of marginalised communities through advocacy and activism.

3.4

The W

turned towards the sky

External Collaboration

Collaboration with influential individuals with the ability to affect policy is paramount in enabling resident-led images to create impact and catalyse change. Academic or organisation-based researchers with links in local or national government can help raise the profile of community-projects conceived to tackle local issues. I suggest that photovoice methods can enable participants to create the agenda for relevant advocacy, based on their own understandings of community needs. The model that I suggest for such collaboration draws on Paulo Friere's (2006) dialogic educational paradigm in which the oppressed individuals are positioned as co-creators of knowledge. In her (2006) work on community arts practise, Goldbard (2006) voices her hopes for the outcomes of participatory projects, rooted in Friere's pedagogical theory:

> that people facing social exclusion, when given the opportunity to express individual truths in the language of their own creative imaginations, will become aware of their common concerns and common capacity to take action in their own interests and may even join together to actualise that awareness…Second is the wish that gatekeepers and others who wield power will be reached by such expressions, will be moved to respond constructively.

> (Goldbard, 2006, p.14)

O'Neill (2011) used mapping, walking, resident-dialogue, writing and images to explore: "ways of seeing the spaces and places of community through the eyes of DTES residents" The participatory, arts-based project is published by citizen journalist social media organisation AHA Media: presented on resident's terms and through their own online information streams. The project outcomes are described through images of presentation slides, on the AHA media website as including (but not limited to): "creating knowledge and understanding of community and what community means to the DTES residents" and "raising awareness of the lived experiences of residents." O'Neill's (2011) work provides an example of how researchers can collaborate with community-led media initiatives to promote outcomes. O'Neill and Seal (2012) argue for a strategy of representation that enables individuals to take an active role in the collective struggle for recognition, taking into account "the complex realities of the residents' lives" (2012, p.141). The use of various visual strategies in the project opens up creative pathways for residents to explore and express the multiple truths of the DTES.

In their (2005) study: *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver*, Leslie Robertson and Dara Culhane enable DTES women to tell their own stories, in their own words. The editors collaborate with the women involved to mutually "rework their many interviews" creating several chronological accounts. One participant identifies the potential of these narratives "as possible catalysts for service provision" (2005, p.11).

An example of a photovoice project which has moved beyond discussion of images and which has been elevated through researcher collaboration to a platform for change can be seen in the Vancouver-based work of Surita Parashar. Parashar's (forthcoming) participatory action

research project, "The way I see it: a photographic exploration of housing and health among persons living with HIV in Vancouver", utilizes photovoice methodology to explore the impact of unstable housing on the health and well-being of individuals accessing anti-retroviral treatment in British Columbia. Through a collaborative visual project, involving participants, Vancouver Royal Hospital and Simon Fraser University, Parashar seeks to enable a multidirectional understanding of human experiences. The exhibition of participant-work in Woodward's W2 Media Café (Appendix 12) brought participant experiences to DTES neighbourhood and wider public attention. Here, the gentrified nature of the Woodward's site worked somewhat in participant favour – allowing both in-group (DTES resident) and out-group (wider Vancouver population) exposure to the work. Parashar's next steps involve connecting her work to policy agendas. She admits that this will be a struggle but believes that photovoice is an empowering route for participatory health-practise, involving the individuals at the focus of debate, and equipping them with the tools to represent their own circumstances on their own terms, using their images to inform housing providers and health practitioners of their needs.

My facilitated focus group discussion pointed to issues in the DTES surrounding urban planning/policy – specifically gentrification, service-provision, policing, and media (mis)representation. Working with a researcher or organisation could enable participants to get their voices heard by a wider audience and position their voices in an appeal for tangible outcomes, informing the direction of research and advocacy.

3.5

The semantic heart

Recommendations

Drawing on my fieldwork analysis, I will conclude my study with what I hope are informed, apposite recommendations for future visual projects involving socially excluded individuals in the city.

Picturing a person-centred approach

Discussions with participants about the contest photography emphasised the importance of a reflexive, person-centred approach. The role of the researcher in the person-centred context is to allow for a free-play of creativity and discussion that may or may not deviate from original expectations. Using community photography in research can position the participant as the expert. I argue for an understanding of the researcher role in a curatorial framework, arranging the fragmented accounts of individuals and involving participants in any editorial process so as to retain intention and meaning as far as possible. This will ideally involve participant involvement in every stage of research, and necessarily so if working towards tangible social change in the name of those involved.

Picturing place-identity

My study has indicated the significant relationship that the camera can reveal between the embodied individual and their sense of place and space – the "entanglements of the individual

and the city" (Lancione, 2011). Understanding urban photography as personal or collectively

conceived visual metaphor can subvert external semiotic coding practices and place the

images in the hands of the community, who can explicate relevant intentions and

interpretations. The potential link between self and place identity must be taken into special

consideration when working with individuals in any urban-based research context.

Picturing tangible outcomes

Working with the community in question towards tangible outcomes is extremely important.

Taking and talking about images allows a degree of control of personal representation.

However, if these discussions remain limited to insular debate, the exercise is restricted to the

symbolic realm, with no actual impact in the social world. Bourgois and Schonberg state: "It

is politically and analytically gratifying to engage with critical theory, but we also need to

operate at the level of immediate policy options and specific local interventions" (2009,

p.297). I suggest that photovoice methods have the capacity to influence, and must extend

impact outside of academia, to inspire policy networks and catalyse change. There is much

work to be done with regards to persuading policy-makers to adopt more humanised, visual

routes for research and advocacy. While my study advocates such a framework, it is a

theoretical argument towards using this approach in future research. As such, I was conscious

throughout my fieldwork that unlike Parashar (forthcoming), the contributions that

individuals are making to my work will have no direct outcome for the group recruited. This

is something that I will endeavour to work towards correcting in my own future projects.

Picturing social inclusion

This thesis provides an argument towards the potential of resident-led photography to use the image to understand ourselves and our world, to frame our lifeworlds in order to enable self-representation, assert normative claims and imagine aspirational scenarios. Visual representation can lead to recognition and catalyse social change through collaborative action-research frameworks as demonstrated in Parashar's (forthcoming) photovoice project. Resident-led photography also enables individuals to present "personal troubles" in the context of wider neighbourhood or "public issues" (Mills, 1959). For DTES residents, however, the understanding of "public" remains restricted by spatial and emotional boundaries. Focus group participants discussed how they felt abandoned by the Vancouver police and ignored or aestheticized by wider city residents. I suggest that participatory visual methods with a resident-led agenda for advocacy can work towards breaking down barriers between marginalised communities such as the DTES, and "significant others" (Mead, 1964).

Through a discussion of contest images such as "The Hug" (Bronwyn Elko, 2003), focus group participants demonstrated how images can provide the stimulus for normative claims to (multiple) truths. Through the use of angel wings as visual cues, Danny demonstrated how photography can be used to portray his community in a positive light. Through picturing the disappeared, Carl demonstrated how the DTES community can actively retain a significant role in the explication of symbolic meaning to outside audiences. Through community photography, the Downtown Eastside can be presented as a multi-faceted, complex space. Resident-led representations are at once personal and collective, overlapping, intersecting and

running through the veins of the neighbourhood, with the potential energy to inform

significant others of their values, issues and aspirations.

David states:

> But you know the best way of reaching people in London or Vancouver or
> Birmingham or Toronto or anywhere else is to educate people – to let people know
> what the real people of this neighbourhood…what the real people get up to.

Echoing the sentiment of Friere (2006) I suggest that this education must be dialogical in

nature, undertaken with and from the vantage-point of excluded communities, encouraging

affirmative social presence through the amplification of grassroots voices. I position the

camera as a tool to promote a qualitative increase in mutual understanding, to picture and

make possible social inclusion in the city.

An invitation to an open discussion:

"PHOTOGRAPHY, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY IN THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE"

Image credit: Point and Click from Parada Creations

All Downtown Eastside residents are invited to attend a discussion group on the theme of *Photography, Identity and Community* in the Classroom at Carnegie Community Centre on

Wednesday 6th June between **5pm - 7pm**

Free coffee and cookies will be provided as well as an opportunity to talk with others in your neighbourhood about photography in the DTES.

The discussion group will be facilitated by Natalie Robinson (University of Birmingham, UK) as part of my Master's research into the impact of photography in the community. I would value your contributions.

An invitation to an open discussion:

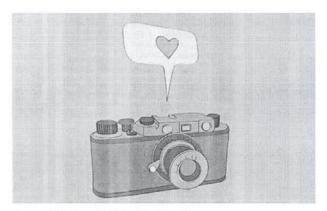## "PHOTOGRAPHY, IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY IN THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE"

Image credit: Point and Click from Parada Creations

All Downtown Eastside residents are invited to attend a discussion group on the theme of *Photography, Identity and Community* in the Classroom at Carnegie Community Centre on

Friday 8th June between 1pm - 4pm

Free coffee and cookies will be provided as well as an opportunity to talk with others in your neighbourhood about photography in the DTES.

The discussion group will be facilitated by Natalie Robinson (University of Birmingham, UK) as part of my Master's research into the impact of photography in the community. I would value your contributions.

Participant Information: Focus Group.

Research Brief:

My research will explore the use of photography in representing or (re)creating personal and community identities. I focus specifically on the 'Hope in Shadows' project, which involves the annual distribution of disposable cameras to individuals in the Downtown Eastside area who have the opportunity to use photography to capture their neighbourhood in a contest context. The contest will celebrate its 10th year in 2012, making my project a timely investigation into the impact over a decade.

This research is for a Master's thesis that I (Natalie Robinson) am undertaking at the University of Birmingham in the UK, supervised by Dr Danielle Fuller (Senior Lecturer in Canadian Studies). The title of my programme is 'Cultural Inquiry'. I am not being paid to do this research.

My research objectives are as follows:

1. To explore how repeat representation can (re)create perceptions of individual and community identities.

2. To understand the impact of photographic practice on individuals and groups in areas with a high percentage of individuals labelled or self-identifying as socially marginalised.

3. To make recommendations regarding the use of photography in social research.

Your Contribution:

The views and opinions that you express during the focus group will contribute to my research.

Audio-recordings are subject to unanimous consent from the group. Any audio-recordings will be used only for transcription purposes (to make a full written copy of what is said), and not in any public presentation, to preserve anonymity of all participants.

The research will be available to the public and will be accessible through the University of Birmingham library and online. The research may be published or presented in whole or in part.

You will not be named in my research: in this respect your contribution will be anonymous.

Right to Withdraw:

All participants have the right not to answer any particular question(s) as asked in the focus group.

You have the right to withdraw from research (in whole or in part) during or after the focus group. You will be granted a 28 day window to raise any concerns. Any comments received after **4th July** will be recognised in a postscript to my work, but may still be contained in the main body of the thesis.

To withdraw following the focus group, please email me nxr671@bham.ac.uk and let me know the comments that you made which you wish to retract. Those without access to email please contact staff at Carnegie Community Centre, who will pass this information on to me. I will then send you written confirmation via Carnegie Community Centre.

Equality and Diversity Monitoring:

The purpose of the Equality and Diversity Monitoring sheet is to enable me to understand how those with whom I speak reflect the wider Downtown Eastside population. You have the right to disclose as much or as little information as you wish.

Further Information:

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to ask me in person or via email, before, during or post-research.

Further information after the event can be obtained by emailing me at nxr671@bham.ac.uk. If you do not have access to the internet, I am contactable through Carnegie Community Centre who will pass a message onto me in writing and I will endeavour to respond within 7 working days of receipt of any correspondence.

You are also welcome to access the outcomes of my research. A copy of the thesis itself - as well as feedback from the event in a shorter, written format - will be sent to Carnegie Community Centre and available from January 2013. I am happy to send this information on request in an electronic format on to any email addresses and welcome any feedback from participants and/or DTES residents.

Participant Information

Research Brief:

My research will explore the use of photography in representing or (re)creating personal and community identities. I focus specifically on the 'Hope in Shadows' project, which involves the annual distribution of disposable cameras to individuals in the Downtown Eastside area who have the opportunity to use photography to capture their neighbourhood in a contest context. The contest will celebrate its 10th year in 2012, making my project a timely investigation into the impact over a decade.

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The research will be available to the public and will be accessible through the University of Birmingham library and online. The research may be published or presented in whole or in part.

You will not be named in my research: in this respect your contribution will be anonymous.

Right to Withdraw:

All participants have the right not to answer any particular question(s) as asked in the interview.

You have the right to withdraw from research (in whole or in part) during or after the focus group. You will be granted a 28 day window to raise any concerns. Any comments received after 4th July 2012 will be recognised in a postscript to my work, but may still be contained in the main body of the thesis.

To withdraw from research, please email me nxr671@bham.ac.uk and let me know the comments that you made which you wish to retract. Those without access to email please contact staff at Carnegie Community Centre (admin office) who will pass this information on to me. I will then send you written confirmation via your contact.

Equality and Diversity Monitoring:

The purpose of the Equality and Diversity Monitoring sheet is to enable me to understand how those with whom I speak reflect the wider Downtown Eastside population. You have the right to disclose as much or as little information as you wish.

Further Information:

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to ask me in person or via email, before, during or post-research.

Further information after the event can be obtained by emailing me at nxr671@bham.ac.uk. If you do not have access to the internet, I am contactable through staff at Carnegie Community Centre (admin office) who can pass a message onto me via email and I will endeavour to respond within 7 working days of receipt of any correspondence.

You are also welcome to access the outcomes of my research. A copy of the thesis itself - as well as feedback from the event in a shorter, written format - will be sent to Carnegie Community Centre and available from January 2013. I am happy to send this information on request in an electronic format on to any email addresses and welcome any feedback from participants and/or DTES residents.

APPENDIX 8

Participant Declaration.

1. I have received and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

2. I understand that I have participated willingly in the interview for research, with knowledge of the intentions of the study: a Master's research project into photography and the representation and creation of identity in Downtown Eastside Vancouver.

3. I understand that all views expressed and information given in this interview may be included in a thesis which may be published and/or presented orally at conferences in whole or in part.

4. I understand that the study is anonymous in so far as my name will not be published in the research.

5. I understand my right to withdraw any information or views expressed. I can withdraw from the study verbally or in writing, on the day of the focus group and any time in the 14 days following the study.

6. I understand the purpose of the Equality and Diversity Monitoring sheet and understand that I have the right to refuse to disclose information.

7. I understand how to access further information regarding my participation and the study itself as explained on the Participant Information Sheet.

Print Name:...............................

Signed.....................................

Date:...

APPENDIX 9

Audio-Recording Consent Form

Please delete below as applicable.

I consent / do not consent to the audio-recording of this focus group via a Dictaphone device.

I understand that this means the discussions that take place in the session will be audio-recorded for the purposes of playing back and transcribing what is captured (i.e.: **to make a full written copy of what is said**).

I understand that the audio-recording will be used for the above purpose alone which will form part of Natalie Robinson's Master's thesis. Audio-recordings will not be used for any public presentation, to preserve anonymity of all participants.

Signed……………………………………………………………………….

Date…………………….............

APPENDIX 10

Equality and Diversity Monitoring Form

1. Age

Age (please specify): …………….

Prefer not to disclose: ☐

2. Gender

Do you identify as:

Male: ☐

Female: ☐

Other : ☐   (please specify) ………………………………………………….

Prefer not to disclose: ☐

3. Ethnic Group

How do you identify your ethic group?

White

White Canadian…………………………………☐

White French-Canadian……………………☐

White European…………………………………☐

Any other White background………………☐

(please specify):

………………………………………………………………

Black

Black African………………………………… ☐

Black Canadian……………………………… ☐

Black French-Canadian……………………. ☐

Black Caribbean……………………………… ☐

Any other Black background (please specify):

……………………………………………………………….

Indigenous

First Nations…………………………………… ☐

Inuit……………………………………………… ☐

Métis……………………………………………… ☐

Any other indigenous background………. ☐

(please specify): ……………………………………

Chinese

Chinese………………………………………… ☐

Vietnamese

Vietnamese…………………………………… ☐

Japanese

Japanese……………………………………… ☐

Asian

Indian…………………………………………☐

Pakistani………………………………………☐

Bangladeshi……………………………………☐

Any other Asian background………………☐

(Please specify)……………………………………………

Arab or Middle Eastern Descent

Arab……………………………………………☐

Iraqi……………………………………………☐

Kurdish…………………………………………☐

Other Arab

or Middle Eastern Descent…………………☐

(Please specify):……………………………………………

Mixed race:

Mixed race……………………………………☐

(Please specify):…………………………………………

Any other ethnic background……………☐

(Please specify):

……………………………………………………………..

Prefer not to disclose…………………………☐

4. Sexual Orientation

How do you identify your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual………………………………………………☐

Homosexual………………………………………………☐

Bisexual……………………………………………………☐

Other (please specify):

……………………………………………………………………

Prefer not to disclose………………………………☐

5. **Religious Belief**

How do you identify your religious belief(s):

Christian (Protestant)………………………………☐

Christian (Catholic)……………………………………☐

Christian (Other)………………………………………☐

Please specify:………………………………………

Native Beliefs……………………………………………. ☐

Please specify:………………………………………

Hindu…………………………………………………………☐

Sikh……………………………………………………………☐

Muslim………………………………………………………☐

Buddhist……………………………………………………☐

Agnostic……………………………………………………☐

Atheist………………………………………………………☐

Other…………………………………………………………☐

Please specify…………………………………………….

Prefer not to disclose………………………………☐   **Thank you for your time!!**

APPENDIX 11

FOCUS GROUP FORMAT

Introduction and refreshments

Participant Information sheet

Participant Declaration

Audio-recording form

Equality and Diversity form.

Reiteration of Right to Withdraw and methods to contact NR.

Reiteration of independence from Pivot Legal Society/ The Hope in Shadows contest itself.

Questions:

- What kind of photographs have you taken of your neighbourhood/would you like to take of your neighbourhood?
- What is your own perception of your neighbourhood?
- How do you think that your neighbourhood is represented?
- What kind of photographs do you feel most accurately represent the DTES?
- How would you like to see your neighbourhood represented?
- What does the Hope in Shadows contest, or photography in general mean for you and/or for your community?
- Do you have any aspirations for your neighbourhood, and if so, what are they?
- How do you think photography might be used for community advocacy?
- Do you have any other comments?

This list of questions represents my own notes for each focus group. Actual sessions were subject to direction by participants.

Transcripts available from the author on request

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