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ABSTRACT

Community art is increasingly coming under scrutiny by urban leaders. Art contributes to vibrant communities, which often promotes economic vitality and liveability. Art is also a vehicle to express political and cultural beliefs. However, neighbourhoods with large artist populations often change as lower income residents gradually give way to elites attracted to urban beautification. How do artists respond to this contradiction? Do they agree that they are the “colonial arm of the conventional middle class” (Ley 2003)? I examine organizations and artists active on Commercial Drive, Vancouver to look at artists as both gentrifiers and social advocates. Through interviews and participant observation, I identify a framing discourse of artists trying to live a lifestyle that is critically aware, socially responsible and joyful. I argue that although artists promote change, they do not feel responsible for gentrification. Instead, they often resist gentrification and blame elites for negative community development.

Keywords: art; neighbourhoods; local politics; wellbeing; citizenship; myth

Subject Terms: urban geography; art; social advocacy; gentrification
DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my wonderful partner Katie Ormiston, who dealt with the frustrations of writing remarkably well and celebrated my victories with style. I also dedicate this thesis to my three children — Anya, Zoë and Joel. Thank you for enriching my life and helping keep my imagination young.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Eugene McCann, my senior supervisor, for his patience, advice and comments. His critical judgement and support has been a guiding force in this project. I also thank Dr. Geoff Mann, my other departmental supervisor for comments and insight that I would never have considered. Thank you to Dr. Kirsten McAllister, my external examiner from the Communications Department at SFU and Dr. Nick Blomley who chaired my thesis defence. I must not forget the Geography Department, especially Marcia Crease’s calm reassurance. Also to my fellow students – thank you for your encouragement and commiseration, great thoughts, shared papers and beer.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objective

The Commercial Drive area of East Vancouver is a neighbourhood that is undergoing socio-economic changes that some describe as gentrification. Yet, it still contains a strong artistic and politically active community where active, participatory citizenship is evident. Participatory citizenship is constituted through the strategies of group membership where action and participation is a large factor in defining the rights to spaces controlled by the group (Isin 2002; Secor 2004). Local events, festivals and a thriving commons are the key intersections where a variety of ethnic and artistic communities construct a strong neighbourhood identity.

Seen as one of the ‘hip’ neighbourhoods in the city, ‘The Drive,’ as the neighbourhood is popularly known, has become an increasingly attractive place to live. Thus, rents have increased, some of the groups that initially defined the area are ageing or have left, and incomes have shifted upward. However, there are many people who live below the poverty line, including many homeless, who appear to prefer this area to others in the city despite the changes. This may be due to the liberal and tolerant social landscape of the neighbourhood, something upon which interviewees have commented. At the same time, there has been a higher policing focus in public spaces due to increased numbers of complaints concerning panhandlers, public drunkenness, etc. (Sommers et al., 2005). The ‘realness’ of Commercial Drive’s ethnic shops, yoga studios, music venues and government assistance offices sits in conjunction with the strong identity of the neighbourhood embedded in diversity, community, socially liberal ethics, activism and
the arts. It is the connection between the arts and neighbourhood change that I wish to explore.

Much of the research that investigates links between the arts and the city argues that arts and cultural organizations make neighbourhoods safe for investment and gentrification by beautifying the built environment (Deutsche, 1996; Ley, 1996, 2003; Markuson and King, 2003; Quinn, 2005; Whitt, 1987). In addition, this literature suggests that arts groups reuse infrastructure (e.g. converting warehouses into artist studios), encourage increased community participation (such as local festivals) and promote an abundance of interactive diversity at street level. This, in turn, encourages property speculation and an increase in commercial as well as residential property values. Markuson and King (2003) further claim that there is a direct correlation between an increase in the number of artists and art organizations in these sorts of areas and the strength of their economy. Neoliberal discourse, argues Deutsche (1996), frames public art as being useful only as long as it is both aesthetically pleasing and functional/utilitarian, encouraging development and other capital flows into the city. Ley (1996, 2003), posits that artists (and others, such as political activists and students) in their quest for diversity, ‘bohemian chic’\(^1\), originality and socially liberal values are the unintentional harbingers of change, paving the way for those not willing to invest time and money into ‘high-risk’ areas. Artists then, are “risk-oblivious” gentrifiers (Sullivan, 

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\(^{1}\) Designer Savannah Miller described a “real bohemian” as “someone who has the ability to appreciate beauty on a deep level, is a profound romantic, doesn’t know any limits, whose world is their own creation, rather than living in a box”. Attached to chic, which is seen as a style that reflects upper-class elegance and trendiness, Bohemian Chic has a shallow feel. It is based on floty trends that seem to be constantly re-emerging; the clothes are often layered, with a neo-hippy/gypsy look and can be attributed to elitism, fashion and style because of the adoption of these trends by celebrities and fashion journalists (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemian_chic). However, even as Commercial Drive is associated with this look, a quick walk down The Drive reveals this to be a minority, with variations of this look popping up throughout different communities that populate the neighbourhood, one of which could be described in this shallow way.
who assist in the production of interesting and tolerant neighbourhoods through a political, anti-materialist stance. Neighbourhood upgrading and change also occurs intentionally through alliances between developers and artists (Ley, 1996; Whitt, 1987). For example, Whitt (1987) suggests New York City adopted strategies to promote the arts in combination with development since city leaders and business people felt that tourism and other consumption oriented activities were integral components to the economic base of the city. It is these neighbourhoods that people such as creative class elites – well educated, upper-middle class, urbanites – find attractive (Florida, 2002). As he writes, “Regional economic growth is driven by the location choices of creative people – the holders of creative capital – who prefer places that are diverse, tolerant, and open to new ideas” (2002, 223).

Art is commodified and artists’ work is implicated, whether wittingly or unwittingly, in increasing urban land values because of its role in making neighbourhoods attractive to investors. However, even as artists are the precursors, indeed catalysts, of gentrification, they also frequently resist it when the development process begins in earnest (Ley, 1996). Art organizations are often activist in nature, promoting inclusion in the face of demographic and economic shifts that threaten to unmake the citizenship of some (Quinn, 2005). Artists and their organizations often oppose the growth machine (Logan & Molotch, 1987), practicing a politics that involves group solidarity and agonism (Isin, 2002). This politics opposes neoliberal understandings of art as commodity and market-based definitions of artistic success. So, although art can be a symbol and vehicle of dominant ideologies, portrayed through a landscape of monuments (Sharp et al., 2005; Waterman, 1998), it is also a social context where the framing discourse of neoliberalism is questioned and subverted, providing ideas and spaces of action that encourage
neighbourhood belonging and action-based citizenship (Deutsche, 1996; Rose, 1997). This tension between art as a social justice project and art as a gentrification strategy produces tensions within art organizations as they seek to negotiate, rationalize, or resist their paradoxical position vis-à-vis neighbourhood development.

It is necessary to look at art as contributing directly to the process of identity formation and citizenship, for many artists reside near the core of this ‘radical project’: they can be said to be “quintessential resistance fighter[s] to straight society” (Ley 1996, 188). This radical project is what Isin (2002) calls ‘being political’ – that moment of struggle and change, when alternative narratives become illuminated as they are pushed into public view. This occurs through what the individuals that make up the neighbourhood communities – the local citizens – actually do. The neighbourhood is a site of collective identity formation where citizenship moves from being “just passive consumption into active participation” (Public Dreams Society, n.d., n.p.; Lepofsky & Fraser, 2002).

The art that groups of people produce and present to the neighbourhood involves negotiation, struggle and conflict to produce solidarity and inclusion/exclusion both among residents and within art organizations themselves. This means power struggles between individuals and groups, often pitting formal politics against neighbourhood coalitions, who compete to have their ideologies recognized and accepted in order to frame the discourse of who/what is a citizen and in turn provide a strong narrative that helps define the neighbourhood. Art organizations need to renegotiate their own visions and mandates as narratives change in the face of economic and social shifts. This is imperative for art organizations associated with specific spaces, since the various processes that encourage attachment to place at least partly inform people’s identity.
Identity is central to my interest in artists and art organizations that have mandates to foster citizenship in particular neighbourhoods. Consequently, my research sits at the intersection of the arts, neighbourhood identity, and urban citizenship. My research question is:

How do artists and art groups resolve the contradiction between their real or potential contribution to a politics of inclusion, on the one hand, and their real or potential role in assisting gentrification processes that effectively change who does or does not belong in a neighbourhood, on the other?

1.2 Contribution

The contribution of artists to neighborhood and sub-regional economies begs to be researched. ... there are pressing policy evaluation agendas waiting for talent and resources ... (Markuson and King 2003, 22).

Some researchers, such as Markuson and King, are beginning to look at the roles that artists play in local area economies. Indeed, they acknowledge the need for more focus on artists and their contributions to society. With research needed in this area, Rosalyn Deutsche (1996) goes further by arguing that artists are often valued and rated only through their economic and utilitarian uses by academics, politicians and business leaders. Geographic research that involves art (especially neighbourhood or community based art) often ignores the social and political contributions of the arts. Artists often rely on the generosity of government and NGO granting agencies. This means that their focus can shift towards economic justifications in order to qualify for funds. This is especially true as the Creative Class thesis becomes ingrained in the everyday trappings of municipal politics. Although a significant amount of my research acknowledges and explores the economic contributions of community art, my focus on the social and
political means that the exploration of community citizenship is paramount. This thesis is valuable for academics, activists, planners, and others interested in understanding the complexity of liveable neighbourhoods.

1.3 Methodology

This project mixes three qualitative methods: document analysis, participant observation and semi-structured interviews (Table 1).

1.3.1 Document Analysis

I spent a significant portion of my time at the beginning of this project conducting reviews and research in social science literature, City of Vancouver publications and other documents regarding Commercial Drive. This meant that I not only read peer reviewed books, articles and reviews but I also watched videos and read newspapers, blogs and pamphlets that dealt with relevant subject matter. I was able to study Vancouver's policy regarding the arts and municipal support for the arts as well as provide a description (demographic, historical, physical characteristics, boundaries) of Commercial Drive and its current context, with particular attention to the arts in the neighbourhood and to the political activities of residents and organizations. I also searched for and read about various art organizations that were based in or had strong connections to the Commercial Drive neighbourhood. When I narrowed my research to three art organizations that would serve as case studies, I researched the basic frameworks and mandates of each one to create contacts and understand the basic framework of each group. This helped me learn about the governance, structure and history of each group as well as highlight their visions and mandates. The three organizations I have chosen are
Public Dreams Society (PDS), In The House Festival (ITHF), and The Black Crow Project (BCP). Public Dreams Society is a large organization that puts on neighbourhood festivals such as The Parade of the Lost Souls at Halloween. It’s success means that PDS now also provides services to community groups, municipalities and corporations for parties and community events. In The House Festival is dedicated to bringing the arts to the private spaces of the neighbourhood, namely living rooms and backyards. The Black Crow Project’s mandate is to bring the arts, primarily local musicians together in community to raise funds for the homeless and mentally ill.

Table 1: Methods and data sources

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>Websites and documents; pamphlets; various City of Vancouver documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Dreams Society</td>
<td>Websites and documents; pamphlets; various City of Vancouver documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>In The House Festival</td>
<td>Websites and documents; pamphlets; various City of Vancouver documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Crow Project</td>
<td>Websites and documents; pamphlets; posters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other organizations (e.g., Car Free Days Festival, East Vancouver Culture Crawl)</td>
<td>Websites and documents; pamphlets; posters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Vancouver</td>
<td>Websites and documents; various City of Vancouver documents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Interviews                                | a) Public Dreams Society: 3  
b) In The House Festival: 1  
c) Black Crow Project: 4  
d) Other art organizations: 2  
e) Local artists, residents and activists: 4 |
c) Volunteered Illuminaries 2007.  
| Public Dreams Society                     | a) 2007 attended two events  
b) 2007 host event and volunteer  
c) 2008 played music at annual festival in spring |
| In The House Festival                     | a) 2006 volunteer at inaugural event  
b) 2007 volunteer at 2 events; played music at 2 events (one of which was Rock for Insite) |
1.3.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation is a method of researching social activities and practices in which the researcher becomes, to some degree, an active participant (Jary & Jary 1991). I participated in different capacities for each organization. (1) I have known of, and participated in events by, Public Dreams Society for about ten years. For my research, I began as a volunteer in the summer of 2007 at Illuminaries Lantern Festival at Trout Lake. This festival of lights celebrates community spirit where people put up light displays and performances and/or carry lanterns in a procession around the lake. I also worked extensively with many of their members and employees at the Burnaby Village Museum for the annual Haunted Village celebrations, where I am employed as the museum's Design Supervisor. Finally, I have been a participant in Illuminaries and the Parade of the Lost Souls festivals for a number of years. I took field notes at these two festivals in 2007. I observed and reflected on the participation of attendees, the attitudes of volunteers and organizers and the overall organization of the festivals.

(2) In The House Festival was a much less familiar organization. It is an organization that promotes art performances and a large festival in homes and backyards in The Drive neighbourhood. I found out about this organization through reading a Commercial Drive blog (http://thedriveisalive.blogspot.com) and decided to attend a show in the spring of 2007 as part of my research. I then attended another later that summer before interviewing members. In late 2007, I volunteered my home as a space for an In The House Festival and hosted a music night of local folk and bluegrass artists. Finally, in 2008, I played with my band in the organization's signature spring festival. I took field notes that considered the organization of the festival, the homes of hosts, the
attitudes and demographics of both participants and performers for all events that I attended or performed.

(3) The Black Crow Project is made up of people I have known in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood for about five years. I volunteered at their inaugural event in November 2006 at the East Vancouver Cultural Centre by helping decorate, advertise and sell tickets. I then went on to volunteer and play at three other events, culminating with playing in my band at the ‘Rock for Insite’ performance with the Downtown Eastside Heart of the City Festival. Once again, I took notes.

1.3.3 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen people. I recorded all of the interviews with a digital recorder and then transcribed them myself. In a number of instances, I sent follow-up emails to interviewees asking for clarification or additional information. Most interviews were around 55 minutes long although two were just under 40 minutes and two were well over 75 minutes.

All of the interviewees, except one\(^2\), lived in and around Commercial Drive and all considered the neighbourhood to have played a large role in their lives. I found my initial interviewees in two ways: first through my own personal contacts and second by searching official websites of the three art organizations. At the end of each interview, I would inquire as to whether I could interview other members of the organization or if they recommended other artists or residents. Many of the people I interviewed are quintessential ‘Commercial Drive people.’ They are passionate, love their neighbourhood.

\(^2\) This person had lived in the neighbourhood for thirteen years before moving to another city. I was fortunate to be able to interview the interviewee here when the interviewee was visiting Vancouver.
and never want to leave. Some have lived there for four years but have wanted to live here for twenty while others, such as one woman who was born on The Drive only some months after moving from Europe in 1922, have lived here for most of their lives.  

1.3.4 Research Challenges

In my research, I encountered two major challenges. First, interviewees invariably contradicted themselves, especially when they spoke passionately about their work with art and people. For example, many interviewees felt that it was unfair that academics suggest that art plays a role in gentrification. They were annoyed and defended artists and art organizations. However, in the same interview people often admitted that they might do things that attract people with higher incomes and developers. Although I was not surprised about the contradictions, it was interesting that artists opposed to gentrification saw no contradiction with the fact that they consciously ‘upgraded’ their neighbourhood and changed it in obvious ways. This meant that I needed to accept that people could be against an outcome but support processes that achieve change (change that was both negative and positive for new and original residents and workers). Second, I found that my research question did not match my findings. I was looking for a simple paradox. Instead, my findings have been much more complex. I found that the either/or regime does not work. Like other people, artists are different, fluid and changing as well as dynamic, emotional and driven. Art organizations do not fall into simple groupings and cannot be compartmentalized into a dichotomy of such drastic difference. This affected my work because I realised that I was writing about the

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3 See Appendix I for a set of typical interview topics.
identities, stories and myths of people in a neighbourhood undergoing change. In addition, I had to be mindful of the effects that municipal policy, political economy, and development on neighbourhoods and their connections with community artists and organizations. Thus, I have found that 'the paradox' is more a multiplicity or spectrum of contradictions and attitudes that do not fall neatly into folders or classification.

In terms of methodology, I found two things that have changed the way I wrote the thesis. First, I was only able to interview one person, the founder and director, of the In The House Festival. Every other member of this group missed interview appointments, responded only to first-run emails or phone calls or simply was not interested in talking. I suspect that the reasons for this are that all In The House Festival members are volunteers and they do not have the time that others like the younger generation of people in the Black Crow Project have because they seem to be homeowners with families. Second, I found that it was a challenge to integrate my ethnographic research into the thesis. When I began my writing, I felt that I would rely heavily on my field notes from participant observation for information about art organizations and related events. I have found that my observations and experiences with the art and culture events, organizations and the people involved have had a different outcome. Generally, my participation in each organization has provided me with inherent and sociological knowledge that only experiencing through activity can do. I found that Steve Herbert was quite right in his argument that ethnographies are important in understanding the nuances of human interaction in geographic research. He writes, "These observations and interactions [with a social group] enable the ethnographer to understand how the group develops a skein of relations and cultural constructions that tie it together" (Herbert 2000, 551). In other words, the experience of participant
observation has helped me tremendously to integrate the linkages, practices and characteristics of the people and organizations into my work. By actively participating, I started to understand the complexity of the groups and people I was researching. A challenge here was to not get too involved and wrapped up in the events to the extent that I needed to be conscious of my own biases and preferences. Editing has helped tremendously in that regard. These experiences have informed my interview and document research.

1.4 Thesis Organization

The thesis consists of six chapters. In this introduction, I have provided an overview of the project, including my research statement and methodology. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature and theory that I use to guide my research, using Engin Isin's (among others) understanding of citizenship and politics. I also draw from Anne Markuson's insight concerning the contributions and implications of art in both economic and social spheres. Chapter 3 looks at Vancouver and its fixation on creative class ideology and the power of development. The chapter then turns to Commercial Drive and its ability to maintain a hegemonic narrative of a small town feel, bohemian status and ethnically diverse population. Art organizations and artists, I argue, are integral in solidifying the story of Commercial Drive. Chapter 4 explores the strength of this narrative in neighbourhood politics and activism. I argue that resistance and the politics of otherness are integral to neighbourhood stability because it helps perpetuate local myths – stories that provide substance to identity and the essence of the community. Art organizations and artists, I suggest, play a formative role in this politics. Chapter 5 details theories guiding my examination of the role of artists in the neighbourhood and the
artists' contributions to community wellbeing and participatory citizenship. I illustrate the paradox of how artists change neighbourhoods and make them more attractive to the people that they are, in a sense, trying to get away from – the ‘conventional’ middle class as David Ley (2003) identifies. More specifically, however, I demonstrate how artists contribute to the myth of the neighbourhood as an urban village by providing a socially constructed world-view that is not necessarily fact-based but is instead founded on the rituals and historical traditions of Commercial Drive. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a discussion of my findings and further implications of this research.
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the literature and theory that I use to guide my research, using as a discourse framework Engin Isin’s understanding of citizenship and politics at its centre. I also draw from Anne Markusen’s insights into the contributions and implications of art in both economic and social spheres. There is a large body of academic literature that focuses on the roles that arts and culture play in the competitive, post-industrial city. Some literature focusing on city policy and planning consistently mentions the importance of a vibrant arts and cultural sector in sustaining economic growth in the city and some of that literature develops normative statements about how the city should be governed in order to promote these sectors (Florida 2002; Latham 2003; Gospodini 2005). According to Florida, the arts play an important role in attracting his so-called ‘creative class’ to particular cities since the arts and culture segments of cities provide the desirable qualities of diversity and tolerance. Art is seen as “the key element in building added value in the modern knowledge economy” (Sacco, Williams & Bianco 2007, 1). Alternatively, academics such as Ley (1996, 2003), Martin (2003) and Markuson (2003) concerned with social justice, pay particular attention to the role the arts plays in the gentrification of urban neighbourhoods, often providing a sober, critical perspective on the negative implications of urban development and the way the arts implicates itself in these processes.

Researchers also analyse how the arts can be part of a strategy to create spaces of belonging in the city, especially within neighbourhoods (Martin 2003; Quinn 2005; Sharp et al. 2005). They demonstrate how the arts can be a vehicle for subversion, transgression
and resistance in the face of a consumption-oriented society that has commodified much of individual and community life. Authors such as Ley (1996, 2003) recognize that artists and arts groups can be both political protesters in a society focussed on consumption, with social justice mandates and promoters of urban development and gentrification. This work notwithstanding, there is little detailed empirical research on this paradox in the identity of artists, arts groups or art organizations, on the way artists resolve this contradiction among themselves, or on the impacts of the paradox on urban neighbourhoods and urban citizenship.

The following section provides a general overview of current research on the impact of art and culture on urban development. Much of the review focuses on the neighbourhood level, although the intention is by no means to invoke an essentialized reading of community, neighbourhood and citizenship as bound to a particular scale (see Smith 2003). Subsections include working definitions of gentrification, neighbourhood and neighbourhood organizations, and citizenship. Throughout, an argument about the arts and art organizations weaves throughout the conversation, demonstrating their importance in fostering stability and instability, marginalization and inclusiveness in the neighbourhood.

2.1 Artists and Art organizations

I use art organizations as a primary object of study in my attempt to understand the role of artists in neighbourhood change for a number of reasons. First, organizations often have a focus or goal that can be held up to empirical investigation. Second, as a social arrangement, organizations can have a great impact on community since they comprise individuals gathered for a particular purpose. Finally, organizations allow
artists to encourage each other, showcase their work, and band together for various political activities. Thus, art organizations provide a context in which artists can receive support and actualize their causes.

It is difficult to define art organizations, let alone what an artist is. Creative city thesis promoters would simply lump artists with creative industries, as if their value was only based in utilitarian and entrepreneurial paradigms that see the world through an economic lens, with liberalism at the helm: “advertising, architecture, art & antiquities, crafts, design, fashion design, film, video, interactive leisure software, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television & radio” (Sacco, et al. 2007, 8). Ley simply calls them innovators and exemplars who, although often poor, are generally associated with urban elites (1996, 190). Markuson seeks a more fine-grained definition: “writers; musicians; visual artists (including film-makers and photographers); and performing artists” but not designers or architects (2006, 1925). Similarly, Sandercock writes that community art comprises “music, painting, poetry, and theatre” consisting of “myth, ritual, carnival, festival, street parades, puppetry, feasts, and more” (2003, 29 & 218). She does not include professions but tends, rather, to focus on a more local, grassroots, or community-based definition of art. It is along these same lines that the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) lists nine occupations that involve artists and art organizations: (1) actors, (2) artisans and craftspersons, (3) conductors, composers and arrangers, (4) dancers, (5) musicians and singers, (6) other performers, (7) painters sculptors and other visual artists, (8) producers, directors, choreographers and other visual artists, and (9) writers (2004, 2). According to 2001 Canada census data artists comprise a small but growing segment of the Canadian population, consisting of some 131,000 people (about
3%) who list their occupation as full-time in the arts (CCA 2004). This, of course, does not reflect the many people who comprise the arts community but work in other professions to survive as artists (some studies suggest as much as 50% of artists) (CCA 2004). Interestingly, Markuson (2006) shows in her data, that artists cluster together in various cities in ways that oppose the creative class thesis. They may be footloose but they do not necessarily gather in cities simply because of tolerance, diversity and place luck but instead carve out their own spaces, regardless of the city\(^4\). Although census data provides a rough sense of the main occupation of respondents, it does not provide us with an appropriate definition of an artist. However, if we are to study the function of the arts as contributing to community building and social justice, we need to go further in defining who and what artists are and in characterizing the organizations in which they are involved.

We can then define art organizations as groupings of artists, their necessary staff and their supporters that gather for a particular purpose with art as priority. In addition, I wish to offer an understanding of art organizations as more narrowly tied to the neighbourhood level. These art organizations then, are community groups that "assert place concerns and identity at a more local scale than that of the entire urban area" (Martin 2003, 731). They are neighbourhood oriented – formulated to promote a sense of inclusion and belonging at the local scale where they frame the identity of the area through the arts and artistic activities. Even as art organizations are often implicated in the logic of gentrification and redevelopment, such as lobbying for new development around cultural centres, they also resist these changes – take for example, art

\(^4\) For instance, Winnipeg, not known for its beauty, favourable weather or diversity has a large and influential music scene that is well supported by local and regional government (see for example www.winnipegfolkfestival.ca).
organizations that are members of anti-poverty or housing coalitions (Sharp et al., 2005; Martin, 2003). Therefore, they “emphasize working ‘within a place’ rather than simply being ‘about a place’” (DeFillipis 2006, 687). Because of this, these organizations are important as they assign meaning to place or, as Martin (2003, 731) writes, they engage in “place-framing” where ritual and hegemonic ideologies formulate identity. This place-framing occurs where organizations at the neighbourhood level provide a discourse of what the community is, both in relation to the wider region and in regards to neighbourhood values. Thus, art organizations are political in nature in their attempts to promote the neighbourhood as a good place to live in creative ways (Elwood, 2006).

2.2 Creative City and the Growth Machine

The move in Western societies from the industrial city with a focus on manufacturing activities to a post-industrialist urbanity that relies on service-oriented economies is well known. Rising costs of the Keynesian welfare state in post-oil shock Europe and North America coupled with the movement of industries to the global South as countries opened up their borders to ‘free-market’ liberalism resulted in the “widespread erosion of the economic and fiscal base of many large cities in the advanced capitalist world” (Harvey 1989, 4). This resulted in a predicament as many cities, characterized by ageing infrastructure, vacant warehouses and sterile downtowns that fostered a sense of decay and depression, dealt with rising unemployment and an increasingly suburbanized economy. In addition, suburbanized cities constructed around highways (such as sun-belt cities in the USA) provided low rents, easy transportation access and a flexible workforce that catered to new service economies and spurred competition. These required different skills and a labour force that was often temporary
and lacked the safety nets of unions and government subsidies. Industrial flight to countries with rapid industrialization also contributed to the belief among municipal governments that they needed to act entrepreneurially and compete with other cities to secure and maintain investment and capital in the city. As Harvey (1989) explains, in response to this crisis, city leaders in the 1970s and 1980s adopted an approach that shifted city governance from managerialism, which focused on providing services and facilities to business and residents, to entrepreneurialism.

Entrepreneurial governance responds to the need, in capitalist societies, to accumulate and circulate capital by adopting creative and innovative practices, such as public-private partnerships that attract investment (Harvey 1989, 2002) and various revitalisation strategies such as redeveloping neighbourhoods (Logan & Molotch 1987; Smith 1996). People see revitalization as the solution to bring new life into the city and under contemporary governance regimes, it works through partnerships between business interests and local government. These urban regimes are coalitions that emphasize the long-term “interdependence of governmental and non-governmental forces in meeting economic and social challenges” in advanced capitalists societies where competition between cities has “increasingly shaped the urban terrain” (Stoker 1996, 289; McCann 2007c). This neoliberal approach is both a rebirth of laissez faire economics where the ‘invisible hand’ guides economic relations and a degree of government intervention (to encourage capital fixity and flow) that promotes practices that require intense efficiency and creativity to be successfully competitive (Amin 2006; Brenner & Theodore 2002; Jessop 2002). As Jessop (2002, 455) writes, “[t]he resurgence of liberalism in the form of neoliberalism is often attributed to a successful hegemonic project voicing the interests of financial and/or transnational capital”. In this neoliberal landscape, cities have turned to
the developmental and urban renewal strategies that form a regime that Logan & Molotch (1987) call the ‘growth machine’. They argue that capital constructs the built environment through development and urban regeneration, influencing the structures of local governance and promoting alliances between various elites. As such, the local community is a focal point since it is framed as a source of economic rejuvenation (Amin 2006; Brenner & Theodore 2002).

Many contemporary Western cities were forced to adopt the neoliberal/entrepreneurial modes of governance in a “climate of beggar-thy-neighbor competition … which was socially reproduced and emulated in the scramble for mobile investment, jobs and discretionary spending” (Peck 2005, 761). It is through this framing discourse of neoliberal and booster oriented late capitalism that the need to fix capital in place has institutionalized a narrative of consumption instead of production in creating new and regenerated spaces in the post-industrial city (Zukin 1991). In other words, as cities vie to attract flows of capital and keep them in place, entrepreneurial strategies become the norm, leading to successive attempts to brand and rebrand cities and neighbourhoods in order to create (hopefully) positive images of the city (Hall 1998; McCann 2004; Zukin 1991).

This shift from managerial to entrepreneurial forms of urban governance has led to a focus on the arts as policy makers realize that arts and culture can contribute to an image of the city that is attractive to investors and speculators (Amin 2006; Ley 2003).

**Tying Art to Processes of Gentrification**

“The artistic lifestyle, like the creative art-work, deliberately presses the borders of conventional middle-class life, while at the same time representing its advancing, colonising arm.” (Ley 2003, 2533)
Most urban leaders believe that artists, art organizations and cultural activities are integral components to making cities more competitive in the global market while also strengthening communities, attracting visitors and 'cleaning' previously 'tarnished' areas (Ley 1996; Markuson and King 2003; Waterman 1998; Zukin 1991). Ley (2003, 2527) writes that the “role of artists as agents, and aestheticisation as a process in contributing to gentrification” is considered common sense among elites and their cohort (developers, urban regeneration advocates, etc.).

Gentrification is a strategy where spatial change in a neighbourhood occurs through actions “by which wealthier residents move into poorer neighborhoods in sufficient numbers to change [the areas’] ... social class composition and neighborhood identity” (Sullivan 2006, 595; Italics mine). This shift demonstrates how gentrification is not simply a neutral spatial process but a political one, exploiting economic hardship (Deutsche 1996) and dominating local cultures and communities (Smith 1996; Zukin 1991). The arts play a central role in this process because they both produce and sustain local institutions and norms and change them into something that is attractive to urban ‘settlers.’ For Ley (2003 following Bourdieu 1984, 1993), the reason an area becomes more attractive through the activities of artists is that artists and activists are themselves members of these gentrifying class fractions and thus produce spaces that attract elites. Interestingly, Ley and also Markuson (2004) argue that artists are the dominated segment of the dominant class in that when their ‘job is done’ they end up marginalized, even as their actions, culture and views are sought after (and adopted) by elites. The artists are therefore among the first wave of colonists in the ‘revanchist’ city – a place where policies and hegemonic attitudes involve the punishment and marginalization of groups who have not conformed to post-industrialism and the related reclaiming of the city for the upper-middle class (Smith 1996).
then, knit the economic and social geographies of urban neighbourhoods to provide spaces that are imbued with the political economy of neoliberalism.

To some writers the opportunities gentrification offers to the neighbourhood vastly outweigh the problems it produces. In fact, authors like Florida (2002) pay scant attention to the potential and real inequalities that redevelopment produces (McCann 2007a). They see consumption, one of the building blocks of advanced capitalism, as a positive and responsible activity (Latham 2003). Using the phrase “productive consumption,” Latham writes, “it should be clear that consumption is a potentially productive element in the creation of social relationships and solidarities” (2003, 1713). Productive consumption would, one assumes, increase the standard of living for residents, attract businesses and educated elites, service firms and tourists. Mixing people in the street as they purchase goods or consume various forms of entertainment would increase solidarity and form tight-knit communities.

Florida (2002) epitomizes this pro-consumption perspective with a flattering depiction of the creative class, a group of people whom he refers to as the next generation of leaders in the Western world. Cities actively attempt to attract these people because they believe that business and industrial development will follow the new urban elite, which, according to Florida (2005), comprises about 150 million worldwide. Cities that manage to retain these people attract capital and upgrade the image of their city because they work in coveted industries, from research and development (R&D) firms to pharmaceuticals, law firms, industrial design, software, architectural services and others that develop or facilitate the development of cutting-edge technology. The creative class

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5 Yet, as I suggest below, others argue that it is often through struggle and resistance to hegemonic narratives and definitions that group belonging and solidarity forms.
is generally comprised of single people or couples, with their lifestyles revolving around constructing identities based on actively consuming the urban (and surrounding) landscape. As such, with their significant economic clout, they engage in processes of gentrification that remakes urban spaces into ones that conform to their lifestyle. Coupled with a somewhat hedonistic lifestyle, the creative class engages in an “indigenous street-level culture – a teeming blend of cafes, sidewalk musicians, and small galleries and bistros, where it is hard to draw the line between participant and observer, or between creativity and its creators” (Florida 2004, 166).

As a group, Florida defines the creative class by their interests. This group of elites has formed around what Florida (2004) calls the ‘3 Ts:’ technology, talent, and tolerance. Since creative class individuals are well educated, Florida believes they are attracted to regions with a large proportion of R&D firms. Through talent and high-tech skills, these firms become successful, drawing capital into those urban areas that this group finds attractive. Finally, the creative class is also socially liberal. A city’s openness to people with ‘alternative’ lifestyles such as gays and lesbians indicates the city is tolerant and accepts new ideas and activities. In these spaces of openness and diversity, the creative class finds “a strong connection between successful technology and talent-harnessing places and places that are open to immigrants, artists, gays, and racial integration” (Florida 2005, 7).

But what Florida fails to tell us is that the creative class thesis is a repackaged liberalism where “the solution seems to be that the working and service classes need to find a way to pull themselves up by their creative bootstraps” (Peck 2005, 757). This has the capitalist tendencies to marginalize and exploit and at the same time enable “[r]etaking the city for the middle classes” (Smith 2002, 443). In fact, the way many
cities have jumped on the creative city bandwagon, especially through revanchist neighbourhood planning and development results in increased inequality in the city.

McCann (2007b) for instance, provides data that economic inequality in cities with a high creative class demographic such as Austin, TX has increased since the mid-1990s. Simply put, creative class policy increases inequality and brings neighbourhood vibrancy and diversity under attack (Peck 2005). Even as gentrifiers yearn for diversity, companies that can afford higher rents replace ethnic and artistic enclaves. This diversity is not ethnic, creative or class-based but is instead simply about having many expensive and fun choices. As Harvey (1989, 16) writes, the “[c]oncentration on spectacle and image rather than on the substance of economic and social problems can also prove deleterious in the long-run, even though political benefits can all too easily be had”.

Indeed, entrenched regimes and institutions would not embrace Florida’s ideas so easily if they actually involved structural changes (Peck 2005).

Ley (2003) argues that artists in the city are integrated into a regime of elite partnerships because of their accumulated social capital and positive influence on investment into the city. Basic principles of capitalism, whereby art serves a particular utilitarian purpose, frame the value of arts and cultural activities in the contemporary city (Deutsche 1996). Even so, Ley and others show that artists are different from other members of the so-called creative class (Markuson and Schrock 2006). As cities repackage their support for the arts to take account of new theories linking them more directly to economic development and competitive advantage, the arts’ role in the formulation of creative strategies to enhance social justice or social expression is elided.

Florida’s Creative Class thesis is popular because the narrative actually confirms and justifies the strengthening of regimes that have formed through competition (Peck 2005).
For, as Florida writes, “In terms of both sheer economic horse-power and cutting-edge innovation, surprisingly few regions truly matter in today’s global economy” (2005, 2). Moreover, it is there that the arts and culture industries find favour with the urban leadership who seek to promote positive images of their cities so they become one of the ‘successful few’.

2.3 Citizenship

Being political means being implicated in strategies and technologies of citizenship as otherness (Isin 2002, 275).

Isin (2002) writes that although dominant actors in the city strive to create an identity around a citizenship that is homogenous and uniform, the reality is that people maintain and (re)create identities through a multiplicity of groups and associations. The city is a productive space for identity formation, which occurs through various strategies of solidarity, conflict and alienation. Additionally, groups in urban centres constantly vie for recognition from and attempt to influence those who create policies in the city. Tully (1995), sees this as important for groups to survive and grow. Without this recognition, according to Tully, groups will constantly struggle because the dominant narrative excludes them from the rights of citizenship. For those that do not, there are certain restrictions on entering what Magnusson calls the “privileged spaces” of society (103). It is the access and use of these privileged spaces that urban residents contest (Isin, 2002; Magnusson, 1996; Smith, 1993). Therefore, even though a person or group is a legal citizen, the difference in the ability to enjoy services or other rights means that admission for marginalized groups is often superficial, hinging on the outright co-optation of their own identities by hegemonic narratives (Secor 2004).
The concept of citizenry is not bound by law and regulation but is instead constituted through group membership and a group's power to define the rights to spaces (Isin, 2002). If an individual or group wishes to become a citizen and will not (or is not allowed to) conform to the overarching meta-narrative, resistances and transgressions take place to renegotiate the terms of citizenry (Holmes 2000; Tully 1995). Through contesting this dominance, the citizen is remade and unfixed. Citizenship is socially produced, a fluid concept that is susceptible to ideologies manifest in the spaces of the city (Isin, 2002). However, the maintenance of these ideologies through dominating a narrative over time fixes them enough to suggest identification(s) with a particular way of living: an identity. To define citizenship in relation to identity is to "evoke the quality of belonging – the felt aspects of community membership", which describe the "affective ties of identification and solidarity that we maintain with groups of other people" (Bosniak 2001, 478). This form of citizenship is intrinsically tied to feelings of belonging within communities at the local level.

Community membership however does not occur without action and so it is to a broader concept of citizenship that we now turn. We cannot simply denote citizenship as a struggle over group rights and privileges but must see it as action oriented (Isin 2006; Lepofsky & Fraser 2002; Sandercock 2003; Secor 2004). Citizenship "is encountered and contested through the spatial practices of everyday life" and "asserts particular definitions of belonging, identity, and rights" (Secor 2004, 353 & 354). Thus, it is an act of participation that provides meaning and answers to defining society. The arts play a large part in this process for art organizations are able to gather the resources and creativity to engage the neighbourhood in direct action that produces a citizenship that is not passive or conservative but one that is dynamic and involved (Cavanaugh 2002;
Deutsche 1996). There is a growing literature concerning citizenship as being
"understood as the practices through which individuals and groups formulate and claim
new rights or struggle to expand or maintain existing rights to the city" (Sandercock
2003, 151). The emphasis then is not on who does or does not become a citizen but
instead on how we can understand what being a citizen actually means (Lepofsky &
Fraser 2002; Sandercock 2003; Secor 2004). This highlights the diversity of city
neighbourhoods for "[c]itizenship has increasingly been seen not merely as a legal
category, but as a set of discourses and practices that are translated unevenly across
unequal social groups and local contexts" (Secor, 2004, 354). Now that researchers
increasingly understand the local as both unique and influenced by an overarching
neoliberal ideology that flows across permeable borders (Massey 1993), citizenship is
associated with action and performance in the local.

The local/neighbourhood is one valuable scale in which we can conceive
citizenship spatially through art, such as performance. Citizenship occurs where it is
practiced – on the ground, in communities and neighbourhood – through protest, festival
and artistic expression so that people reclaim their spaces and enact a community sense of
ownership (Sandercock 2003). We practice citizenship in these various public spaces by
enacting those activities that signify membership. Further, it is in the way others in the
community are treated that citizenship is expressed. We can be inclusive or exclusive and
we can protect those within our group by resisting hegemonic narratives that threaten to
destabilize the local myths and lore that define a community. Local protests and
resistance to threats create the solidarity needed for community definition and building
for it is a voluntaristic and "willed adherence" to protecting the neighbourhood that
citizenship scholars now perceive as being integral to societal formation (Isin 2002; Borneman 1992, 339n).

Citizen participation initiatives in local governance partnerships are one manifestation of a new localism enacted through community institutions, urban neighborhoods and the people who live in them. Just as a discourse of urban entrepreneurialism plays a fundamental role in shaping options and strategies available to local state and citizens in their efforts to foster urban prosperity, discourses of partnership and participation frame the ways in which these actors can work toward urban spatial change ... (Elwood 2004, 758).

It is through this idea of citizenship that we can unpack identity and belonging along local group lines, especially concerning art organizations for they influence the areas where they operate by promoting what they believe to be the dominant narrative (the myth). Citizenship as a set of social practices and strategies helps code who is the citizen and who is the stranger (Isin 2002; Secor 2004) and it is often in the arts that these indicators of group membership can occur. The way people “narrate their own spatial stories of ‘making do’ and ‘becoming political’ in everyday life”, help define the rules and ethics of what it means to be/act citizen and process them into norms and regimes that not only regulate individuals but also re-appropriate spaces through action (Secor 2004 353).

2.4 Neighbourhoods and Communities

A simple resort to explanation in terms of ‘money’ or ‘capital’ alone could not begin to get to grips with the issue (Massey 1993, 146).

[M]any artists choose a locale in which to work, often without regard to particular employers but in response to a nurturing artistic and patron community, amenities and affordable cost of living (Markuson and Schrock 2006, 1661).

The arts contribute to society in at least two ways. First, they contribute directly to contemporary economic development through facilitating urban changes that often increase inequality (Smith 1996). Or, artists are like pioneers – the elites’ “colonizing
arm” (Ley 2003, 2534), which would, presumably, provide a space for where processes of marginalization can take place. This provides policymakers and civic leaders with the impetus to encourage the arts to promote civic boosterism and gentrification (Ley 1996; Quinn 2005; Amin 2005). Second, it is argued that art helps communities be economically independent because they strengthen and stabilize neighbourhoods, which encourages policy-makers to rely on the local community to solve its own problems (see Amin, 2005 for a useful critique of this process). It is easy to justify cutbacks, streamlining, and budgetary restraints because civic leaders and planners fail to see the links between all the scales, including the local. As a result, the arts in the city literature is generally focused on utilitarian purposes (Deutsche 1996; Logan & Molotch 1987). However, as we know, the arts also contribute politically to the social concerns of justice, neighbourhood belonging and community building (Ley 1996 & 2002; Quinn 2005; Markuson & Schrock 2006; Amin 2006). What this discourse highlights, in addition to economic activity, is the importance of belonging and citizenship in the neighbourhood.

My research uses a particular neighbourhood, a residential area of Vancouver, as its site of study even though the term neighbourhood is difficult to identify empirically (Johnston 2000). Moreover, the concept of neighbourhood is adopted to include a grouping of communities in a particular area that have a generally understood common identity in terms of what the area is and what it represents. A neighbourhood is both “codified in local politics” and is “a salient, given territory of experience” (Martin 2003, 731) whereby the economics, culture and the state are all involved in giving it shape. The neighbourhood is a grounded abstraction whereby people, organizations and communities define and understand the physical area through everyday geographies and experiences. It is important to understand that the term ‘neighbourhood’ is a socially constructed fuzzy
concept imbued with layers of meaning (Johnston 2000; Martin, 2003; Massey 1993). It is a vague term, often uniquely defined by various groups and people, depending on a multitude of factors, not least among them mobility, ethnicity and language, income, and education levels. The built environment and local identity then, are not exclusive of one another but instead linked through cultural, historical, physical and traditional boundaries and social groups. These groups are multiple and struggle to dominate the local definitions of place (Isin, 2002), or, at the very least, vie for recognition and acknowledgement (Sharp et al., 2005; Tully, 1995). In any case, the formation of neighbourhood identity and belonging involves various groups that are often involved in a politics of engagement to define the good city, where active participation to produce identity, most often including conflict and dissension, takes place (Mouffe, 2005).

The arts, as a political project, are involved in this struggle for definition as artists often highlight the way some forms of governance (in the contemporary entrepreneurial city) increases inequality in the city and indeed, the neighbourhood. Cities designed around neoliberal principals reward citizens who are engaged in those practices, while others are not included at all (Amin 2005). It is here that art organizations often get involved by being the participants and even organizers of activities that encourage inclusion and advocate on behalf of marginalized and disadvantaged communities (Rose 1997). As such, the arts can provide empowerment to disadvantaged communities (Ibid) and encourage a habit of solidarity and belonging — a key factor in this citizenship (Amin 2005; Isin 2002). As I will argue further, this is a citizenship based upon an individual’s active participation in their group. Moreover, the arts encourage this participation through relationship building, interactions, and other vital networks. Thus, art organizations help to define the neighbourhood with their emphasis on inclusivity for
... neighborhoods become meaningful to inhabitants because of the interactions among people in them or from shared values and interests. Thus, neighborhoods are the site of and encompass a variety of interactions and exchanges that form a complex set of social and economic relations (Martin 2003, 732).

So, even though arts and culture have varying degrees of influence upon how the neighbourhood is defined depending on which group is promoting the arts and who is or is not included (Quinn 2005; Sharp et al. 2005), there is no doubt that by promoting inclusivity and local participation, a particular neighbourhood narrative is solidified. For instance, some creations, like government funded public art projects maintain a particular understanding of what is the public good and who are the local citizens while others such as graffiti or performance art may subvert the hegemonic definitions of place. Art organizations that use the neighbourhood to promote their own mandates and visions of what the 'neighbourhood' is or what it should be institutionalize these identities.

Current discourse that promotes community cohesion and belonging as necessary factors in the 'good city' relies on an ethic where urban spaces are seen as politically active, where individuals and groups strive against marginalization and inequality (Amin 2005; McCann 2007b). Defined along positive lines where the principles of equality and freedom are seen as attainable for all, "[t]he good city might be thought of as the challenge to fashion a progressive politics of well-being and emancipation out of multiplicity and difference and from the particularities of the urban experience" (Amin 2005, 1012). Amin feels that the Western city has an opportunity to forge equality in a technologically advanced democratic society. In fact some writers, as opposed to theorists like Chantal Mouffe (2005) and Miranda Joseph (2002) who insist that conflict is inherent in community/group formation and stability, believe that it is possible for all groups and individuals to have equal status (Sharp et al. 2005). Although overly
optimistic, we cannot discount this argument because community driven artworks can become symbols of collective identity (Waterman 1998) and social justice to promote stability in the face of the upheaval that neighbourhood gentrification produces (Sullivan 2006). The work of artists and art organizations brings diverse groups together into discussions about the character of the good city. Art organizations can celebrate neighbourhoods and enhance local communities through a celebratory engagement with others and with the environment (Quinn 2005; Sandercock 2003; Waterman 1998). This can produce a solidarity that promotes stability and a sense of belonging in the multiple communities that comprise a neighbourhood. The documentary *Boom: The Sound of Eviction* (Cavanaugh, Liiv & Wood 2002) poignantly illustrates this in the activities of Mission Hill, San Francisco residents against neighbourhood gentrification. Arts groups banded together with local communities to engage in direct action, such as street celebrations and performance art, where residents in carnival costume with names such as “E. Victor” approached newly arrived gentrifiers in cafés with speeches and presentations. Although this did not stop the development of some areas in the neighbourhood, it may be thought of as fostering a bonding experience for the diverse classes and ethnicities in the area, raised awareness, and began a dialogue with new residents about the effects of the changes.

Here we see the interaction of neighbourhood communities as integral to the formation, development and evolution of neighbourhood identity and belonging. As Cavanaugh et al. (2002) argue, it is the families and artists that define the neighbourhood. This is one reason that my focus is on neighbourhoods – there is great value in grounding the theory in tangible geographic sites. Additionally, the neighbourhood is a primary focus for many policy-makers and city leaders with influence on the affected
communities. Communities come together in a multitude of ways to form these neighbourhoods, which in themselves are vague reference points in the urban landscape. Solidarity often occurs between these communities, differently and at different times but generally, to continue to uphold a semblance of neighbourhood identity that provides a universal narrative. “Communities [then], are the realm of social reproduction in society” (DeFillipis et al. 2006, 685).

Mythmaking

It is not enough, however, to simply say that art organizations contribute to the identity of communities in neighbourhoods. What is it that they do that contributes to community cohesion or fracturing? What, in essence drives communities, especially those that are strong and resilient? Do the arts foster or hurt the community as it becomes more attractive to others who may not share the same ideologies or beliefs? The narrative espoused by the dominant groups in a community provides us with an inkling of its identity but it is important to look at the entrenched belief systems and everyday ways of being and seeing that define what is the neighbourhood. These are the stories people in community tell each other and pass on to others: this is mythmaking.

Mythmaking plays a central function in society – it “is a universal property of human societies and plays a vital role in every culture” (Rees 2002, 251). Mythmaking is essentially story telling, the creation of narratives of communities’ lives – it is used to construct a reality of our past and to justify our current existence. In other words, people use myths to keep groups together and construct identities (Isin 2002; Rees 2002). Through repetition and constant reiteration of beliefs, interpretations, ideas, facts, and mental maps, myths become powerful norms that portray the world in easily
understandable ways. These norms reflect the dominant narratives and ideologies of social groups, whether they are Christian congregations, business organizations or neighbourhoods. They define the taboos and transgressions that tell us how we are to conduct our lives in both the public and private spaces of society. Thus, myths tell us what civil society is, how to act and how to govern ourselves (or be governed). This means that mythmaking decontextualizes facts by removing their spatial realities (Smith 1996) in order to maintain the hegemony of a particular ‘way of living’ and acting. As Smith writes, “the more events are wrenched from their constitutive geographies, the more powerful the mythology” (Ibid, 12). We must “tell lies to each other, and especially to ourselves … The lies act as barriers to truth. The barriers … are necessary because without them many deplorable acts would become impossibilities” (Jenson quoted in Rees 2002, 251).

And this is the side of mythmaking that involves those strategies of citizenship that create otherness and exclusion. As groups vie for the hegemony of ideas and mythologies what we see is that myth often “determines what is acceptable or unacceptable” (Rosello 2001, 66). Although other factors can include the political climate and economic circumstances, how groups perceive these or respond to them is ultimately defined by what dominant ideologies are espoused through their myths and stories. If neighbourhoods change through gentrification processes, or any other means, then the rules that define citizenship can change as well. Where there is change, there is struggle and contestation. People become citizens or lose their citizenship based on the stories that are dominant, so, just as mythology changes, so to does the rights, privileges and definitions of citizenship.
I will use storytelling and myth to illustrate how local narratives become ingrained in neighbourhoods that are widely defined (from both inside and outside) through the communities of residents. I will show how the strength of a myth can shape the course of development and gentrification as well as mould the attitudes of original and new residents in a neighbourhood. Of course, it is important to acknowledge other forces and contexts that shape identity. For instance, the role of the economy and standard of living has a huge impact on how people perceive themselves and the world around them. However, mythmaking is directly related to artists and art organizations because, as I argue, these groups of people are inherently involved in the ongoing processes of storytelling through the participation and performance of the dominant narratives. Chapter 3 will set the context for this while Chapters 4 and 5 will unpack the relationships between mythology, neighbourhood, economy and the role of artists.
CHAPTER 3: CREATIVE VANCOUVER

3.1 Creative Vancouver

As much as the city shapes the arts and culture that are created within it, arts and culture contribute to the essence of the city. Quality of life is a key civic asset, with the “people climate” as crucial as the “business climate” in achieving an energetic, attractive, and exciting place to live, work, and visit. Art that builds relationships between people from different communities contributes to the health and vitality of all. (Cultural Services 2008, n.p.)

It’s, ‘artists go off and do your thing and get back to us with something.’ And then what happens economically we suffer because it is the last part of the budget because the people designing those budgets aren’t artists. (Group Member 2)

In 2004 Vancouver City Council formed the Creative City Task Force, a division of the Office of Cultural Affairs, a group that has a mandate to produce the goals for the “City’s long-term role in support of arts and culture” (City of Vancouver 2008, n.p.). The seventh step in the eight-step process (The Implementation Plan) culminated in January 2008 with unanimous approval by City Council. The document, Cultural Plan for Vancouver: 2008-2018, aims to provide residents of the city with a creative narrative that sounds eerily familiar to those who have studied the creative class thesis. “Vancouver’s investment”, the document reads, “is thus strategic and is requisite for a city of international distinction. Whether an individual is a practicing artist, an audience member, ... he or she is part of building community and contributing to the economic and social health of the City” (Creative City Task Force 2008, 4, their emphasis). Is this the reality of Vancouver, a narrative proposed by those who wish to promote the city so it is attractive to global investors or both?

The initial reaction from visitors to Vancouver could very well support this
narrative, for there certainly seems to be a great deal of artistic activity in the city. From the Downtown Eastside’s Fearless Festival (http://fearlessfest.blogspot.com) and other politically motivated grassroots organizations like the Black Crow Project, to large scale events put on by organizations like Public Dreams Society and the East Vancouver Culture Crawl, the city can boast that the arts has a central place in daily life. But what roles do municipal politicians, policy makers and planners have in arts and culture related development and in which ways do these people support the arts? Further, is Commercial Drive, a neighbourhood regarded as an artistic cluster, a conscious product of the city through support for the arts or is it a tool of neoliberal policy to use the arts for profit making – or both? If we are to understand the roles that art organizations play in neighbourhood wellbeing and explore the tension of being both social advocate and gentrifier, we need to look at the influences that city leaders have in forming a narrative of Vancouver as creative and artistic.

3.1.1 A Short Historical Geography of Vancouver

Vancouver is a young city. It was incorporated in 1885, the same year that the first cross-Canada railway (Canadian Pacific Railway) was completed. It has since become the western terminus and gateway for Canadian imports and exports to the Pacific Rim. By 1910, Vancouver was the third largest city in Canada and its metropolitan area has maintained this standing since. Since the early 1900s, this port city has been a cluster of headquarters of provincial, national and international businesses, particularly in relation to the resource industry, British Columbia’s income mainstay (MacDonald 1992). Although not large, a booming manufacturing industry also thrived, which resulted in a large entertainment district in the downtown core of the city that catered to labourers,
sailors and dock workers.

Of course, Vancouver was not immune to the deindustrialization of Western cities that began in the latter half of the 1900s, particularly as transportation networks increasingly relied on highway systems instead of rail. However, because of the smaller amount of industrial infrastructure in relation to Eastern cities that relied strongly on heavy industry, the downturn was akin to the sunbelt cities in the USA (Hutton 2004). It is not surprising then that by the 1960s Vancouver’s core had changed economically for the worse and was seen as morally corrupt and filled with vice (Smith 2002). In fact, the downtown area, especially to the east of Gastown (the original town site) was sliding into extended decline. Not surprisingly, the local growth coalition saw new development as the answer to ‘clean’ the area (Ibid). This included a political remapping to hide the Downtown Eastside that began by the late 1960s in order to attract business and tourism (Ibid; Blomley 2004). The new liberalism and anti-authority counterculture that was sweeping Canada at the time coincided to combat growing economic woes and realign the economy with the growing service sector. In Vancouver, the local political climate realigned itself with this new trend as The Electors Action Movement (TEAM), which was comprised of “a newly emergent class: predominantly youthful, highly educated, middle and upper middle income …” swept into power in 1973 (Ley 1980, 238). As such, the physical, economic and social geographies of the city began to change as warehouses were vacated, manufacturing industries failed and/or began to move out to suburbs and overseas where rents were lower, and demographic shifts took place.

The nature of the political landscape shaped the city’s neighbourhoods. Industrial spaces like False Creek became rezoned for residential uses after considerable controversy (MacDonald 1990). Kitsilano became the place of social justice, artists,
environmental advocacy, hippy communes and socialist leanings. For example, in 1970, Greenpeace activists, Jim Bohlen and Brian Blessed, both American expatriate peace radicals, started the organization in Kitsilano. Then, in 1976, Vancouver hosted Habitat, a conference that “sprung from the warnings about urbanization ... [and] convened to deal with the perceived threat to the environment by human activity” (UN Habitat 2006). This was the first major environmental event that put Vancouver’s ‘other’ values onto the international stage. In 1978, Vancouver put on the world’s first Children’s Festival, which was subsequently copied by New York City and others (MacDonald 1990). This helped make Vancouver attractive to artists and activists who unknowingly set the stage for future development and gentrification, especially in places like Kitsilano where social liberalism and the arts flourished (Ley 2003).

In neighbourhoods such as Kitsilano and the West End, there was a marked movement towards gentrification in the 1980s. Previously seen as inexpensive and even gritty, Kitsilano began to morph into a yuppie, highly educated neighbourhood that increasingly marginalized some original residents due to increased rents, high land speculation and development. This was further intensified by business elites and politicians who, in the 1980s, strove to remake Vancouver attractive to global capital through downtown development and Expo 86 Worlds Fair (Hutton 2004, Ley 1996). As one local resident put it, “[The area] has changed a lot since I was a kid. I would say that the biggest change happened when Expo 86 came” (Local Resident 1). Expo 86 gave the city reason to build the Skytrain transit, an elevated light-rail system that now stretches eastward to the suburban cities of Surrey and Coquitlam. It also entailed the beginning of a long redevelopment project in and around downtown, setting the stage for the frenetic condominium construction that continues into the present. It seems more than a
coincidence that The Alliance for the Arts also began in 1986 while Paula Jardine, the founder of Public Dreams Society arrived in Vancouver’s Strathcona neighbourhood from Edmonton that same year. Perhaps the insertion of capital into development and culture (leading to Expo 86) made it attractive for artists to move to, or become more involved in the city?

It was also in the 1980s that East Vancouver (including Commercial Drive) became the area of choice for recent immigrants, political activists and artists. Artists found a new home outside of the more affluent western region of Vancouver, mixing comfortably with mom and pop stores, ethnic grocers, cheap restaurants, and, for a while, inexpensive rents. The Artists For A Creative Environment (ACE), East Vancouver Culture Crawl, Parade of the Lost Souls, Lantern Festival, and many other successful festivals and art organizations that had politically activist and environmentalist leanings firmly established themselves in the area. East Vancouver already contained a high population of European and Chinese residents and it experienced continued, and rapid, immigration from Asia and South America throughout the 1990s. In fact, we see this increase in immigration throughout the city, the more affluent moving into Yaletown, Vancouver’s downtown condominium district, while others spread throughout the city. The present day sees Vancouver as one of the most ethnically diverse in Canada, with almost 50% of the population having a mother tongue that is not English (Statistics Canada 2008).
3.1.2 A Creative City Narrative

The recovery and reinforcement of ... interurban competition these last two decades, suggests that urban governance has moved more rather than less into line with the naked requirements of capital accumulation. (Harvey 1989, 15)

The official fastidiousness driving that vision [to promote Vancouver as being the perfect home for creative elites] is beginning to frighten. It threatens now to sterilize the last of what is lovably scruffy about Vancouver. It feeds on Olympics anxiety and the search for the next hot real estate play. (Beers 2007, n.p.)

David Harvey (1989) warned that the movement from managerial to entrepreneurial governance in city politics foreshadows a resurgence of neoliberalism in the landscape of the city. This, he felt, would increase the marginalization of certain groups and create an elite group of people in the city core (Ibid). Indeed, as Florida suggests, cities now make concerted efforts to woo ‘creative’ individuals into their downtowns who in turn attract capital in the form of high tech industries, research and development and acclaimed educational institutions (2003). The strategy for cities has been to foster a narrative that offers a consumption oriented, spectacular city that promotes Florida’s 3 T’s (tolerance, talent and technology). Florida asserts that economically successful cities utilize these three factors properly to attract high-tech workers, artists, musicians, gays and lesbians, and highly educated individuals (Ibid). It is in this context that a creative city narrative began to take shape in Vancouver in the 1990s and increasingly in the 2000s.

Soon after Expo 86, development in Vancouver’s inner city neighbourhoods (such as Yaletown and False Creek) began in earnest. The 1991 Downtown Plan called for increased residential density, on the one hand, and concessions by developers to provide parks, recreational facilities and venues for restaurants and other forms of entertainment,
on the other. This was reinforced by the GVRD’s Livable Region Strategic Plan (1996) that called for higher residential density in order to support public transit and Vancouver’s CityPlan (1996) that reflected residents’ desires for less cars, walkability and maintaining a high standard of living with mountain backdrops, clean beaches, accessible parks and nearby community facilities. By the late 1990s, the city had transformed itself into what local author, Douglas Coupland (2000), called a ‘city of glass.’ This massive reconstruction of Vancouver’s downtown delighted municipal planners and policy analysts who look at Vancouver as a model for New Urbanist style development in many other cities (Boddy 2005). Although several months later, Trevor Body did write a critique of the seemingly unending construction of non-business, residential only, towers in the metro core, city planners and policy makers seem to have ignored pleas to slow down city centre residential development and push ahead with unhindered growth to satisfy the craving for uninhibited short-term capital gain. So, although Vancouver residents and its government are to be credited for saving the city from highway expansion, social/racial tensions and concessions for some non-market housing, there is no doubt that tough decisions on how to maintain the current success will plague future generations. As Boddy says, “Downtown Vancouver’s weaknesses (trading jobs for condos, taking third rate designs with sometimes questionable “social benefits”) may yet overpower its strengths (cosmopolitanism, dynamic social and ethnic mix, a glorious site)” (2005, n.p.). In addition, the city’s unflagging effort to attract those people and industries that Florida calls creative has opened a Pandora’s Box of increased marginalization of non-elites, the hardest to house and others in need.
Vancouver elites believe that it is imperative that the city promotes its arts and culture, if its creative city narrative is to be given credence. This relies on identity-making through consumption of the bohemian lifestyle, health trends, and tolerance, especially in relation to groups that promote an atmosphere of being hip and trendy. However, they worry that Vancouver seems to “lack a consistent cultural identity ... despite their relevance to the local economy” (Sacco, et al. 2007, 5). So city council has recently instituted a “Creative City Task Force”, a group comprised of Councillors, community representatives and city staff, that was formed in 2004 “to undertake a stakeholder consultation process to identify strategic goals and directions for the City’s long-term role in support of arts and culture” (Creative City Task Force 2008, 5). This is an effort that, while billed as innovative, seems to resonate strongly with previous strategies, namely ACE (Artists for a Creative Environment) and more recently the creation of a $300,000,000 ‘Cultural Precinct’ in downtown Vancouver (BC Liberals 2006), and thus underscores Peck’s (2005) argument that the creative city approach is largely a repackaging of well-worn growth machine strategies. Local financial institutions have come on board such as Vancity, that published the document The Power of the Arts in Vancouver: Creating a Great City (Sacco et. al. 2007). These strategies include funding for popular events like as Car Free Days and Parade of the Lost Souls and increased attention to facilities that the city deems worthy, such as the Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver Public Library and the Queen Elizabeth Theatre (Ibid). Increasingly, as the 2010 Olympics come into view, money has been spent on facilities as well, such as Britannia Community Centre on Commercial Drive, where protests to protect the facility as a community oriented institution have recently been held (CBC British Columbia 2008). Thus, in addition to the establishment of relaxed liquor licensing, entertainment
laws, such as dancing, there is a concerted push among different levels of government to make the city attractive to young, hip professionals. As the premier of British Columbia says, the additional money “helps define our community and it’s critical to our economy. It is Vancouver’s face to the world in 2010” (Ibid, n.p.).

3.1.3 Support? Cultural Planning in Vancouver

To ensure our future as a creative city, open and accessible to artists, to the broadest range of artistic expression, and to the widest participation. (Office of Cultural Affairs 2003, 3)

So [the office space] went up for lease. And so [performers and artists] wanted to take that over but the expense of putting in an application for a zoning change. The ridiculous timing that the city required in order to process the application, dealing with the landlord. It was just ridiculous. And they worked on that application for months. Spent well over a thousand dollars and it fell through. Simply because the city was like, “Nope we’re not going to change the zoning.” That kind of thing needs to change. It’s not useful to have an empty space. It’s not useful, necessarily just to add just another store. No one really goes up there. If it’s an arts centre, all of a sudden you have people going up there. You have a much more dynamic use of space. (Art Director 1)

How, then, do Vancouver’s efforts to maintain a creative city narrative translate into support for arts and culture in neighbourhoods and communities? To address this question, it is important to look at the studies that the City of Vancouver has produced over the years and also look at how people in grassroots organizations have fared since Vancouver’s emphasis on the arts strengthened after Expo 86. In 2006, the Creative City Conversation task force began its Public Art review, the first of its kind in 15 years (Creative City Conversation 2008). The Public Art Program, which began in 1991 and was more or less adopted by subsequent city councils, was realigned with new and existing cultural priorities that conformed to the city’s drive to be on the global forefront of cultural experience and to bring the antiquated funding formula up-to-date (Ibid). This
open acceptance and support of the arts was built upon the city's earlier "Cultural Goals," adopted by council in 1987:

- To promote a high level of creativity and excellence in the cultural life of Vancouver.
- To promote diversity in the artistic life of the community, including both the professional and non-professional, the traditional and the innovative, the established and the aspiring.
- To encourage financial and managerial efficiency in the operation of Vancouver's cultural organizations.
- To ensure the existence of adequate facilities for the creation and presentation of the arts in Vancouver.
- To ensure that all Vancouver residents and visitors, including senior citizens, youth, low income people, members of ethnic minorities and other distinct groups have opportunities to enjoy and participate in cultural activities.

(Office of Cultural Affairs 2007, n.p.).

Recent results of the increase in planning attention to the arts and culture include specific plans for areas undergoing gentrification, such as the Downtown Eastside (Carrall Street Greenway Public Art Plan, (City of Vancouver 2006), creation of a cultural precinct, reports about local celebrations and events (Culture Plan for Vancouver, 2008) and even reports addressing the overall need for the city to support the arts such as The Power of the Arts in Vancouver, commissioned by Vancity (Sacco, et al. 2007) and the city planning department's own Social Indicators: City of Vancouver 2001 Census. These reports acknowledge and identify strategies to help artists of all stripes. However, as one interviewee said about what it was like at the Creative City Task Force public forum in 2007, people involved in art and culture feel there is a sense of disconnect between reports and actions:

They are asking the questions but it was really interesting. One of the fellas at the focus group, he said, "I'm really happy to be here and I think this is great but I don't want this to happen". He opened up his binder: study, study, study, study. He had four pamphlets from the 80s of studies about how to be a creative city.
We don't want to be a pamphlet. (Art Director 3)

What's more, city policy does not officially recognize artists as a legitimate profession in Vancouver:

We don't have any status in the city. That's another interesting thing. Artists can't get a business license. You are either in an office or you are light industry. You can't go and say I'm an artist. My federal taxes, I fill out as an artist. But in the city you can't be an artist. (Art Director 3)

Tully (1995) argues that state sanctioned recognition is key to incorporating a community into the larger group of citizens. If there is no recognition by the state, there is no legitimacy. Without legitimacy, artists will move through different clandestine forms of action that involve resistance to hegemonic ideas and narratives. Whether it is conducting house concerts without licence or failing to report artistic income in tax returns. The 2010 Olympics are a good example of this. Many artists (and activists) in Vancouver do not feel that they have a legitimate voice in the planning process for this international event. Thus, there have been subversive acts that border on real physical violence in order to be recognized and heard. Others have engaged in less physical forms of resistance and forms of subversion.\(^6\) It is, then, imperative that mouthing support is translated into true action that does not just provide funds to 'legitimate' city art groups and organizations but that community activists and local artists are included in the mix since they are closest to the grassroots needs of communities.\(^7\)

In this sense, artists that I interviewed feel that they are not supported even though the city has been clear that it finds artists important.

Well, how come there is this completely disproportionate reaction to spontaneous


\(^7\)There are other community organizations such as minor sports leagues and 'Block Watch' type groups,
music in the park, a public park, and in the middle of the day where things get shut down constantly? It just doesn’t make sense to me. It totally takes away from the liveliness of the city, from people having a great time and dancing. (Art Director 1)

Alternatively, as one Art Director said:

So, Amacon [a local development company] is buying it [an office building with 30 art studios] and turning it into ten luxury apartments and so we are fighting the development permit. Don’t know if we will get it – the deal is done but to make that a shining light – a beacon – that this should not happen then maybe we could get density bonuses to include for instance 1000 Parker [artist studios]. If [the landlord] decided to sell that maybe it should be sold as artist studios. That kind of protection. We don’t have that in the city anywhere. (Art Director 3)

Why is there a disconnect between what the city says and what the artists feel? First, the studies and plans for creating an artistic environment are for people that can speak the language of policy makers and city council. Art Director 1 complained that although artist friends of hers had gone through the necessary hoops and spent over $1000 to get a commercial space renovated for artists, they were informed that the zoning for the space was ‘commercial’ and could not be changed unless they went through another round of applications. Some art organizations are simply not equipped with the necessary workers skilled in, or with the time and money to apply for, grant funds or zoning changes. In this regard, those larger organizations, or ones with a higher profile because of popularity or possibly political connections, end up with an advantage over others struggling to make their artistic and political voices heard. Second, artists feel that Vancouver does not financially or structurally support the arts (as the above quotes suggest). This is interesting considering the amount of dialogue among city departments and municipal council and the arts community and the many reports that have been completed. Artists interviewed in this research feel that the red tape they encounter is a form of passive resistance because the amount of work and knowledge needed to navigate through the bureaucracy is formidable. In addition, the city government itself suffers from a
dichotomy by creating clear boundaries between ‘citizenship and belonging’ and ‘arts and culture’. Two backgrounder papers published by the Vancouver Planning Department make this clear. The citizenship and belonging page does not include the words art or culture in its description but instead says that “theme relates to initiatives that support inclusion [such as] the retrofitting of buildings to be accessible for people with disabilities or activities that reduce barriers to community participation for those who are typically excluded” (Social Planning Department 2007b, n.p.). Of course, many organizations and people overlap in their focus and the department is not ignorant of this. However, the divisions they have made do not acknowledge the role of art and culture in some social planning initiatives even as they state that, “[t]he richness of the arts enhances our quality of life as well as our economy” (Office of Cultural Affairs 2003, 4).

Finally, there is a perception among the media, artists and city residents that Vancouver is a ‘no fun’ city that is conservative and will not open up to artistic entertainment. The city is seen as mediocre in comparison to cities like New York, Paris or even Toronto (Local Artist 1; Local Artist 2), even though this is akin to comparing apples and oranges in regards to relative cultural influence, city status and even population, regardless of the changes in zoning and hours, increased funding prior to the Olympics (itself seen through cynical eyes by artists) and relaxing of entertainment bylaws. Media reports, especially over the past decade, as global competition for R & D, high-tech and software workers increase, have consistently downplayed Vancouver’s arts, cultural and entertainment communities. May local artists and the media ask why other cities support their arts but Vancouver does not. As Sacco, et al. (2007, 1) insist:

We do not provide enough resources to the arts. We do not co-operate or network enough in the arts. We are not developing the necessary entrepreneurial skills
amongst our artists. We are not breaking through our many separate commercial/industrial silos with the skills of our artists and creative workers. Even as policy makers in Vancouver engage in a creative class narrative through promoting the arts, it is evident that many artists and people within art organizations see this as lip service. Changes in the city are geared towards attracting people who can take out large mortgages and gentrify neighbourhoods that were once viable spaces where artists, activists and low-income earners could live. However, artists and the groups to which they belong continue to coexist in this climate. As I will now discuss, this is the case in many neighbourhoods of the city.

3.2 The Changing Face of Commercial Drive

I was so shocked when I came back here [from New York] because they took away the streetcar and there was no real public life ... All the activity that was on Granville and when you got to Hastings, I would walk as a kid, we would walk down there. The streets were packed during the war. I mean the wonderful lights above the movies and these wonderful neon signs that had gestures of some kind. This was real public life. And then there was nothing. (Local Artist 2)

[It used to be all] lower working class. I moved out of the neighbourhood from '89 till about '94 with little stints in between. When I moved back into the neighbourhood I saw the changes ... also people who were my age were starting to buy into the neighbourhood because property had gone up. (Local Resident 1)

The Commercial Drive area is widely seen as the most vibrant neighbourhood in Vancouver (Sacco 2007). There is a strong neighbourhood identity that tells a narrative of tolerance and creativity, of political activism and art. Included in this mix are a mingling of various sub-cultures of communities based on specific sexualities (including a significant lesbian population), the arts, political activists (the area is fondly called 'Red Square' by NDP party members) and Vancouver's lesser-known ethnic groups such as Jamaican, North African and Latino. There is also a large Aboriginal population – about 10% (Sommers, et al. 2005). This diverse landscape has become increasingly evident
since the mid 1980s as the identity has changed from one that “was just a convenient place with markets and things like that … and the street car” (Local Artist 2) to a space of political movements and the arts as well as trendy cafes (thank Italians for that, one interviewee said), clothing stores and venues for live performances and music.

Commercial Drive, like many areas in the Lower Mainland, formed around the interurban railway (street car) in the early 1900s. Known for its working class residents and small town feel, the neighbourhood gradually became known as Little Italy, especially after World War II as Italian immigration to the area increased. Vancouver has always been a city of neighbourhoods and even now, ethnic groups tend to cluster together (Office of Cultural Affairs 2003) so it makes sense that this neighbourhood, with its economy focused towards the harbour, textile industries and light manufacturing would have an immigrant feel. The neighbourhood was diverse as Ukrainian, Portuguese, Greek and Spanish immigrants made it home. Chinese migrants moved there, from the Strathcona neighbourhood sandwiched between Commercial Drive and the Downtown core further west. By the mid 1980s, this character was changing rapidly. There are a number of factors for this change: Expo 86, the sudden increase in housing prices throughout the city, beginning in the west end, changes in immigration rules, and immigration pressures from Asia and Southeast Asia (especially from Hong Kong in the run-up to 1997) (MacDonald 1992). In fact, the 2001 census shows an increase in diversity on The Drive as people from Pacific Rim countries increasingly make their home there (Sommers, et al. 2005).

Partly because of the ethnic diversity, there has been an increase in arts and culture on Commercial Drive. There are African drum circles, events ranging from Ukrainian dinners to Cuban protests, and a proliferation of African, Latino, Asian and fusion
restaurants. Ethnic live music venues have also become increasingly popular. For example, recently, a café has begun a hugely successful Saturday night salsa dance with live Cuban bands playing regular shows. However, there are other reasons for the increase in arts and culture activities. By the late 1970s, Kitsilano was becoming a yuppie neighbourhood that almost inadvertently began to marginalize artists, students and activists simply because of higher living costs. Many of these people converged on The Drive so that by the early 1990s it became known as one of the trendiest, undiscovered, bohemian neighbourhoods in North America (Sommers, et al. 2005). Art organizations have their headquarters in the neighbourhood, activist groups like Greenpeace and Oxfam have offices on the street and there are papers such as the ‘Republic of East Vancouver’ in coffee shops and pubs.

Since the area has definitely become vibrant and successful, we can view these changes positively. Yet, there is a side of Commercial Drive that is troubling. Many of the people interviewed noted that the visibly homeless are increasing in number as the area has also become seen as a natural corridor for panhandlers (Local Resident 2). Prostitution on its fringes and open crack-cocaine use has also come to strongly characterize the neighbourhood. As one local resident said, “I have to walk through Grandview Park everyday to get to The Drive and it is much more ... people just hanging out doing drugs kind of thing. Hanging out getting drunk. That didn’t happen [in the past]” (Local Artist 1). The Institute For Canadian Urban Research Studies (ICURS) Community Study (2008) notes that turning the Skytrain Station (Broadway and Commercial) into a major hub contributed to an increase in street crime and house/store break-ins. They also write that local charities have seen high increases in meal distribution and requests for assistance regarding homelessness. This, combined with a
housing price boom (of over 210% according to some estimates – Mosca and Spicer 2008), has changed the livability of the area. No longer is this area a cheap place to live. For those that have owned since before homes started to sell for between $500,000 and one million dollars, this has been a boon. For the renters and would-be new homeowners, this has become a hindrance to obtaining affordable housing. Recent surveys show that homelessness, panhandling, crack-cocaine use and affordable housing are the highest concerns of people in the neighbourhood – a large change from a decade ago (Ibid).

3.3 Mapping the Neighbourhood

Well I guess when I first moved here the snob in me would say [the neighbourhood] was like Broadway, Clark, Venables, Nanaimo [streets]. That would be the snotty Commercial Drive in me, but because of increasing rent and tenancy availability, I think that is growing because people are beginning to be forced to find lower rent beyond … So, Trout Lake [is] becoming more popular … braving past Venables to Hastings … and people going [east of] Nanaimo although I think a lot of people don’t like going that way. It feels further for some reason. (Art Director 2)

As a neighbourhood, Commercial Drive’s borders are commonly defined as stretching north-south from Broadway to Venables St., including a number of blocks on either side: east to Nanaimo St. and west to Clark Drive (Figure 4). However, there are different interpretations and understandings of what ‘counts’ as Commercial Drive. In fact, as Sommers, et al (2005) point out, Commercial Drive is not recognized as a neighbourhood by the City of Vancouver but, rather, spans the northern half of Kensington-Cedar Cottage and the southern two-thirds of Grandview-Woodlands neighbourhoods (Figure 2 and 3). Figures 1, 2 and 3 are from the City of Vancouver ‘Community Web Pages’ page (www.vancouver.ca/community_profiles). Figure 1 shows the various ‘communities’ defined by the city. On Figures 2 and 3, the blue squares indicate what many call Commercial Drive. Figure 4, is a combination of these
areas into one map that includes both Commercial Drive (the street) and John Hendry Park (known locally as Trout Lake Park), as far south as 16th Avenue. People interviewed for this project often defined Commercial Drive this way and added Trout Lake as a sort of appendix or tag-note: “I guess if I could just take Trout Lake and add that on somehow because Trout Lake is definitely part of the Drive culture” (Group Member 5).

Figure I: Vancouver, BC
Source: City of Vancouver, 2008
The relatively fuzzy borders that define Commercial Drive demonstrate that real spaces are constructed and understood through social interactions, identification and community networks rather than abstract definitions imposed by the state (Martin 2003). For some, The Drive, with its diverse populations, shops, studios and restaurants, reflects a local identity founded in diversity, community, social liberal ethics, activism and the arts. The Commercial Drive area then, is an imagined neighbourhood on a very real street. Thus, it is important that the concept of neighbourhood is used with the understanding that, as an imagined geography, the apparent stableness of the term is unsettled depending on perception, interest and use. A good example of this is the way Trout Lake, which sits outside the Commercial Drive neighbourhood in Business Improvement Association (BIA) maps of the area, is seen as a ‘Drive’ space to many locals, especially during times of celebration such as Illuminaries in mid-July or on summer Saturdays when the Farmers Market is open.
3.3.1 The Drive Myth

[Bohemian neighbourhoods] are inner city islands with high concentrations of bars, restaurants (ethnic or/and continental), cafes, popular music halls, antique shops, fashion design shops, book and music shops and small avant-garde theatres. They usually correspond to run down housing and commercial areas regenerated by urban renewal. The urban fabric mostly consists of vernacular buildings conserved, renovated and reused. (Gospodini 2005, 319)

The core of the community and the way [people] think has stayed the same. I thought people who were buying houses for $800,000 would have possessed a more yuppie viewpoint," she said. "But I think they bought those houses with a viewpoint of what neighbourhood they were moving into. People living here are well aware of the nature of the community and it suits them." (Eileen Mosca, president of the Grandview-Woodland Community Policing Station, quoted in Sinoski 2008 n.p.)
I think here people are more accepting and so street people come here more because of that tolerance as well. (Local Resident 2)

As I previously illustrated, Vancouver's elites generally adhere to a creative city ideology, which means that in this sense at least, the city government and business community views art and culture in a positive light. In terms of Commercial Drive, it is particularly interesting that city documents often use the area as an example of vibrancy or as an example of a neighbourhood defined by cultural events and 'activity'. The 2003 *Creative City* document, for instance, features an image from Public Dreams Society's 'Parade of the Lost Souls' event. To some, the area is the trendiest and hippest in the city. To others, it is as hip as any in North America. Although Gospodini (2005), in the above quote was describing culture clusters in Europe his summary fits well with Commercial Drive. However, defining The Drive is complex because it generally does not follow the normative definition of a neighbourhood in the midst of intense development or gentrification. Older communities have not completely disappeared even though recent demographics show a downward shift in the size of the senior population. There is also a large lower income immigrant population, a high proportion of Aboriginals, many living in subsidized housing, and a higher rate of artists than in other neighbourhoods, even gentrifying neighbourhoods. In fact, although rents and property values have increased dramatically, the average personal income of the area has not risen correspondingly (Sommers, et al. 2005). The reality is that only a small proportion of the area is undergoing extreme speculation – the well known 'character houses' and commercial property (Ibid). The vast majority of residents are very diverse and live in apartments, converted houses, above storefronts and cooperatives.
The ability to see The Drive in terms of a narrative of Bohemian urbanity, without the usual drastic gentrifying processes that have changed some areas in the city evokes a feeling of resilience in respect to the neighbourhood’s identity. This involves tolerance of others (which some believe implies unity) and resistance to change, key paradoxical ingredients of identification and citizenship.

Although many facets of The Drive have changed over the years, residents’ opinions have stayed, much like the overall diversity in demographics (Sommers, et al. 2005), substantially the same (Mosca and Spicer 2008). The tolerance that people have for such things as panhandling, homelessness, public marijuana use, outdoor music and even skateboarding has not changed by many residents (Mosca and Spicer 2008). In fact, the changes have, in part, increased diversity and at the same time attracted more likeminded people who have come to The Drive for particular reasons, namely to enjoy a vibrant urban community that is socially liberal and responsive to left-leaning social justice issues. What Mosca and Spicer suggest is that the social identity that defines the Drive’s essence and ‘feel’ is increasing, rather then decreasing, a claim that resonates with many of my interviews with people in the neighbourhood suggest:

I mean it is interesting to look at the shift here and look at what the housing market has done to the neighbourhood and what rent increase ... but ... there is more artists here than there was before. Despite the fact that rent is way up – because likeminded people do gravitate to each other. (Group Member 1)

The identity of The Drive is compounded and strengthened by the territorial markings of difference by the bohemian hipster class and the immigrant makeup of the space. Group Member 4 notes,
It was also things like the vegetarian restaurants, places where there is organic foods, the co-op style grocery store, the amount of things like meetings that people would have at the Britannia Centre let’s say … a lot of people who were challenging things and … peace signs and stuff out of windows you got a real sense that when you came to the Drive you entered a kind of territory. There is something going on here and you sensed it was vibrant and really active. Lots of people out in public spaces, not spending a lot of money – just hanging out in the parks. OK, in the cafes they buy coffee but just spending hours sitting around, enjoying everyone’s company.

City documents that I have already introduced and comments made in interviews show that the city promotes difference as identity. As Art Director 1 states, “There is actually stuff happening here that I can connect [to]. You’re connected to the underground here. You are connected to the art scene that you don’t necessarily see in The [Georgia] Straight or The Vancouver Sun” (city-wide newspapers). Here we see a clear line being drawn between what is seen as ‘normal’ and what people identify as being The Drive ‘scene’. This ‘scene’ as part of the Commercial Drive identity and narrative is further constructed through tolerance and even pride in the ‘sketchiness’ of the neighbourhood. Marijuana use in public, clandestine street vendors and even graffiti is tolerated, “as long as it is tasteful” (Mosca and Spicer 2008, 15).

It is worth noting, however, that there is a tension in the neighbourhood. As interesting as it is to have jugglers, BMW owners and panhandlers chatting together on the same street, there is evidence that some activities are becoming unacceptable – especially to homeowners. “You know, like its cool to have kind of edgy people, or mental outpatients or people drinking in the park but there’s something to think about that it is … intimidating and it’s important to be sensitive about that” (Social Activist). There has been a move to put in purple lights in some parks (so people can’t see their veins and therefore have difficulty injecting), the local BIA has hired a graffiti removal company.
and complaints of intimidation have increased (Mosca and Spicer 2008). This has contributed to a general perception of deterioration in personal safety in the neighbourhood even as, at the same time, respondents to surveys concede that the area is one of the best in which they have ever lived (Sommers, et al. 2005).

The contradictions and tensions evident on Commercial Drive contribute rather than retract from a strong sense of belonging. Many residents are invested in the area more than ever before and feel that there needs to be a balance between tolerance of activities that may be illegal but are seen as harmless and contribute to the vibrancy of public spaces and those that can have negative effects on the reality of and perception of safety. Combining these with the high proportion of artists, less common ethnic minorities (Palestinian, Ghanaian, Nicaraguan, etc), gays and lesbians, and political activists contributes to a narrative of tolerance, social liberalism, and celebration. Although the tension between those with higher economic standing purchasing character homes and renters/old owners may be there, it is mediated through the beautification of the physical landscape (flower beds between sidewalk and road, more care taken to parks, public gardens, etc) and the stability of independent grocers, cafés, music venues and vintage clothing shops. This is an attractive place to live and it seems that the majority of the homeowners who have recently moved to The Drive came because of this identity and not primarily for the purpose of house-flipping and real estate speculation.

### 3.4 Art Organizations and The Drive

... organizations discursively relate the condition of the place – the common experiences of people in place – to their different agendas for collective action. In doing so, they construct the local scale of the neighborhood and its organizations as the appropriate sphere for political activism, consolidating the “neighborhood” as a salient political place. (Martin 2003, 731).
In the context described in the previous section, there may be little surprise that there would be artists and activists creating and involved in various community organizations in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood. When likeminded people come together, they form circles of citizenship where they can participate, encourage, invite, mandate and otherwise express themselves. Communities have interest groups that reflect their common goals and that help them maintain their citizenship status. These groups serve the dual purpose of promoting the values of members and othering those that do not subscribe to the objectives and ideals of the group identity. Indeed, this is a prime focus of mythmaking whereby hegemonic narratives are integrated through the actions of the citizenry. In this sense, neighbourhood based art organizations could be called violent because of their othering processes but in another sense, we could acknowledge the deep-rooted humanness of people wanting to connect with other like-minded individuals. Thus, art, in its creative and participative capacity, can be a great vehicle for community enrichment.

The scope of my project does not allow for an exhaustive analysis of all arts related organizations and groups in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood. Specifically, the artists that I chose were a small group of predominantly Caucasian performers and musicians who work in the three art organizations. Generally, the interviewees are not fine artists, although one does practice fine art in a career capacity and another is a high-end jewellery designer. In addition, preliminary searches reveal a wide range of people in art organizations participating in the area that move in other circles throughout the city and are much more diverse in ethnicity or culture than the artists I interviewed (see Appendix 2). These groups, such as the Car Free Day Festival organization, which closes
the street on specified summer dates to allow only pedestrian traffic, are highly visible in
the neighbourhood. It is difficult to uncover the full extent of arts groups involved in
community art, as many are not 'official' but are instead loose networks of individuals
involved in various media and/or causes. These groups are varied, often forming through
community networks with common interests or skills for particular causes. Considering
that nearly 10% of the Commercial Drive population (within the limits defined in Map 3)
is involved in the arts, this is not a surprise (Sommers, et al. 2005).

Many groups form for particular events or causes, some lasting for a weekend,
others changing and evolving over time as new members replace the old or as the political
focus evolves, based on changes in the neighbourhood. For instance, when the provincial
and federal governments announced the plans for the Gateway Project, groups in The
Drive formed almost instantly, some making signs, others petitions, some shutting down
roads through impromptu street hockey games while still others engaged in art projects
such as documentaries and public performances in protest. These people feel that the
project’s intention to add another bridge for the busiest highway in the region will
contribute to noise pollution and increased congestion on Commercial Drive since a
major exit point off the highway is 1st Avenue, which runs through the neighbourhood. In
addition, congestion leads to commuters driving through neighbourhoods, increasing the
chances of accidents. Many of these groups no longer exist, because they joined forces in
solidarity over this commonly perceived threat (see www.gatewaysucks.org). Local
artists have continued to respond to this activism, with one result being an exhibition on
hockey at Havana (a well-known local restaurant/theatre/gallery space) that conflates
national sport as identity with local solidarity. Other groups are performative only,
coming to The Drive for particular public events or festivals, while at other times fading
away from public consciousness. Thus, it is clear that public art covers a wide range of organizations, groups and political projects. This made decisions as to which groups to include in my research somewhat difficult.

3.4.1 ‘Why Public Dreams Society’, ‘In The House Festival’ and ‘Black Crow Project’?

There are two reasons why I have chosen these three art organizations. First, they all have significant, longstanding roots in Commercial Drive and second, they are all focused on community building. Paula Jardine who moved directly to the neighbourhood from Edmonton created Public Dreams Society. Her goal was to have an art organization that served a neighbourhood that needed the help of social advocacy and arts groups but was also receptive to the performance and theatrical work she was able to provide. Living in the area provided a natural starting point for her activism, beginning with a festival she called ‘Journey to the New World (a creation myth involving Aboriginal, Chinese and Norse mythology) in Strathcona and then reclaiming her own neighbourhood park, Mosaic Park, from drug addicts and prostitutes by beautifying it with art and gardens. The park was around the corner from her home. A significant part of the mandate of Public Dreams Society is to “encourage creative collaborations and build fellowship among diverse communities” and to “foster the fertile ground necessary to create and enhance community vitality” stemmed directly from Paula and Dolly’s vision of home and community (Parade of the Lost Souls n.d., n.p.).

While the headquarters of Parade of the Lost Souls has since moved to the Main Street area (although still situated in East Vancouver) the In The House Festival office and director are rooted in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood. The Director actually
moved from the west end because she felt a lack of community in her life and was considering moving to another city. However, when she moved to Commercial Drive, she found a community that she had never experienced before and was motivated to begin the In The House Festival in 2003. Once again we see a mandate committed to bringing people together: “Create strong communities by getting home owners to open their homes as venue hosts and bringing together people from both the neighborhood and the rest of the city in the intimate setting of the home” (In The House Festival 2005, n.p.).

Interestingly, In The House Festival offers a smaller, cosier, perspective on how to foster neighbourhood citizenship – by breaking through, at least to some extent, the public/private barriers of home and offering people the opportunity to be exposed to the inside of people’s lives.

As the youngest organization studied (formed in 2006), The Black Crow Project is similarly mandated to strengthen community at a grassroots level. The first objective of this project states that through music the organization intends to “bring people together to support our community” (Black Crow Project 2006, n.p.). Here we see that there is a clear local/ neighbourhood essence that is very similar to the In The House Festival.

Bringing the neighbourhood together through art is integral to the organization as it is a form of celebration and togetherness: “Well I think a lot of it would be event circled. The arts creates the event. Like Public Dreams creates the Lantern Festival and all that. They create events. Black Crow Project is very much event oriented. In The House is an event. So, it gives a reason for celebration. It is also an emotional expression – shared emotional expression – art” (Art Director 2). Additionally, even though the fundraising focus of the BCP is geared towards raising awareness and funds for the Portland Hotel
Society in Vancouver’s poorest neighbourhood, the Downtown Eastside, the three people who began the project have lived on The Drive long before the project’s inception – and they have no intention in leaving.

These three art organizations are, in essence, quintessentially Commercial Drive. They propose a narrative of inclusion, political action and tolerance that is seen by residents as the identity of the neighbourhood. The success of Commercial Drive is its bohemian chic feel, the laid back atmosphere of the residents and the glorification of its ‘sketchiness’. This has made it an attractive entertainment space as well as a successful commercial district. The arts contributes to this through festivals, political activism and entertainment that integrates neighbourhood residents that ‘belong’ while at the same time excludes those that do not fit with this particular understanding of the character of The Drive. The next two chapters delve into the actions of artists and art organizations and show how they draw, maintain and otherwise exemplify the mythology of a neighbourhood that they see as inclusionary, community oriented, tolerant and hip.
CHAPTER 4: ARTISTS IN THE COMMUNITY

This chapter explores the strength of the Commercial Drive narrative in neighbourhood politics and activism. I demonstrate how resistance and the politics of otherness are integral to neighbourhood formation and that art organizations and artists often play a formative role in this politics. I begin with the influence of art organizations in the neighbourhood and how they foster local community, produce results (art) that can be both inclusive and marginalizing, and (sometimes critically) contribute to The Drive myth. I then provide an analysis of the three art organizations that I have chosen for the project and then show how they contribute to the identity of Commercial Drive. Here, I again demonstrate the paradox that artists and art groups contribute both to a politics of inclusion and also to gentrification processes that change who does or does not belong in the neighbourhood. The discussion suggests that there is, in fact, no simple dichotomy, but instead a complex and ever changing set of tensions and negotiations that are socially, spatially, and historically contingent. Finally, the chapter concludes by providing evidence of territoriality and otherness. Territoriality is characterized by who does not belong and who is excluded, depending on the identity and mythology of the space. Thus, it is at least partly through othering that the identity of The Drive is made manifest.

4.1 What art organizations do.

They constitute arenas where local knowledge is produced and reproduced, where the history, cultural inheritance and social structures, which distinguish one place from another, are revised, rejected or recreated. (Quinn 2005, 928)

You see people meet for the first time. They are side by side. They have maybe never met their neighbour before. All of a sudden, they are chatting and they are
making friends and they are like, “Wow isn’t that a great performance”. And they realize that it is safe to talk to your neighbour. It is safe to open up your home. It’s safe to bring the arts into your life and to share it with other people. (Art Director 1)

The art organization is one of the vehicles that can provide the spaces needed to create, exercise and regiment citizenship at the local, neighbourhood level. We know that citizenship is action based within a community model because in the community or group, power struggles to dominate and maintain the main narrative occur. The stories of a group’s identity needs to be told and people vie for the power to be able to tell the story of who they are. Even though The Drive identity is strong, it is constantly changing as different forces affect it, be they economic, ethnic, cultural or political. Thus, organizations and groups form to resist changes, facilitate changes or do both, depending on their mandate and political perspective. Agendas are often fragmented and fought over within the group and so we see a constant movement and flux over what the possibilities of a Drive narrative could be (or is). In fact, it is difficult to pin down The Drive narrative to a simple story because the neighbourhood itself is composed of various groups, communities and organizations. How, then, do art groups contribute to a discourse on defining the stories of neighbourhood identity, narrative and myth? Specifically, how is this discourse operationalized in the reality of Commercial Drive?

First, art organizations provide spaces for activism to occur visibly and interactively so that people can engage with the issues or ideologies that organizers are attempting to disseminate. These spaces or venues are encapsulated in the physical realm but are defined through a local ideology and framing discourse of who ‘we’ are. These are the events and festivals that add to the vibrancy and small town feel of the neighbourhood. With these, the communities and residents can come out and celebrate together. Car Free Day is a good example. It was formed with a political mandate to get people out of their
cars and onto the streets as well as to bring awareness of the Gateway Project. The wrangling with businesses over the name of the festival (for example, some wanted to call it 'Walk on the Drive Day'), searching for funding through official channels, organizing the event, and recruiting volunteers were all done by those from the community who were interested in providing a space for people to enjoy each other and their environment without an automobile. The artists and arts groups that contribute to Car Free Day take the seemingly mundane political issues of the event and make it exciting, celebratory, and provide the spaces where people can actively participate. Dancing, live music, juggling, soapbox podiums and other creative activities bring visibility and definition to the activism and resistance to mainstream culture that is the core of the event. As much as local businesses try to capitalize on the event by encouraging people to consume (and they do consume), the festival provides an avenue for local communities to participate in local citizenship. Keep in mind, however, that some may feel that they cannot be active in local events because they are perceived as elite or geared towards particular groups (like artists or tourists) and are thus excluded.

Second, art organizations can contribute to enhancing the wellbeing of the neighbourhood – provide vitality, critical thought and health – so that the community is actively engaged in the narrative of the neighborhood. Art organizations provide venues where the neighbourhood is given the opportunity to celebrate. People have a need to celebrate and be creative in a communal way (Quinn 2005). Rather that being spectator oriented, art groups provide ways for people to be involved in their communities in productive and political ways. The Black Crow Project provides the necessary spaces, in the form of artistic – musical and fine art events, to further its political mandate of strengthening and expanding the arts and culture community and to bring visibility to the
mental health and housing crisis in the Downtown Eastside. Raising funds for people in need of housing has been one real product that enhances the everyday lives of people on Commercial Drive by building a community that becomes occupied with social justice issues. For example, Public Dreams Society founder Paula Jardine facilitated the restoration of Mosaic Park, to be enjoyed by the citizens of the area. In this way, the area was beautified through a cleaning of a public space by the community and then protected by this same group of people. Although some of the people pushed out were drug dealers or homeless in the first place, they were not considered citizens by community leaders and were thus othered through strategies of territoriality. These tangible experiences contribute to the narrative of Commercial Drive as being place characterized by artistic political activism. It is important to remember, however, that these activities do produce marginalization to some community members.

Finally, the artists promote themselves as narrators of the neighbourhood. As one interviewee put it, “[A]s far as the community, there was the desire to build the musical community that lives here. So the compilation CD was bringing together musicians to participate in a common goal” (Art Director 2). Another person I interviewed said, “Most of the ways that we see our culture reflected back to us is through the news media. And so this is ... a different kind of observation. And it’s a different kind of recording of culture” (Group Member 1). They make themselves visible to the neighbourhood (and the tourists that visit), which legitimizes their position as leaders in The Drive community. This gives artists a real power to contribute to defining what the neighbourhood is and to struggle with or against other people and communities on The

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8 This compact disc contains a diverse array of songs all composed by local musicians. They donated the songs so that profits would all go directly to the Portland Hotel Society.
Drive and elsewhere. This is made clear, for example, when the BCP brought people together for its inaugural fundraising event at the Vancouver East Cultural Centre. At the event, I noticed that although the group attending was diverse, conversations often shared a common vision – to improve the lives of the ‘hardest to house’ and themselves, even as they enjoyed the music and art. At the same time, this diversity was limited to artists, hipsters, activists, the educated classes and local community leaders; there was no evidence of Aboriginals or other communities who struggle on the margins.

It is possible then, for art organizations to provide spaces to exercise citizenship in a particular way, through activism, celebration, increased participation, and narrative. Think of PDS’s Parade of the Lost Souls event where people are encouraged to wear costumes, walk in the parade, play instruments and set up Halloween decorations outside their homes and in the parks. Alternatively, consider Black Crow Project’s events where people can help local charities and listen to local music. This is understood as different from other identities that are generally defined through the physical geography or the political lines of the urban neighbourhood and even regionally, nationally and globally. The ‘difference machine’ of the city, or ‘alterity’ of social groups, as Engin Isin puts it, whereby “various groups and associations claim functional jurisdiction over a spatial extent and struggle simultaneously for their rights to that space” is a major factor in defining citizenship and this can certainly be applied to the neighbourhood (Isin 2002, 44). Artists, ultimately come together in groups, as do other social circles. These fluid, changing groups often adopt codes of ethics in which to promote certain ways of living. They attach themselves to various social issues that help define what their communities are in relation to the environment in which they live. As a neighbourhood where activism is a common occurrence, indeed an integral component to its identity, groups with
significant mythmaking influence will form through the established communities.

4.2 Art organizations on The Drive

There are a large number of organizations in the Commercial Drive area that are art related. Most are not art exclusive but use art to further a particular purpose or political ideal. Even those, such as the East Vancouver Culture Crawl, that are created to showcase local artists in their studios have activist tendencies, especially when they feel threatened. The focus of the Culture Crawl is to promote the arts and organizers have often lobbied for additional funds, organized petitions to save artist studios and taken part in neighbourhood cleanups. This is what most art organizations in the Commercial Drive area seem to be mandated to do: to strengthen community, to raise the standard of living, to promote health and wellbeing, to get people to be creative instead of simply be spectators and bystanders. Thus, there is a proliferation of performance troupes (The Bicyclettes, Company A, Public Dreams Society) and organizations that utilize the arts for festivals and political activities (Car Free Day, Black Crow Project, In The House Festival, Vancouver Pride Society). These organizations put on a multitude of events and festivals in the Commercial Drive area that contribute to its vibrancy, ethnic diversity and Bohemian identity. These festivals cover everything from celebrating Che Guevera’s birthday (Party for Socialism and Liberalism) to alternative sexualities (Dyke March and Festival) to simply enjoying art (East Side Culture Crawl). The richness and diversity of the alternative lifestyles on The Drive is enhanced through the contributions of art organizations that strive to build strong communities.

My central concern in choosing art organizations was that they be diverse, covering a spectrum of ideas and creativities, organizational traits, and activities.
However, I was also interested in those with explicit mandates to work in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood and to increase neighbourhood belonging and participation. I did not, in other words, want to limit myself to music or visual art, but rather to explore the inner workings of a diverse array of groups. However, I also wanted to make sure that, even if the focus is activist in nature that the organizations begin with art to use it as the vehicle for disseminating the intended message.

The three organizations that I have looked at in depth share the belief that a strong sense of community in the neighbourhood is important for inclusiveness and promoting a sense of wellbeing. They gear their particular activities to strengthening the neighbourhood and bringing visibility to the arts through non-conventional methods. In this sense, their political agendas are similar as they seek to build community, foster citizenship and provide a space for the arts. However, the vast scope of PDS compared to the BCP, for example, serves to reach different audiences in different contexts. Both of these groups, however, attempt to promote neighbourhood accountability as well as individual citizenship in helping neighbours or participating in celebratory activities. The In The House Festival, geared towards intimacy in the privacy of a home, is different from my other two case studies. Below, I build upon the short descriptions of the role these organizations play in the Commercial Drive area (see Chapter 3) to develop deeper descriptions of each.

4.2.1 Public Dreams Society

PDS, born out of collaboration between three friends in 1985, is a large organization dedicated to creating ways in which people can experience and be actively a part of the arts (PDS, n.d.). PDS has three main objectives (www.publicdreams.org).
First, it seeks to turn passive consumption of ‘entertainment’ into active participation in ‘art’. They feel that this active ‘doing’ assists people to experience belonging within a community. Second, PDS wants to “provide a space to enhance community vitality” by encouraging collaborations and fellowship in the neighbourhood (Public Dreams Society n.d., n.p.). Finally, PDS aims to provide a space for economic opportunities for local artists, their communities and businesses. PDS is a large organization that evolved from a community-based group into a corporation that provides services like event planning, workshops or performances to companies and local governments such as the Burnaby Village Museum’s Haunted Village or the BC Rivers Day Festival. Its two main events (which are also free) draw huge crowds of people, many of whom participate in the festivities by costuming and role-playing.

The organization is the leader in and main contributor to two signature events on Commercial Drive: the Illuminaries Lantern Festival at Trout Lake and The Parade of the Lost Souls at Grandview Park⁹. Both of these events are large, attracting thousands of participants from the local community and beyond. Apart from the sponsored activities at these events (for example Telus and Safeway both contribute to the ‘main’ stage for The Parade of Lost Souls), PDS provides the context and backdrop in which to encourage citizens to participate through such activities as lantern making workshops, marching in the parade or providing instruments for people to use. The Parade of the Lost Souls, a parade in celebration of the dead, the future and of the fragile nature of humanity, promotes a value of camaraderie, through celebration in the face of consumption and an isolationist way of living. Fire dancers and jugglers, stilt walkers, twenty-foot high

⁹ Note that Illuminaries was cancelled for 2008 due to worries that it was getting too large for traffic and parking in a residential neighbourhood. Last summer a Facebook group was formed to hold Illuminaries regardless. This grassroots action replaced the official event in 2008.
monsters, revelry and a wide variety of music in the street mix with costumed
neighbourhood participants. The party begins with a meandering ‘wake the living’
parade from a vacant field to Grandview Park, where the main performances take place.
The crowds fill over ten blocks of Commercial Drive as well as alleys and side streets.
Walking through the streets is indeed a strange experience as it is not uncommon to find
Hare Krishnas handing out pamphlets while others promote their ideas in full costume via
soap box preaching and still others feverishly dancing on stilts to large drum circles that
seemingly materialize spontaneously on the street.

At Illuminaries, audience participation occurs through lantern making workshops
two weekends in advance of the festival, a lantern parade around Trout Lake, and spaces
for groups to create dioramas and sets that integrate candles and lanterns. The creativity
is striking, with local artists contributing through spontaneous performances, a wide
variety of lanterns and lights, and local activists such as Critical Mass (a political bicycle
group that promotes alternate modes of transportation through active engagement with the
public). Although locals complain that many people do not make lanterns anymore but
come only to watch, the vast majority still seem to participate to some extent.

4.2.2 In The House Festival

Consistently sold out shows prove that another local organization, the In The
House Festival that began in 2003 is very popular (www.inthehousefestival.com). The
festival highlights performances for one weekend in June (as well as fundraising
performances over the course of the year) in people’s homes and backyards throughout
the Commercial Drive neighbourhood. Performances by Vancouver artists include music,
theatre, dance, spoken word, film, comedy and mime. The idea is that close proximity to
others will produce a shared experience of intimacy that only the arts can provide. This intimacy, the festival organizers believe, will produce strong communities from all walks and ages of life. Once again, the mandate of the festival is similar to both PDS and BCP while being different in concept, scope and size. The In The House Festival aims to create strong communities by encouraging homeowners to open their homes and bring people together. Although there is no stated critique of private property in what the In The House Festival is doing, it seems that the group is interested in unsettling the private/public binary that homeownership produces. Other objectives are to increase awareness of the talent in the city and provide recognition and exposure to artists.

One of the interesting aspects of the In The House Festival is how it destabilizes the dominant liberal public/private dichotomy. All of these homeowners are volunteers, who presumably are interested in fostering neighbourliness and inclusion. However, most of the people that I observed at the two shows I attended seemed awkward with attendees not being what I expected. For example, a fair amount of people came from other neighbourhoods and the suburbs (possibly to experience Commercial Drive?).

4.2.3 Black Crow Project

What I like about the Black Crow Project – it’s not against something. It’s for something … I enjoy being for something, not against something artistically. (Art Director 2)

Formed by three friends from the Commercial Drive neighbourhood in early 2006, the Black Crow Project is in its infancy relative to organizations such as PDS. It also focuses on bringing people together in community – particularly on Commercial Drive. BCP’s political aspirations are clear, stating specifically on its website (www.myspace.com/blackcrowproject) and during events that it perceives a need to build
community through music and visual art in an area increasingly fractured by

gentrification and rent increases. Along with this are two other objectives: (1) BCP aims
to raise awareness of housing and mental health issues in the Commercial Drive

neighbourhood and the Downtown Eastside (DTES), both areas where the mentally ill

and homeless are a significant segment of the community; (2) It aims to participate in
active citizenship by raising funds for a local charity, the Portland Hotel Society (a
housing NGO based in the DTES). To fulfil its mandate, the BCP has branded itself as an
advocate for local musicians, providing venues for them to showcase their talent. The
organization provides a space for collaboration between artists in the community – many

of whom have never worked together in the past. The organizers split the money made

from these events 50/50 between the artists and the Portland Hotel Society.

The BCP’s inaugural event, a release party for a CD compilation of local artists,
was in November 2006 at the East Vancouver Cultural Centre, locally known as ‘The
Cultch’. There, eight bands and six visual artists came together for a night of music,
providing imagery and symbolism of a close-knit community through reference to the

(locally) well-known daily flight of thousands of crows from East Vancouver, across ‘The
Drive’ and west towards the Downtown Eastside (DTES), returning at sunset.
Throughout the evening, there were many references to the power of community in the
Commercial Drive neighbourhood.

The BCP has continued through 2007, being the ‘artist in residence’ at Rime, a
popular restaurant/pub/music venue on Commercial Drive in May and being part of a
fundraising event sponsored by the Rhåda Eatery on Main Street. At these venues, a
spokesperson from the Portland Hotel Society generally speaks of the practical need for
housing in a city with a vacancy rate of 0.5%. A talk by one of BCP’s founding members
once again invokes symbolism and imagery of the crow for “witnessing the daily flight of the crows provides us with an image of togetherness, and movement towards a common goal” (Black Crow Project, n.d., n.p.). Bringing the political objectives into the musical performance provides a space where both the performer and spectator practise citizenship through political action and charitable work. Not only does this action help the marginalized but it also creates new relationships and networks of solidarity around a common cause. This is the political project of BCP – to integrate a passion for the arts with symbolism to form a locally created and experienced political project.

4.3 The Contradiction

A lot of what supports art is ... wealth. And wealth is often what art is speaking out against. (Group Member 1)

And I certainly have a role to play in that. One that makes me very nervous in that it’s a classic gentrification scenario whereby radicals and artists and working class people inhabit a poor neighbourhood – take over a poor neighbourhood because it's cheap, they can afford it and they can do shit in there – there is possibility – over the course of a number of years they beautify it. (Social Activist)

So far in the chapter I have give a rather romantic picture of the role of art organizations and artists on Commercial Drive. I have shown how artists and their organizations have an impact on The Drive identity and contribute to telling the narrative, strengthening the myth, of The Drive as hip, bohemian, artsy, ethnic, liberal and political. Yet, how does this image relate to the fact that Commercial Drive has become an attractive place to developers and wealthy homebuyers? It is important that we look at some of the effects that might not be viewed positively to people who are trying to pay their ever increasing rents or want to go for dinner but realize that the cheap, good
vegetarian fare at local restaurants has often been transformed into a package of loud music, tourists from other parts of the city, and trendy $9 martinis.

In 2007, 80,000 people in total attended the two Car Free Day festivals compared to 15,000 in its inaugural year - 2005 (www.carfreevancouver.org). Because of these huge numbers and the fact that many people from the Greater Vancouver region were driving to the festival, in 2008 the Car Free Day festival was broken up to take place simultaneously in different parts of the city (Social Activist). Illuminaries, Public Dreams' signature summer event, was cancelled in 2008 because Public Dreams could not safely and artistically accommodate the 25,000 people walking around a small inner-city lake with one path. As Group Member 3 said,

Well you are seeing that with Illuminaries where the people have a negative take on our event ... They stop supporting it. Where they don't feel it's a positive event anymore. Most of them would like to see it gone – the people in the neighbourhood. Because it's just too big and people are afraid that something big is going to happen in their neighbourhood. Some kind of tragedy, an accident. And they don't want that kind of negativity put onto their neighbourhood.

What I have noticed in attending and volunteering at these events is that they have become more generic and spectacle oriented where people passively consume the entertainment by watching the festivities instead of actively participating. They are no longer initiated through grassroots groups and it is no longer clear how many local people attend the events. Indeed, I have spoken to some people who actually avoid the festivals because of crowds. Grassroots groups seem to change or lose their power. When events get this large, there is a need for a strong organizational team that acts as a governing

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10 In 2007 the website for PDS had detailed information about Illuminaries. In the summer 2008, the link was revised to say that the festival had been temporarily cancelled. Now no link actually exists on the website.
body. No longer do we see groups in the community making the decisions but instead we see that people from the community lose their agency as their power wanes in the planning process. The governing body may include people who are not artists, who are not from the neighbourhood, or who have vested economic interests in its expansion. This has certainly been a concern for PDS (Group Member 3).

Clearly, Drive events are getting more popular, which has naturally contributed to the event having to accommodate significant change. Although size is definitely a factor, I believe this is symptomatic of something else that is occurring in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood. Much of what goes on with these arts groups involves participation by the people living in the communities that are directly affected by the events in question. As these festivals and events have matured and become institutionalized, especially in relation to PDS's two signature events, they have lost the participation of the neighbourhood, which has resulted in them being spectacle oriented instead participatory. It seems that when events are removed from direct community participation, the community and people coming from other neighbourhoods begin to expect them to appear without their help. What we see is the community drawing back from participatory citizenship toward passive consumption. Additionally, generic and uncreative events become the norm, as people prefer to spend money than to spend the energy participating. In 2007, Illuminaries was remarkably 'corporate' with big name sponsors (like Telus and Safeway) and food vendors (such as Mr. Tube Steak and Dominos Pizza) that are part of large franchises.

From my experience, there is no doubt that Commercial Drive is still far from passive and corporatized but it could be argued that when aspects of the arts become
institutionalized this contributes directly to gentrification because people begin to expect them to happen for them instead of being produced by them. We see the contradiction at work where artists become the unintentional catalysts for gentrification processes through the popularity of their efforts. This is not only in the immense success of local, community events but also with the various forms of public art (like murals, street performance and sculpture) that have significantly changed the face of Commercial Drive. For instance, the redesign of Mosaic Park was a community effort led by artists who lived with their families in the surrounding neighbourhood and chose to beautify it by planting flowers, creating path mosaics and installing sculptures. One of the main reasons for this was safety; to keep crack addicts and dealers away from neighbourhood children. But the changes in other parks (such as the upgrading of Victoria Park) have been different. Victoria Park has experienced a huge makeover with a new playground, bocce court, exposed areas for picnic tables to discourage public drinking, and washrooms that come from both local participation and the city in response to complaints from people in the community (see http://vancouver.ca/parks/info/planning/victoriapark). Two community meetings were held where many decisions were made with the community (Ibid). However, some locals felt mistreated because some people uncomfortable with the park chose to rely on city departments to make changes instead of actively engaging in the local community. Regardless of whether or not this renovation was needed, the fact is that it was the state that changed it, with tax dollars from city coffers, not a group of locals banding together to plant new perennials, tile the walkways and pick up needles. Although sometimes there is a need for the state to intervene, especially in large capital projects, the small amount of consultation and the lack of
community involvement in reconstructing the park are indicative of the gentrifying changes of Commercial Drive, of which the artists are involved.

4.4 Its not political, its just “pure unadulterated self-expression”

I haven’t met an artist that isn’t political in my whole life. You have to be political. What you are doing is political. What you are saying is political. What you are trying to change is the norm. The status quo. And that’s what makes a vibrant community is a bunch of people that say “No”! That refuse. That look at things and go, “That’s absolutely crazy and it blows my mind”. (Group Member 2)

So I think its incumbent upon the organizers and the artists, I mean all we can do is insert an acknowledgement of working class politics and the role of class ... inserting a kind of class discourse in there. Otherwise art just becomes something people buy and sell, not something that is available to help the local community. (Social Activist)

The quotes above show that these interviewees believe that art is a useful tool for activism. However, it is interesting that even when faced with the evidence that art takes part in defining what the dominant narrative is and thus creating spaces of exclusion, many other artists do not consider art as political. Although we could infinitely stretch the definition of ‘political,’ it is generally understood that being political is being engaged in making or contributing to changes that have an impact on the boundaries of citizenship. As Isin (2002, 275) puts it, “Being political means being implicated in strategies and technologies of citizenship as otherness”. Thus, being political is also telling the stories of who we are so that norms are agonized over, contested, subverted and, as hegemonies both change and get stronger, are solidified. Art is implicated in this process for art is an abstraction, a de-contextualizing of space and environment, which helps people see the world from a sociological perspective that is not, as Rosalyn Deutsche (1996) argues, necessarily based on bolstering individualistic utilitarian ideals. Regardless, art provides
different ways of looking at place so that myths are contested or strengthened since place itself is an artefact of both conflict and cohesion (Zukin 1991).

Art, then, is political. Why is it that when I asked interviewees whether art was political, especially in the context of whether or not art acts as a catalyst to gentrification, many people initially either denied that art was political or softened the political power of art. It is as if by saying that art was political, they were admitting that art is not as romantic and utopian as they wished. People said that art is, “Just pure unadulterated self-expression” (Local Artist 1) or “if it starts getting too politicized it just takes away from it” (Art Director 1). Art Director 1 also went on to say, “My only political agenda is to get people out and enjoying the arts,” and then as an afterthought, “and to get people to open their homes and build community.” Some artists resist calling what they do political because for them the beauty and narcissism of the creative expression would be destroyed. Others see the politics of art as being secondary to the aesthetics or individual self-expression. As Art Director 3 said, “[W]e’re more just about welcoming the public into seeing different types of art”. Interestingly, all of these interviewees also talk about what art has done in their neighbourhood, how people are healed by art, how art makes people happier, how art can be used to change policy and so on.

Here we encounter a tension between a desire to help create better community and strengthen a local identity, on the one hand, and a desire to simply do what artists are passionate about. This is related to a sincere denial, as I will further talk about in Chapter 5, about the negative role that art can play in the neighbourhood. At the same time, art organization members insist that what they do is for the betterment of the community and they get to do these good deeds while at the same time doing what they are most
passionate about. These artists refuse to accept responsibility for producing what they view as negative changes in the neighbourhood with their art such as marginalization or production of a class of non-citizens or even creating events that infringe on the wellbeing of impacted communities (Illuminaries, for example). Consider what Art Director 1 said when I asked her how she feels about this paradox:

In my head, there’s a difference between cleaning up a neighbourhood and gentrification. Cleaning the neighbourhood is painting the houses, making beautiful gardens, making the streets safe, getting rid of the needles, having a block watch. Gentrification for me is more the rich folks coming in, building those hedges around their houses, closing off the community that was built when it was all cleaned up.

So while many artists and art organization members see what they do as being, “just creating beauty” (Group Member 1), some don’t actually acknowledge that what they do can have potentially negative impacts on their own communities. Cleaning up a neighbourhood makes it more attractive. The result of this can precipitate gentrification and/or create a place where the local identity is geared towards resisting these changes. The latter can result in what many describe the Commercial Drive as feeling like: a small town or village.

4.5 Urban Village? Small Town Myth?

Commercial Drive is like going back to a small town. (Local Artist 1)

All our great cultural stories—our myths—are ungainly concoctions of fact, belief, and shared-illusion shaped and polished by frequent repetition and ritualistic affirmation. (Rees 2002, 150)

In tightly knit neighbourhoods, myths frame identities since they explain the places and spaces of everyday life. “Living myths,” as Grant (1998, ix) puts it, “represent a web of visions and loyalties that give life shape and meaning.” Myths that explain who
we are - provide us with our identity - provide a framing discourse to live by so that communities have a foundation to apply rules and procedures for citizenship. Rees (2002, 250) tells us that "one of the most ironically enduring myths of industrial society is that modern nations, products of the enlightenment, are no longer the dupes and slaves of myths" because we "equate myth with falsehood, superstition, and the unscientific beliefs of 'primitive' peoples." Interestingly, we live by such illogical understandings by the way we conduct ourselves in the construction of our everyday spatialities – we are logical only because we create ‘facts’ based on assumptions, common understandings, feelings, interaction with others and our common geographies. The myths grow because we try to resolve the contradictions inherent in our lives that pure logic will not explain (Levi-Strauss 1958 in Rees 2002). Thus, the life stories that we tell each other and ourselves plays a vital role in explaining who we are, becoming the “essential social glue” (Rees 2002, 151) of neighbourhoods and communities. In neighbourhoods such as Commercial Drive, the myths are strong because of the common stories of inclusion, difference and uniqueness.

4.5.1 Commercial Drive: The Mythical Village

URBAN VILLAGE: A concept developed by Gans (1962) in his ethnography of an Italian immigrant neighborhood in central Boston. He identified elements of a coherent local, or 'village-like,' social world - including ethnicity, kinship, friendship, and values - that reflected and bolstered residents' identity and helped maintain it over time. Spatially, this social world is located in a clearly defined urban NEIGHBORHOOD where much of the population has longstanding ties - an urban village. (McCann forthcoming, capitals in original)

And this is one of the great things about the Commercial Drive community is that it is so fragmented – each café has different people that sort of go there and different loyal followings. But then people go from one to another and there are so many – its like I think this is quite a multi-cultural part of the city where there is actually more integration between the cultures than other areas. (Art Director 2)
All but one of the people interviewed for this research live in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood, and that one exception had been an active resident for over twelve years before moving away. For these artists, directors, activists and 'regular' residents, Commercial Drive is both a fragmented and diverse place in which to live but also a unified community unto itself – engaging in a small town mentality where they see themselves different from the rest of the city\textsuperscript{11}. The dominant narratives of The Drive, as being a tolerant, left-leaning, counter-culture, artsy, Bohemian space, are realized in this small-town myth. It is a myth of oneness where citizens are not engaged in conflict, where people think alike and have found a common bond in the public spaces of the streets and parks. The urban village of Commercial Drive is similar to Gans' central Boston, even though it is comprised of various ethnicities, for this difference is outweighed by the strength of The Drive narrative. It is a myth that many hold dear, even as the area changes. And it is a narrative that those I interviewed are not about to relinquish easily because it is their home and they believe it is theirs: “I feel like this is home – coming from a small town. When I first came to the city, I felt lost in it. I feel like I am part of a small community” (Group Member 5).

So, what is this small-town myth? The key doctrine that bonds the neighbourhood is the idea of an inclusive community, which is realized in various public, semi-public and private spaces: the street, the cafés, shops and the parks. As Art Director 2 explained, “It really is about walking down the street on Commercial Drive and seeing familiar faces.” Group Member 5 felt the same:

\textsuperscript{11} One interviewee actually said that Vancouver itself feels like an apartheid era place where neighbourhoods are segregated based on class and ideology (Group Member 2).
I love that when I walk down the street I see people that I know and people that I don't know are warm and welcoming. I do sometimes see this community as sort of cliquish but I recognize that this is a minority. (Group Member 5)

Another interviewee said that the semi-private spaces that coffee shops provide are important for her to keep in touch with friends:

Thank God for those marvellous cafés that everybody has. I bump into friends there all the time. We sit down. We chat. That to me is really wonderful – very vibrant and marvellous. (Local Artist 2)

The small-town myth is something that people feel. It is the atmosphere; the culture, the music and the art that brings the space to life and makes it seem vibrant and open. It is interesting how the following interviewee weaves street life, homelessness and music into the idea of a small-town.

I think I first fell in love with it because of the street life. Even the homeless people that I know ... I know the homeless people on Commercial Drive ... I have never been anywhere else where a small [place] – like not a downtown environment – where there is live music everywhere. (Art Director 2)

What is evident is that the people I interviewed feel that the neighbourhood is a community unto itself. The people I interviewed feel that they belong when walking or shopping or simply sitting at the cafes – they do not feel estranged or inhibited but instead feel that this is their home and that they are citizens in this home. Studies of The Drive validate this notion of the street and public spaces being spaces where people feel they are strongly connected through common understandings of citizenship and ownership (Mosca & Spicer 2008).

One widespread value on The Drive is tolerance. This is something that I have seen (watching people ignore marijuana smoking in parks, traffic stops for large rallies and protests, the inclusions of ethnic and GLBT groups, etc.) and repeated by interviewees:
What I like about the neighbourhood is that it's, to me and I've lived here a long
time, this is the best of city life; you live in the city to encounter the other ... That
is what the city is good for. For encountering otherness. And this neighbourhood,
as far as I can tell, is about the most diverse in the city. Not only in terms of
ethnicity but also in terms of class, in terms of background, in terms of interest.
(Social Activist)

Here, however, I argue that a particular mythology or story with elements that are highly
valued can often be unreal. Tolerance and community is an idyllic belief about small
towns. Many see them as friendly and accepting. This is the power of this form of myth
for people have attached certain assumptions that are utopian and romanticized about
what a small town is even though the reality can be very different. The Drive story is one
of tolerance and one where people that I interviewed feel they are connected, know each
other, care for each other and are attracted to a street scene. The citizen of this ‘village’ is
also ‘safe’ even though crime in this area, as a result of gentrification and a large group of
full-time and temporary residents (such as people addicted to drugs, a poor aboriginal
community and such) is much higher than in many other parts of the city. As one
interviewee said, Commercial Drive “is, like, safe” (Social Activist).

Commercial Drive is seen by many as a commons, where the public spaces (the
parks, sidewalks, music venues, etc.) are shared, maintained and enjoyed by the people
that live in the area. A commons means “we feel like we can participate and make it a
place – that’s different than public” for “we are all participating in common stakes”
(Local Activist). Many residents feel that participating, being a citizen, on Commercial
Drive signifies a common ownership of the land. Artists paint murals, activists enlist
local businesses for their needs and sponsorships, young people clean the streets, and
neighbourhood families beautify the parks, often with the help of the local BIA (who
have an economic interest in improving the neighbourhood). The myth of the Drive is
thus summed up in the concept of the commons. The strength of the local identity and the pride that people take in maintaining the neighbourhood's identity as one that is beautiful, attractive and politically active in a socially liberal way is spatially confirmed in the belief in public space as a commons. The small town feel is derived from this community belief. Although the 'reality' may be that the parks, roads and sidewalks are owned by the municipality while local businesses own, lease, or rent their spaces, the myth makes much of this inconsequential since the dominant narrative on The Drive is that this is owned by the local community.

4.5.2 Territoriality: Maintaining the Narrative

The public space becomes part of a shared identity. There's also something in that, that does mark a territory. (Group Member 4)

When social groups succeed in inculcating their own virtues as dominant, citizenship is constituted as an expression and embodiment of those virtues against others who lack them. To put it another way, citizenship is that particular point of view of the dominant, which constitutes itself as a universal point of view. (Isin 2002, 275)

A contemporary urban neighbourhood as a commons is a romantic, utopian ideal. It alludes to a single community of members with common goals and a common identity. This demonstrates the danger of myths; they contain a diverse range of truths, falsities and commonly held understandings of the world that constitute a hegemonic story.

Regardless of how wrong or inaccurate the narrative is, it continues unabated, even gathering strength as the framing discourse is repeated and ritualized through citizen participation (Rees 2002). This provides a sense that conflict, resistance and struggle are absent in the community for people deny its existence through the utopian myth that all is well in the village. However, with continual changes in the neighbourhood – from

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demographics to building new parks – it is virtually impossible to have unity without imposing strict civil rules and regulations. People are marginalized in tight communities, borders are created and neighbourhoods become territorial and cliquish as they develop and mature. People who are or become excluded fight for a shared ownership of the commons and develop strategies of resistance to struggle for supremacy of the narratives that define the area (Mouffe 2005, Isin 2002).

‘Urban village’ communities such as Commercial Drive are, as three interviewees suggested, like a tribe or group of like-minded clans. There is a sense that in this neighbourhood you can “find your tribe” so that you are “not being alienated” by people any longer (Local Artist 1). The neighbourhood becomes a story of us versus them within the area as well as a case of the city versus the neighbourhood. It is necessary to be territorial because this is how the community protects its stories. Without protection, it is easier for other groups (such as gentrifiers) who have capital and increasing numbers to take advantage of the neighbourhood. Thus, citizenship is based on ownership: ownership of a space, ownership of a narrative, ownership of a myth. People perform this citizenship through belief systems and this performance can be expressed artistically. Artists that I spoke with have been frank about this need to not be overly open to others outside core groups in the face of overwhelming pressures to change the community to one that is spectacle and consumer oriented. And it is this struggle “to maintain where they are” that “comes out in being more involved in what you’re in” (Local Resident 2). Territoriality, of course, finds itself in a contradiction since it is inclusive but only to the extent of borders. This is because it is defined through otherness and exclusion, creating
a boundary of us and them. And it is through this otherness that the identity of The Drive is manifest.

The power of this exclusivity is evident as the neighbourhood is gentrified. On The Drive, the story also includes a ‘dark side’, with the increase in hard drugs and an “inner-city feel”: “There is a segment of the population around here that is very underprivileged ... our cars were broken into three times. The building has been broken into ... People getting beaten to death” (Local Artist 1). This same person describes herself as being caught in a nexus between gentrification on one hand (the east side of The Drive where the neighbourhood seems insulated from crime) and ghettoization (where she lives on the west side) on the other. This is the power of myth; that it continues even though it may not be based on fact or reality. Thus, it is important that we explore it further to see how artists and art organizations facilitate the framing discourses of The Drive and the power that they have, even as they are faced with the fact that they, themselves, are instrumental in fundamentally changing the neighbourhood. In Chapter 5, I will bring art into the village myth to show how artists contribute to strengthening this identity even as the neighbourhood changes and slowly gentrifies.
CHAPTER 5: A COMMUNITY OF PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter, I show how artists change neighbourhoods and make them more attractive to the ‘conventional’ middle class – the people from whom the artists are, in a sense, trying to escape. These neighbourhood changes also suit the agenda of the local growth coalition which engages in a politics, often with cultural inflections, that seeks “more intense land use and thus higher rent collections, with associated professional fees and locally based profits” (Logan and Molotch 1987, 204; McCann, 2002). I outline the strategies of resistance and acceptance towards the growth machine and middle class that I have found in my research. I also show how artists and art organizations are part of othering processes, like marginalization, in order to dominate and maintain the urban village myth. I argue that artists are territorial and attempt to provide spaces for the people in their neighbourhoods to participate together so they can resist the gentrification that is a consequence of capital infusion and development. This is one form of citizenship in action.

Lepofsky & Fraser (2002) move beyond the realm of formal legalities and into a conceptual understanding of citizenship as practiced in place. They, like Isin (2002), demonstrate that to be a citizen is to act out rights in a participatory way. The citizen then is involved in both mythmaking and placemaking for, without performance, the repeated codes of conduct in a particular group would not be actualized. Participatory citizenship is a predominantly organic enterprise where ideologies are proposed and contested in place. This means that the actual story of who groups are, their mythology, is often filled with contradictions. So far in this thesis, I have argued that artists and art organizations
involved in neighbourhood politics are fundamentally implicated in the processes of
citizenship through their own interpretations of local narratives about place. In this
chapter, I further this argument by illustrating how the myths and narratives proposed by
neighbourhood residents, policy makers and art organizations are subjectively constructed
through community participation.

Assumptive reality is a term that describes how our worldview is based on
subjective experiences and desires that often do not reflect objective 'facts' (Elkind, 1980;
Parkes, 1991). Where mythmaking is concerned with ritualized actions and repeated
experiences, our assumptive reality is contained within the framework of how we
perceive the world to be because of our hopefulness and desire for good things, regardless
of the reality of given situations (Elkind 1980). For Elkind and his peers, an assumptive
world-view is best understood when people's understandings of the world are disrupted
through traumatic experiences. A concept based on the experiences of a child counsellor
in the 1970s, may seem strange to use in this thesis but his hypothesis certainly evokes an
understanding of how people can act out assumptions and create myths through
performance. Although I argue in this thesis that 'objective fact' is in itself a construction,
especially in relation to neighbourhood narratives and mythology, assumptive reality (or
world-view) is useful in understanding how people make assumptions about their lives
through denial of how other people could be negatively affected or influenced by their
beliefs. In section 5.3, I explore this in more detail in relation to the denial by some
artists and members of art organizations of the role that art plays in gentrification.
5.1 Art and the Drive Myth

I would say that it is an area of Vancouver that is quite artsy but is less wealthy ... I would describe the restaurants; I would describe all the different kinds of foods that come from different countries [and] about how much is always going on in the streets. It is a neighbourhood where things happen. People walk. People are out on the street and they know each other ... I don't think I could describe it without describing the arts ... there are murals on the walls. There are always posters for - more than I see in any other neighbourhood - music events. The street gets shut down for festivals. (Group Member 5)

Gospodini (1996) describes the Bohemian neighbourhood as one that contains cafés, live entertainment, small grocers and trendy clothing shops. Although this helps describe The Drive, it provides only one picture of the neighbourhood. The built environment – its character homes, common gardens, cooperatives and local parks – is discursively framed by a small town mythology that makes this neighbourhood attractive to elites, artists and low-income people alike. Even though The Drive myth, like any narrative, is fostered by fluid and changing identities, there is a real sense of stability in the neighbourhood. Mosca and Spicer (2008) note that even with the changes since the last major survey in 2000, there is a marked consistency in how residents perceive their neighbourhood. Commercial Drive citizens are invested and attached to the place not through ethnic similarities, religious affiliation, or property relations, but through its identity as a space of tolerance and social liberalism. Thus, identity is, for one interviewee, associated with the neighbourhood’s ‘hipster scene’ where “there’s bands, there’s art, there’s shit going on here. [The Drive’s] got vibrancy, it’s got funk” (Social Activist). Although there are contradictions and tensions in this area – after all, it is economically and culturally diverse – there is a widely held social worldview that contributes to a strong sense of belonging and safety. This has furthered the small-town
mythology of The Drive, and it is with this that artists and art organizations are intrinsically involved.

Art encapsulates the dominant myth of The Drive because art is important to and reflects the identity and worldview of elites in the neighbourhood. Since The Drive has a high proportion of artists, and because many people in the area attribute the ‘feel’ of the neighbourhood to art – “It was the musical and artistic presence of this community that I have never found – I haven’t found – anywhere else to this degree” (Art Director 2) – it is no wonder that art organizations on The Drive work self-consciously to foster the small-town mythology. Added to this is the blend of left-leaning politics and social activism that is so evident in the neighbourhood. As one interviewee said, “I am definitely left leaning in my intentions … and that seems to be the arts and culture thing” (Local Resident 2). With a narrative that blends art and hipster trends through the high participation rate of local artists who proselytize the myth, the narrative has remained hegemonic regardless of the changes that have occurred in the neighbourhood. Artists and art organizations not only promote this mythology to themselves but do so outwardly to the new middle-class, and thus make the area susceptible to gentrification. Recall that artists can be seen as the urban colonists who prepare neighbourhoods for elites (Ley 1996). They serve, as David Ley writes, “a social role as a broker of fashionable middle-class taste, demarcating the new frontiers of cultural distinction” (Ley 1996, 189). They help define a particular story of place and who belongs in that story. Neighbourhoods like Commercial Drive with a high proportion of artists, thus represents what many people believe urban life should be – even as it changes into a less affordable space to those same people who helped tell its story.
With all this said, the question remains: how do artists contribute to the tension of helping precipitate gentrification and change in a neighbourhood while at the same time strengthening the dominant narrative and local myths? First, artists help maintain a narrative through participation. Strong communities, like families, repeatedly and actively retell stories of who they are. Creating a community of participation furthers the narrative. As Local Artist 1 reminisced, “The thing about the Lost Souls parade is that you were a participant ... everybody got dressed up and participated in the Parade and it was fun”. People publicly engage in the arts, as with community sports or clubs, to celebrate and make their spaces safe so that they are liveable for their families and neighbours. In so doing, they tell one another that this is the best way to live. Second, the use of symbolism and metaphor, where inanimate objects are brought to life or even animals are given a spiritual trait is a powerful way to turn subjective understandings of the world into ‘truth.’ In East Vancouver, the most obvious use of anthropomorphism as a solidarity strategy is the crow. All three organizations in this study use the crow as imagery and metaphor. More so, however, the crow is brought to life and fetishized. As the Black Crow Project website states, “Witnessing the daily flight of the crows provides us with an image of togetherness, and movement towards a common goal.” Further, a director of the Black Crow Project said,

The Black Crow part [of our vision] came from living in East Vancouver and seeing the black crows fly over East Van morning and night. I had noticed at concerts in the area that these local musicians all seemed to have songs about crows ... that was how I selected the musicians and stuff like that. (Art Director 2)
In its Commercial Drive celebrations, Public Dreams Society also uses the crow. During 2007 Parade of the Lost Souls celebrations, the parade leaders were stilt-walkers dressed as crows.

Figure 5: Stilters dancing on the street at The Parade of the Lost Souls Used with permission: Craig Elliot, FlickR, 2006

In The House Festival uses the crow on its website and in flyers. Note in Figure 5 that along with other images of togetherness and celebration, crows are featured:

Figure 6: In The House Festival introduction page. Used with permission: D.L Frazer and In The House Festival, 2008

Finally, another example involves the Eastside Culture Crawl:
Well, we love the crow because they are part of the neighbourhood. I wake up every morning and they come here on their way downtown for lunch and they stop by on their way home ... So we adopted it. In some form we always have it attached to us ... They are very communal. They talk to each other; they take care of each other. (Art Director 3)

This imagery fits neatly into The Drive myth of togetherness and belonging. These art organizations propagate the mythology of a neighbourhood that is unified and communal, accepting and tolerated.

However, if we are to further the imagery of the crow, it is also important to note that crows themselves attack weaker crows, are extremely territorial and work together to drive out unwanted trespassers. Artists and art organizations do not only contribute to fostering inclusion and equality for residents of urban villages but also engage in the less positive attributes of a small town. As Rose (1997, 4) puts it, “Whichever definition of ‘community’ used in the discourse of community arts – place- or identity-based – deployment of the term ‘community’ in this discourse produces a boundary which distinguishes between members and non-members of a ‘community’”. Art organizations are fundamentally a part of othering processes since they are engaged in political action that produces boundaries of who does or does not belong: “I get the feeling that if you are not actively doing art, creating art, then you are not part of our community” (Group Member 5). This interviewee, although involved in an art organization, considers art a hobby and mentioned a number of times during the interview that it was difficult to
connect with artists in the community. The art organization that is mandated to foster community is doing this with a certain narrative in mind. These artists have specific goals to produce community based on their own particular ideals – ideals that will certainly not include everyone, even if they intend to be inclusive and tolerant. These artists create their own communities that can be extremely cliquish: "Part of my beef with artists is they are usually famously self centred" (Social Activist).

Marginalization happens all the time because artists can be very protective in what they have created, community-wise ... what starts happening is this defensiveness when more and more people come [to the neighbourhood] who aren’t artists. It’s territorial. Absolutely. And so what you have is this need to say, ‘us versus them’ because in a way you feel watched and ... art makes a community attractive ... people who aren’t [artists] move in, push them out. It’s this idea of needing to preserve and to protect [what you do as artists] ... instead of us being inclusive and saying, “Hey welcome, come see what we are all about” because this person really does want to see that, what you do is you say, “You are not welcome”. It’s a catch-22. (Group Member 2).

According to some of my informants, artists on The Drive are doing exactly what they blame gentrifiers for doing. Through practices that include only like-minded people, the result is often exclusion.

Therefore, artists and art organizations further The Drive myth by inclusion and otherness. They also produce strategies to maintain their territory and create, what they feel is stability, even as the neighbourhood changes and moves closer towards being gentrified. I next turn to the actual changes that are taking place in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood at the hands of developers, city policy makers, local citizens and, invariably, the artists themselves.
5.2 Towards a New Kitsilano

Before I lived here I lived in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, which at one point was the centre of radical organizing in New York City ... Sometime in about 1991 it started to become gentrified ... Cleared out the band shell in Tompkins Square Park and gentrified all that area ... There is no band shell now. It was the centre of the arts community right. Fucking vibrant radical community that now doesn’t exist. Now it is what they call the East Village. And it is just a lot of sushi shops and brass door-knockers and expensive condos ... Once this neighbourhood [the Drive] becomes too expensive – and it is very close, on the verge, or maybe it is already there – where do people go? There is no other alternative, funky, radical neighbourhood in Vancouver ... and then the vibrancy begins to become ... dispersed and displaced by what people call quasi counter-culture. Well the classic example in this city of course is Kitsilano, which at one point was the centre of radical culture at the time. Radical organizing, radical art, music, you know – people trying to live in an alternative way ... And now look at it! (Social Activist).

This [Commercial Drive] is the Greenwich Village of Vancouver! (Group Member 2)

The Lower East Side has become a potent example of the changes that take place when capital is invested in neighbourhoods that the new middle-class wish to colonize. Neil Smith, writing about the Lower East Side, called this revanchist, a “symbol of a new urbanism” that “embodies a widespread and drastic repolarisation of the city along political, economic, cultural and geographical lines” (Smith 1996, 6). Although the use of frontier imagery by Smith is arguably questionable12 (is it really a wilderness that is being (re)settled?) ‘the frontier’ is, nonetheless, a powerful metaphor to describe the attitudes of city leaders and capitalist investors who view low property values and ethnic neighbourhoods as empty spaces to be ‘regenerated’ or ‘revitalized’. The quote above tells a story of gentrification in areas with a history and mythology of tolerance, left-wing politics and social activism that was strengthened by a high percentage of artists and activists in the local population. With the rise in property prices and the noticeable

12 Neil Smith did, indeed, assert this himself at a recent talk at Simon Fraser University, September 16, 2008.
changing scope of services on The Drive, from inexpensive and bohemian to trendy and expensive this has become a concern among some people in the neighbourhood. Yet, my research indicates that many residents are not worried about becoming ‘suburban’ and do not feel threatened by the conservative middle class. Instead, they talk about other neighbourhoods in Vancouver that have changed into upscale areas. When interviewees spoke of their territory being invaded or taken over, many mentioned Kitsilano tourists. For example, when I asked Group Member 1 about gentrification, this is how she concludes: “And when you walk by and look in there [a local restaurant] you don’t usually see the artists or musicians in there. And a lot of people are from Kits coming over to eat and drink over here”.

The Kitsilano of the 1960s and 70s is generally remembered as a blue-collar neighbourhood that was a haven for ‘back-to-the-landers’ and hippy counterculture. Indeed, after “Yorkville [a Toronto neighbourhood], Canada’s most celebrated youth neighbourhood was Kitsilano” where “past and present landmarks on Fourth [Ave] as the founding office of Greenpeace, Banyen’s Books, the Divine Light Mission, Naam’s health-food store, cafes and drop-in centres” were popularized (Ley 1996, 183 & 185). However, in less than a decade, it changed considerably to become devoid of light industry and services like automobile garages and hardware stores (Ley 1996). The movement of Greenpeace offices and other such organizations out of Kitsilano further exacerbated the collapse of the myth (Ibid). By the mid-1980s, the area had changed in demographics, infrastructure and industry to reflect middle to upper-middle class demographics (Ibid; Macdonald 1992). Since then, this new, or changed demographic has effectively overshadowed the socially liberal and left-wing narratives of the past. As an interviewee says:
When you talk about a cultural infiltration. Kits having changed from being an artist based neighbourhood to being very sort of urban working professionals ... when you look at that change, that infiltration, I think that's what happens when ... when artists or when art is seen as a phase that people go through – a transient sort of phase where you have people who were struggling in the arts in their twenties and going to yoga classes and painting murals and that kind of a thing and then they marry the investment banker at thirty and then said, "I'm going to have kids and I'm going to settle down on Commercial Drive." Then you have this interesting kind of hybrid sub-community built within the enclave of family but then obviously begins to change the face of the neighbourhood because you have investment banker money but artist morals. (Group Member 2)

Instead, the present-day characteristics of Kitsilano have turned the 1960s and 1970s into a much romanticized, nostalgic memory of Vancouver's recent past. It has become part of the history and mythology of Vancouver as a contemporary city.

What happened in Kitsilano is also what some interviewees believe will happen to Commercial Drive. One interviewee (Art Director I) predicted that a similar process of change would happen over the next decade while others see clear evidence of it now. Interestingly, Mosca and Spicer (2008) write that there has not been much change in attitude or ideology since the last survey of the Commercial Drive neighbourhood was conducted eight years ago by the Grandview-Woodlands Association. However, in a quote that I use in Chapter 3, they write that illegal activity such as marijuana use and graffiti is tolerated by residents as long as they are not negatively impacted. The question is, who defines what is acceptable (tasteful) or not, and has this changed? With a huge increase in land prices, the influx of higher income earners and a resurgence in middle-class families with younger children (in addition to the power afforded by the law to individual property owners) it is easy to come to the conclusion that these new residents influence who is allowed to be a citizen of the community.

As The Drive moves towards becoming a space that is based on individual property rights where property owners and higher income earners 'pioneer' paths recently
used by renters, blue collar workers and diverse ethnic groups, the mythology of the
neighbourhood changes in subtle but fundamental ways. Property owners pay taxes and
have a greater voice in municipal politics. In addition, they are generally more invested
in the state of their neighbourhood for land prices are reflected in the level of attraction of
the area. Essentially, the changing social and residential geography of the
neighbourhood's communities moves mythology further from reality, even as the
ideology of The Drive as a small town, filled with healthy individuals who know each
other and share tolerant, left-wing views stays the same. Indeed, remaking the geography
of the space means a revamping of the myth for,

...myth is constituted by the loss of the geometrical quality of things ...
Deterritorialization is equally central to mythmaking, and the more events are
wrenched from their constitutive geographies, the more powerful the mythology
(Smith 1996, 12 his emphasis).

And this is what we see: art and economics knitting together in a fabric that is not tolerant
of social activism or even neighbourhood participation but instead is constituted by a
"mix of heritage, craft production, the arts, and entertainment" that "have both anticipated
and nurtured the consumption desires of the new middle class" (Ley 1996, 304).

5.2.1 Purchasing and Participation

And the neighbourhood becomes one more, you know, de facto capitalistic
accumulation instrument rather than an aspect of community, which is what
gentrification is ... they want to purchase what they haven't participated in and they
have a mind for capital accumulation, which is to say they buy a cheap house and
flip it for something down the line. (Social Activist)

Well, we're seeing it with the real estate on Commercial Drive. The people that
make this neighbourhood great can't afford to buy houses here. (Art Director 2)

In 2007, I participated, for the third time, in the Parade of the Lost Souls. In
previous years, the focus of my participation was to take part in the parade, enjoy the
experience with friends and spend a night out dressed in costume. This time I again participated with friends, but with this project in mind. Over the years, I have noticed that the festival has slowly changed from being a costumed parade that mixed traditions of harvest, death and early culture ritual to being a street party that had more to do with spectacle and consumption. The 2007 event underscored this perception as the vast majority of attendees, from what I could see, were not participating but were standing on the periphery of the event, taking photos, drinking, getting rowdy and spending money at local restaurants and drinking establishments. Even as the Parade of the Lost Souls increased in numbers (and, to some, in success) it did not seem to reflect The Drive myth but instead conformed to the classic development myth that suggests that growth equals happiness and wellbeing (Logan and Molotch 1987; McCann 2002; Rees 2002).

As I described in Chapter 4, myths constitute many ideals and morals that are not based on substance or reality but instead create a narrative based on belief systems that are detrimental to certain groups of people. Interestingly, the propensity for capital accumulation has been increasing on The Drive. One of the things that many businesses on The Drive have been attempting to do is increase their customer base for it is through this that they can accumulate capital in order to grow. This is an interesting contradiction in respect to the neighbourhood narrative since many residents are, at least in ideals, not interested in living in a culture that is consumption based. Businesses, then, have moved towards creating The Drive as a destination point by appropriating the multi-cultural, liberal and left-wing ‘vibe’ of the street (see www.thedrive.ca, a website created by the Commercial Drive BIA complete with the tagline “Vancouver’s expressive edge!”). Businesses strive to attract a tourist base by catering to consumer, mainstream cultures
that will spend money on the spectacle of the Drive space. An exploration of the
Commercial Drive BIA website reveals that the organization takes credit for funding
programs such as “graffiti removal” and “beautification projects” as well as for assisting
in all of the major events and festivals in the neighbourhood. It seems that their efforts
have seen some success. As one resident put it,

It’s definitely becoming a destination place for people and people from out of
town ... So that’s good but I think that it’s kind of double edged. (Local Resident
2)

This same resident felt that arts and culture is now being used as a tool, in collaboration
with artists, by businesses to further their own success:

[M]ost of the new businesses that are opening up really see the value of having
live entertainment and the fact that most entertainers have their own people that
they can bring out. So you are not just hiring people to entertain the people in the
restaurant, you are using them to promote their place as well. Places like the
Libra Room and Falconetti’s.

The local BIA and policy makers in Vancouver, certainly with some success, are
attempting to co-opt the art and art organizations on Commercial Drive that have
contributed to the village myth. Business owners and local business leaders are taking
advantage of the mythology of The Drive by branding it and using the popularity of the
narrative for economic advantage. This in turn exacerbates the contradiction that artists
and art organizations face. Their success in solidifying The Drive as artsy, trendy and hip
has contributed to the changing demographics of the area and the changing nature of
businesses. This, in turn, has widened the gulf between rich and poor in the
neighbourhood and helped increase the perception from interviewees of a neighbourhood
increasingly segregated along economic and ethnic lines.
So I don’t know what I find harder to deal with: the gentrification or the ghettoization. It seems that both things are happening at the same time. And so I feel caught in the middle of that … artists have to work very hard to hold their territory and as soon as you let go, one of the other two are going to take it really quickly (Local Artist 1).

It is difficult to verify this perception, especially when neighbourhood statistics give a much rosier picture. For example, from 1996 to 2006, the unemployment rate in Grandview-Woodlands decreased from 14.6% to 7.8%, household incomes have increased and the population of low-income families has decreased from 45% to 35% (Planning Department 2008). However, the neighbourhood has many different pockets of people, even to such an extent as drastic differences within one city block. Walking through the neighbourhood, one can encounter an apartment building next to a renovated character home, which is adjacent to a cooperative housing complex. This in itself is a sign of gentrification as new or remodelled houses slowly supplant older apartments and/or less maintained residences. Added to this is the very visible increase in street people, panhandlers and people addicted to drugs.

In Chapter 3, I provided evidence that although there are changes in the neighbourhood, people, perhaps surprisingly, still want to stay. What the study that I referred to there did not tell was who the people were that were interviewed. Since they spoke only with people walking along Commercial Drive, is it possible to get a true representation of resident opinions? There is no doubt that many people love The Drive, even though they increasingly struggle to stay in the neighbourhood. What we do not have a statistical idea about are the increasing numbers of people who live on the streets, are part-time residents or who may live in the neighbourhood but do not spend time walking along Commercial Drive to be available for interviews and surveys. The gulf between the well-off and the very poor is rising. We know this from international,
national and provincial statistics. We are also told this by the people who live in popular areas, where housing prices and rents have skyrocketed and the homeless have continued to increase in numbers. So even though many people still believe that “the character of the street is still pretty good” (Social Activist), and indeed the ‘vibe’ of The Drive is certainly being maintained (and mythologized), it is clear that the processes of gentrification are affecting segments of the community in negative ways.

5.3 It ain’t my fault.

My argument is that the role of artists in neighbourhood identity, change and gentrification is more complex than simply their production of culture as a commodity. Producers of art and culture are a small, if influential, segment of the population, which generally has lower incomes than the average. Many artists do not own property, tend to have marginal or precarious employment and live in low-income neighbourhoods. Even so, these people are privileged because they are often well educated, form strategic cliques and make influential changes in their communities. The comprehensive social networks that artists have are often backed up by economic resources, such as being able to obtain money from parents, that puts them at an advantage over other economically marginalized groups who have little economic or social capital. They are promoters of gentrification because their strong sense of ownership contributes to changes in the neighbourhood that make it more attractive to other more wealthy elites, as well as speculators and developers. Artists tend to make their homes attractive because their lives revolve around creation and aesthetics. There is, then, no denying that artists are implicated in neighbourhood changes that makes it more attractive to home owners and land speculators. Given that many artists both attract capital and can hardly afford the
consequences of gentrification because of their financial difficulties, it is perhaps not surprising that when presented with the argument that they contribute to gentrification, many interviewees responded with denial and anger.

Accept responsibility? I don’t – that’s kind of harsh to expect artists to accept responsibility for something they aren’t aware of. The unknown result of the future by creating beauty and to have to be responsible in the future as a result of the beauty they have created. (Art Director 2)

I think you can’t just not create stuff because people are going to be attracted to it. (Group Member 1)

Of course, they do but when good people get together and want to make a nicer place to live, what are they fucking supposed to do? ... should we make it a worse place to live? (Social Activist)

Even when faced with research that demonstrates the role that artists play in promoting gentrification in a neighbourhood, why are artists so easily provoked to denial of responsibility? Apart from the apparent financial stress of being an artist, I believe that the main reason is that it would mar their utopian worldview. As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, looking at the concept of assumptive reality or world-view can give us insight into mythmaking, the performance of maintaining a dominant myth. As Elkind writes,

Sometimes, as in problem-solving situations, the child can test a hypothesis against the facts. But at other times, particularly when the young person’s emotions are aroused, he or she will take a hypothesis for reality. Given facts contrary to this hypothesis, the young person will alter the facts to fit the hypothesis rather than alter the hypothesis itself (1980, 353).

This concept can also be applied to adults, civic leaders and other decision-makers because as stories are retold and ritualized, what we assume to be real does not necessarily bring into account the understandings of others, especially those with less agency and influence. Artists are particularly susceptible to this since they often feel,
from my experiences in interviews and observation, that their work cannot be anything but positive or at least encourage political change in people and communities. There is a wide spectrum of reasons why artists create their work. Some strive to unhinge norms and help people view the world in alternative ways, while others work to maintain a certain ideal. In addition, artists that work together in an organization that has common goals towards creating inclusive neighbourhoods that are healthy and strong feel justified in their actions for they understand their creative work to be good and morally sound. They have difficulty relinquishing their worldviews because they have invested so much of their ideals and beliefs into their livelihood. Denial of their role in promoting marginalization processes in neighbourhood is understandable. Assumptive world-views are only turned upside down during major trauma or at life changing junctions (Parkes 1991) and these are difficult to see when they can take years, as changes in neighbourhoods often do.

Although artists make neighbourhoods more appealing, this is only a part of the gentrification process. In fact, Ley (1996, 2003) admits that artists are simply the precursors of gentrification. Art organizations can change a neighbourhood but it is ultimately the injection of capital that truly promotes gentrification processes in significant ways (Smith 1996, 2002). Groups Member 4 explains it well by saying that the blame should be on the ‘system’:

It’s not the artists’ fault! It’s a result of the beauty of an artist’s vision and mind but I don’t think that it’s the artists’ responsibility. Like, what should we do to stop gentrification that rides on the back of artists? I can’t imagine that. I think that, yes, it follows artists but artists are certainly not to blame. The system is to blame. Our lack of policy that protects people’s homes is to blame.
Group Member 5 is frank about the skyrocketing property prices: people are moving east because it is all they can (barely) afford before moving out of the city completely, where they would feel isolated from their artistic communities. Artists do not want to be pigeonholed in an academic discourse that lays the blame of gentrification at their feet. They struggle for their rights as contributing citizens to be heard in a system that puts value on utilitarian action through creativity, perseverance and business savvy. The three art organisations that I have studied are not constructed to be profitable in this neoliberal sense but instead to add value to communities to build up societies and groups in ways that increases happiness, strengthens identities and promotes a sense of belonging. Of course, not all organizations are like this and it is naïve to think that all artists are only interested in the happiness of others. However, when we look at community organizations with mandates to increase participation in neighbourhoods, clearly the focus is not on increasing the exchange value of land, even if they do play some part in the process.

Artists are beginning to acknowledge this as their belief in the strength of the Commercial Drive narrative is thrown into conflict with the fact that the neighbourhood is changing into something quite different from their mythic urban village. The injection of capital into real estate on The Drive has meant that the tangible consequences of development are becoming a reality. This has had a profound effect on the way artists see their neighbourhood as many long-time residents move elsewhere, struggle to find accommodation in close proximity to their communities on The Drive, or increasingly need to work outside their chosen profession in order to support their art and thus have less time to put into community activities.
5.4 What Can Artists Do?

[T]here's a ton of great community artists in this neighbourhood in particular ... that have made it their business to make the neighbourhood a better place. (Social Activist)

The Drive mythology is being dismantled, assumptive world-views shaken up and there are BMWs on the street. The neighbourhood is changing and many of the people I interviewed feel that they have no way of stopping it. Why should artists be blamed for marginalization when their work so often involves making the neighbourhood a better place to live in by increasing levels of community commitment and wellbeing?

Interviewees tended to throw their arms up in despair. They feel that as much as they try, there is nothing they can do as long as the local government does not recognize them as legitimate workers and money keeps pouring into their neighbourhood with the end result being increased rents, higher food prices and the increasing marginalization of the poor.

Regardless, my experience with community art organizations is that many of the members resist the problems of gentrification and propose solutions to them. This is part of the dominant mythology of The Drive: artists and political activists understand themselves to be resisting 'the system' and the people outside their bubble who attempt to marginalize them.

Yet, denial generally does not lead to many solutions. In fact, this is the conclusion that many people I spoke with came to after their initial heated protestations. It was then that the conversation often moved towards being action-based citizens in order to protect their way of life. Thus, the first option for artists has been to resist the system, the 'established order'. Waterman writes that,
The popular festival enables the politically marginal to express discontent through ritual, thereby restricting their revolutionary impulses to symbolic form, in which case the festival acts as a medium of resistance to the established order (1998, 60).

The festival is what all three organizations use as a framework for resistance. It is also a way to engage in a fundamental of citizenship: solidarity. Isin (2002) feels that solidarity within various groups of people helps define the ethics and morals of a community. Thus, solidarity fosters identity, effectively undermining processes that work against the urban village myth.

5.4.1 Solidarity, Institutionalization and Celebration

All three organizations use solidarity as a method of resisting passive consumption and the co-option of neighbourhood mythologies. Although much of what the Black Crow Project does is based on small events, they have aligned themselves with organizations that have a great deal of political impact. For example, in the fall of 2007, the BCP participated in ‘Rock for Insite’, a one-day festival at a music venue (The Railway Club in Vancouver) to bring exposure to the need to maintain a health facility for drug users on the Downtown Eastside. They recognized that their neighbourhood is affected by the troubles that follow drug addiction and know that the connections they make with other organizations at such gatherings prove invaluable for disseminating ideas of resisting the marginalization of these same people in their neighbourhood. Art has an advantage over other modes of action in this regard since it creatively draws likeminded people together to work against the very processes that they may have unwittingly initiated in the first place. There is power in art organizations that collaborate on social issues because the creativity of the artist can promote issues in controversial or spectacular ways.
... you can have a bunch of people get together and they have a parade about the fact that there is a Wal-Mart going up down the street and how everybody feels about it and the houses being torn down and you take real things that are happening, you put it into a play and show it to the community and you can have backlash. You never know what’s going to come out of it. (Group Member 2)

These connections or solidarities are even more influential when they become institutionalized. PDS’s Parade of the Lost Souls has become a major event in the city:

Although it is important to keep in mind that when organizations become the de facto mode of maintaining a community they seem to be ripe for co-option and spectacle, especially by those looking to increase exchange values, we need to recognize that this also puts art organizations at an advantage. The value that political and business leaders affiliated with The Drive have put on PDS to organize this festival is significant. The Commercial Drive BIA, for example, uses this festival as a signature event for the neighbourhood, travel guides talk about it as one of the neighbourhood’s main attractions and city politicians (along with large companies like Telus) have recognized its importance through major sponsorships and official support. The parade is over 20 years old and so has added to the mythology of The Drive as vibrant and tolerant.

Further, people like Richard Florida (2003), encourage city leaders to embrace and promote neighbourhoods that contain radical, activist and artistic communities. Although possible for gentrifiers to appropriate the festival and turn it into passive consumption, it is not likely given the recognition of this type of co-option by the organizers themselves. This would only be possible if there was an extreme change in local demographics where elites outnumbered others on these organizational boards and the population of radicals so

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decreased that other events or festivals could not be created. For the time being, even though the neighbourhood has moved towards less participation, the rate of people involved is still very high.

Art organizations may then become another way to gather a community to work for a common purpose.

[Y]ou do [art] and you connect people to each other. Very powerful. You can have stories attached to it, you can have an evening where there’s a celebration of the unveiling of all these sculptures. It connects people who might previously have not been connected. You don’t have to charge [a fee]. You don’t have to have a health card. It’s more empowering than a group where you would just sit around and talk. (Group Member 2)

It is at least partially through the power of these connections that communities like Commercial Drive have been at least somewhat successful in resisting gentrifying processes. These solidarity strategies mean that the community becomes inclusive and breaks down the social barriers that are common in areas that are becoming gentrified.

“Art disrupts boundaries. It definitely attracts likeminded people but it also creates more inclusivity” (Groups Member 1).

Art organizations subvert the barriers that marginalization produces through celebration, and it is celebration that has become institutionalized as a major factor in the myth of The Drive. From Car Free Days to In The House Festival, the neighbourhood narrative is recounted and ritualized through moments of celebration whether it be a day for the whole neighbourhood or private parties in backyards. Art organizations celebrate neighbourhoods and enhance local communities through a celebratory engagement with others and with the environment (Quinn 2005; Sandercock 2003; Waterman 1998). They help people look at the world from a different perspective so that one can find strength
and tools to resist change. They provide a space where one can momentarily move away from the travails of mundane life in solidarity with others. As Group Member 2 said, “I make you laugh when you feel shitty and that is more valuable than, ‘Here is Valium and take it for six weeks and come back and renew your prescription’.” Art is a happy necessity for a community: “I think it is just as necessary – it’s like food for the soul. But a pleasurable part. A pleasurable necessity!” (Art Director 2).

Wrapped into this is the ability or, indeed, necessity to think critically. Artists provide information not based on fact but instead provide a space to think critically about what we are being told in mainstream society. “But I think that what art offers that a lot of these other things don’t offer, is a question period” (Group Member 2). This critical thinking is imperative to resisting an entrepreneurial and capitalist system that propounds development and expansion as the answer to financial and economic woes. Art organizations, even considering their subjective belief in their high moral standards, often do provide spaces to think critically, which offers the possibility of stronger connections within the community. This gives people a greater sense of wellbeing and health as they become more accepting and open.

I think that, art, including music, is a way that we can reflect on our present, past and future culture that is not attached to news or media … it’s a different kind of observation. And it’s a different kind of recording of culture. It’s like observing it from a [different] standpoint. (Group Member 1)

The modern, secular world is constructed around a system that believes that science and logic is objective and factual. This is the normative discourse of our society’s generic (and mythical) answer to issues of inequality and poverty (Rees 2002). It is “the belief that human welfare can all but be equated with ever-increasing material well-being.
(income growth)” (Ibid, 251). This follows the neoliberal, puritan framework that if you work hard you will be successful simply because the system rewards those people. It is based on the false assumption that the world has enough resources for everyone to live adequately and happily as long as they engage in a capitalist system (Ibid). Art organizations mandated to help communities grow and be healthy are made up of artists who provide ways of seeing the world differently and promote a wider acceptance of difference (in culture, ethnicity, etc.).

[Art provides] a broader perspective … When you look at a piece of art … you might be able to get a little bit more closer to their perspective by looking at that or trying to understand it. Or listening to their music and hearing that they are coming at it from this perspective and you think, “I never thought of it from this perspective but now that I hear it from them I’m just a little bit closer to understanding who they are”, and therefore that leads to a more acceptance of each other – culturally. Men/women, age differences, cultural differences, racial differences – all that stuff I think through looking at each others’ art and music is way more inviting to understand each other rather than through something that is a lot more factual and technical. There is less room for understanding in fact than there is in art and music. (Group Member 1)

5.4.2 Performing the Myth: The Commons

Making the conditions and the possibilities available for all kinds of people to participate in common life. That’s what a community is. (Social Activist)

The power of the commons is that it is neither public nor private but is commonly owned by the local community. My interest in the commons is not as a resource but as common ownership based on use. The tradition of the commons is perhaps most well-known in the West as an historical English system where people in the community still walk through privately owned land along trails that have been used for centuries. These trails and tracts of land were, until the advent of surveying and hedging in the 1600s, not only commonly used but also commonly governed by the community with codes of
conduct ingrained in the local narrative (Blomley 2007). Commercial Drive has been described as a type of commons by interviewees (Social Activist, Art Director 1, Local Resident 1) because of its high rate of participation in the public sphere and intolerance towards development that could usurp social ownership of the street, curb side gardens, parks and playgrounds – even the sidewalk. The commons is “something produced through social action, such as gardening [in public spaces]” (Blomley 2004, 635). Although ‘legally’ owned by the city these spaces are used by the neighbourhood community to enforce The Drive myth. This is a huge resister to processes that seek to co-opt the vibrancy and liveliness of the neighbourhood.

Thus, art organizations play a huge role in strengthening a community that has moved towards a common ownership of the neighbourhood. This is attractive to people because they can feel safe while moving about in spaces where they do not normally have a sense of control. Art organizations help people get engaged in their community so that a commons can be realized in the public spaces of everyday life.

I like to make parades because it is such an inclusive art form. People have such an immediate opportunity for creative expression and it’s fun and people have a joyful time together. So we went through the back alleys and in the post mortem of the first Parade of the Lost Souls, what was noticed was that this helps make the neighbourhood safer because people are ... like on a ritual level we were making noise to chase away bad spirits but on a physical level we were meeting people, we were being the eyes – there were eyes on the alleys, there was just this more awareness of each other and the neighbourhood. (Art Director 4)

Citizenship as participation and action is, then, vital to the artists. The act of walking through a commonly held landscape has territorial implications on physical, emotional, intellectual and even spiritual levels that all contribute to a commonality among the citizens who perform these geographies. Citizens perform the stories and identities of
themselves as truth. In so doing, their communities can be strengthened with self-government of the commons and increased wellbeing.

[F]ind me a happy community that doesn’t have some kind of performance. Some way, shape or form. It is an outlet for countless number of things. Not just to be emotional; it could be spiritual, it could be anything. You can transform a person with the arts. An angry person becomes a beautiful person because all of a sudden they can play the guitar or they can paint a mural – they can even do graffiti! (Art Director 1)

This performance contributes to the local truths held commonly by neighbourhood citizens. A community based on performing truths (myths) is difficult to co-opt by gentrifiers – instead they must assimilate, at least to some degree, into the local narrative. Indeed, research by Proudfoot and McCann (2008) illustrates how prevailing attitudes of tolerance and community in East Vancouver neighbourhoods seem to be adopted to some extent by new residents. If not, they risk becoming isolated.

Being removed from the local narrative is the antithesis of what makes Commercial Drive attractive in the first place. Although art can be inclusive, those that do not prescribe to stories in the neighbourhood and attempt to create social barriers that rely on individual property ownership instead of commonly governed spaces cannot be a part of the performance. Gentrifiers in a strong neighbourhood like Commercial Drive are faced with a resistance that is not materialist or consumption based but is ingrained in the community consciousness. This has been reiterated and performed repeatedly that it has become ritualized. Art is process oriented – it does not rely on an end result. This means that the neighbourhood is in constant flux, which makes it difficult to remain static or artificial and generic. As Group Member 3 stated, “Most of the time, the philosophy that I was mentored under and use was that the end result isn’t as important as the process
to get there”. It focuses on the *doing* and *action* parts of a project, instead of the simplified legal rights prescribed to a citizen by the state (Isin 2002). This means that art organizations, like the three I have explored, are trying to make connections, evoke feelings, project ideas that promote understanding (or at least promote questions and critical thought) in the work that they do: Social boundaries and barriers are difficult to maintain in a space where performance is a key ingredient to the dominant discourse.

### 5.5 Conclusion

It’s an unacknowledged benefit to society that artists bring, because you move into a junky house and you’re an artist so you make it look great, and you do stuff. You bring life into the neighbourhood. (Art Director 4)

In the previous section, I outlined a number of strategies (intended and unintended) of artists and art organizations that they hope will slow gentrification in their neighbourhood. However, to conclude, it may be more accurate to say that what artists and art organizations do is simply maintain the structure of a changing myth, remaking and redefining it as the neighbourhood changes. If the myth is anti-gentrification, then resistance to gentrification, or what people see as gentrification, becomes the dominant narrative so that people’s assumptive realities are not challenged or disrupted. Even as the processes of the growth machine are put into motion, artists first deny their own involvement before they reluctantly acknowledge they may play a part. At the same time, they work together in solidarity against processes of change. Ways of living in the neighbourhood are changing. The mythical tolerance and hip culture suddenly becomes suspect. Tolerance is idolized but only to the extent that what people are doing is “tasteful” so that we see a self-government emerging that may be inclusive but is also
territorial, protective and exclusive. As Grafton (2000, 507) writes, "... the social norms of the community can be effective at controlling undesirable and opportunistic behaviour of individuals within the community".

Art organizations like In The House Festival are an important ingredient to keeping the commons alive and governed by engaging the community in their story, which provides the impetuous to take responsibility for their neighbourhood communities. They bring definition to the neighbourhood in a very significant way, providing the eyes and ears of social change, stimulating alternative perspectives and adding joy to the community. In The House Festival blurs the public/private divide and illustrates the importance of a commons where citizens are responsible for the wellbeing of the community, not the individual, private owner. They promote active participation that provides joy, happiness and wellbeing is hopefully effective in slowing neighbourhood appropriation by gentrifiers.

The celebration of life and the neighbourhood through the arts promotes critical thinking and new perspectives. It also strengthens the dominant myths and thereby legitimizes the status quo. There are many different ways to resist gentrification. Anti-gentrification strategies like low-income housing, co-operatives, social programs for the mentally ill and job-start program centres\textsuperscript{14} all contribute to maintaining a certain quality of life in the neighbourhood that subverts traditional gentrification. To successfully resist, the community must work to "accumulate a repository of anti-gentrification measures" (Social Activist), not simply rely on artists, who play the paradoxical role of being residents who intentionally and unintentionally pave the way for gentrification.

\textsuperscript{14} All of which exist in the Commercial Drive neighbourhood.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

[T]he artist isn’t trying to create elitism. They are creating – they are putting it out there. They don’t know what is going to happen after they have created it. I don’t know, at least with the Black Crow Project, there wasn’t any ulterior future motive of changing the community in some negative way. It was just the assumption that bringing people together was a good thing and music was a good thing and raising money for the homeless and mentally ill was a good thing. (Art Director 2)

We will always be marginalized and this is not a self-pitying routine. It will always be a question of finding a subculture or finding a ... like scenting things out. And how an artist fits into a community is the big question. You know, financially how do they fit in, socially how do they fit in, politically how do they fit in? (Group Member 2)

The research question guiding this thesis project is: How do artists and art groups resolve the contradiction between their real or potential contribution to a politics of inclusion, on the one hand, and their real or potential role in assisting gentrification processes that effectively change who does or does not belong in a neighbourhood, on the other?

As I have suggested, this is, in part, a question of citizenship, defined in terms of performance and action. Furthermore, the question begs a conceptualization of the spatialized actions of local residents within neighbourhood communities, groups and organizations. I have suggested that community art organizations are a useful object of research in this context because they invest in festivals, parades, concerts and other activities that they believe will help place-based communities. By looking at citizenship as identity in action, we see that, as Lepofsky and Fraser suggest, “the content of citizenship shifts from given as status, to citizenship given as performative practice or an
identity to be accessed, possessed and utilized" (2002, 139). The politics of citizenship – and, by extension, the politics of place – is comprised of varying and competing forces that vie for power to define neighbourhoods and neighbourhood life (Isin 2002).

Narratives and myths about places are central to this type of artistic practice and neighbourhood politics. They are performed by neighbourhood citizens, repeatedly underscoring and institutionalizing the identities of who they are. After reading Ley’s book, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (1996), I felt that the way we conceptualize artists and neighbourhood development in academic research is often in economic terms that removes the complexity of social interaction within diverse but strong neighbourhoods. Yes, artists contribute to gentrification processes and yes, they are also social justice advocates but they cannot be conceived as either harbingers or opponents of detrimental neighbourhood change. Instead, they need to be represented within a spectrum of strategies, forces, contexts, and possibilities that are fluid and changing, much like any other forms of human interactions, connections and relationships.

This argument crystallized and strengthened when I interviewed artists who work in art organizations, residents and local activists. These people both deny and acknowledge the artists’ role in gentrification *and* at the same time provide reasons why they should not be defined or stigmatized in a simplistic manner. In this regard, however, we cannot necessarily expect to see artists ‘resolving the contradiction’ because they refuse to *acknowledge* their role and responsibility as urban frontier settlers, in the sense that Smith (1996) uses that term. This denial is, I have suggested, a result of constructed identities where ideas about the world are not changed unless they are significantly
disturbed. Overwhelmingly, the artists I studied believe that their work is good for the
neighbourhood since they are creative people who work to bring a community together
and make the neighbourhood a better place to live. To them, the contradiction is not the
point. What is important is that neighbourhoods and communities are healthy so that
wellbeing and happiness are achieved. If gentrifiers wish to appropriate this ‘good city’
(Amin, 2006), the artists feel that they should not be blamed but instead they and others
(policy makers, civic leaders, planners and regulators) should take action to manage and
protect neighbourhoods and communities. On the other hand, a smaller group of artists
seem to see their work as being largely aesthetic and apolitical. Although it is easy to
problematicize this position by asking, for example, if any work that affects people be
characterized as free from politics, many artists themselves believe that their work has
nothing to do with the politics of neighbourhood change. Gentrification, however, is
underpinned by socio-economic and political processes that involve residents, including
artists, whether they realize it or not. Artists that deny their role in this process because
they think they are apolitical risk the possibility of missing the changes in their
neighbourhood simply because they cannot see beyond themselves and their work. On
the other hand, those that are willing to take action with the other players have the
opportunity to be leaders in their community and help foster local mythology.

In areas like Commercial Drive where there are a large proportion of artists,
radicals and bohemians, it is clear that art organizations help propound and foster the
small-town mythology of the neighbourhood. They provide us with a glimpse of the
territoriality, especially in relation to other neighbourhoods in the city that is necessarily
both marginalizing and inclusive to maintain an identity built on the physical spaces of
the neighbourhood. Art is used, both negatively and positively, to empower communities by helping people create strategies of solidarity and othering in tune with the hegemonic narrative (although the conditions under which people can choose their identities and futures are, of course, shaped by many forces that artists have little control over). That the mythology of a neighbourhood is strengthened by enhancing participatory citizenship does not, however, mean that exclusion does not occur. Isin (2002) is clear that creating citizenship also means that struggles for who dominates the myths fosters otherness or, as he writes, alterity. Artists interviewed for this research argue that art is a necessity for the survival of communities and that art brings “a different angle to the building blocks that make a community” (Art Director 3). Indeed, groups of people, whether they are urban communities or concerning larger cultural groups rely on creative elements to foster greater cohesion and understandings of themselves through mythmaking and storytelling.

Through propounding a specific village myth that has art as one of its ‘building blocks’ however, means that artists and their organizations contribute to the pressures of gentrification and the desire for capitalist enterprise to appropriate the trademarks of an attractive neighbourhood. This ideology, that artists and art organizations help fill in one of the gaps needed to create a vibrant community, means that neighbourhoods with a high ratio of artists are seen as appealing to tourists, residents and would-be residents. In this sense, Ley (2003) is right, artists are the dominated elite who are caught between making neighbourhoods stronger and being part of the liberal economic engine, that through the influx of capital, creates marginalization. Thus, it is imperative that state and neighbourhood leaders foster artists and their groups through acceptance, acknowledgement and action while at the same time consider that the very presence of
artistic change (beautification, fostering participation, etc.) can produce negative consequences. Ultimately, artists need to be supported through funding regimes that enable, instead of paralyse, the arts so that they can strengthen communities through positive storytelling and actions that address social issues of exclusion. At the same time, it is imperative that strategies are put in place that would provide the resources and support needed to survive for those who wish to stay in the neighbourhood but could be pushed aside because of the changes that artists bring. Support (moral or financial) for artists need not be relegated to a simple utilitarian arena through an economic agenda, therefore. This might be argued to be particularly the case at a time when city leaders are realizing that healthy neighbourhoods foster wellbeing in a variety of measures.

Although some artists do say they are apolitical we must remember that artists are a diverse group. The three organizations that I have studied are consciously political and have clear mandates to help increase community participation through their activities. These artists are trying to make a critical difference on The Drive and thus help increase the vibrancy and active citizenship of the residents. The people in these art groups may acknowledge the paradox but it is clear that they will not, or cannot, stop being creative people, especially since they are working to resist the negative changes that often take place in attractive neighbourhoods. To stop would be for them to put themselves into a state of paralysis that is detrimental to the neighbourhood. One of the reasons for The Drive’s vibrancy is that the public nature of raising participatory levels because of artists is so prevalent and well known. This is part of The Drive story and its reputation. I argue, then, that they should not stop their activities simply because what they do will result in the commodification of a neighbourhood. These activities are political and focus
on resisting social cleavages such as opening homes to others or walking through alleys in a symbolic reclaiming of spaces. These art organizations and artists actively attempt to be inclusive and socially aware by tackling the very real issues of homelessness and the mentally ill as well as the environment and general wellbeing through the arts. Examples include soliciting money for the Portland Hotel Society, raising awareness of the Gateway Project, ritualistic parades through back alleys and even bringing public into private homes. Without these forms of creative resistance, there would be one less avenue for critically questioning growth machine agendas (Amin, 2005; Cox and Mair, 1998; McCann, 2002).

6.1 What do Residents Want?

The commons ... is an underrated, much-ignored reservoir of valuable resources, system of social governance, and crucible for democratic aspirations (Steinberg 1995,15 quoted in Blomley 2004, 635).

[Geographers are today witnessing the increasing importance of the geographical factor in explaining the dynamics and performance of productive sectors. In particular, the logic of spatial agglomeration is taking an increasingly central place in the analysis and explanation of competitive processes, and this directly leads to the role of cities as hubs of a new organizational model in which production, living, leisure, and social relationships tend to occur in the same complex-layered economic and social space. (Sacco et al. 2007, 13)"

The contemporary world can be argued to require “heterogeneity, hybridization and contamination ... between technologies, processes and products” (Sacco et al. 2007, 14). Risk-taking, flexibility, and willingness to change are valued. Art and culture plays a part in this, as it increases happiness and wellbeing (Sacco et al. 2007; Sandercock 2005) above what income can provide because it allows people to create and solidify their identities with their localities. This provides stability in a fluid society. In a society that is increasingly blurring the boundaries between work and leisure (Florida, 2002), art
organizations have an opportunity to foster local narratives and strengthen communities.

In promoting a local ownership there are times (and spaces) when (and where) people engage in activities that can move a neighbourhood beyond the individualism of contemporary society and into what Blomley (2007) describes was the norm in 17th century England. There the common lands were utilized and enjoyed by the local populations and when threatened, they took action (such as tearing down hedges) to retain what they believed was land owned by the community.

Art and culture in the public realm provides a vehicle by which people can engage in the commons and feel fulfilled and connected: they provide the avenue for local, neighbourhood citizenship and thus, wellbeing and happiness. Income does not equal happiness after a certain threshold (Sacco 2007). Art organizations can create the experiences that objects do not because the participation and adventures that can occur with art often involve others. Art creates social interactions that become the focus of identity and citizen-making. However, the reality is that a strong community that creates common land out of public land has ramifications that are not necessarily positive. To begin, there is gentrification and development. Many examples of neighbourhoods that were famous for their art, activism and community such as Greenwich Village, Mission Hill or Kitsilano, have gone through incredible amounts of gentrification. People are attracted to community, which provides fuel for developers, policy makers, politicians and property owners. As people move into an area, services need to be upgraded, homes renovated, suites built, and public spaces created. This means that laws need to be changed to reflect new zoning pressures (to allow suites in homes for instance or maintain a heritage look or feel) and conflict emerges between many original residents who are
increasingly marginalized and/or experience negative changes in their lives. To change laws means that political will needs to be evident, and this generally occurs through municipal government. Therefore, not only does this have economic ramifications but it also involves the socio-political spheres of governing bodies within both the impacted community and municipal government, effectively linking the social with the economic through political action.

Another aspect that we need to consider is territoriality. Through their research, Proudfoot and McCann (2008) briefly note that the dominant narratives, to a degree, assimilate people who move into neighbourhoods like Commercial Drive. Understandably, because they are attracted to the area in the first place, people take on (or already have) some of the prevailing attitudes that the community promotes. The result of this is stronger boundaries and barriers towards both outsiders and those in the community that may not fall within the narratives’ parameters. Indeed, there is a common understanding among interviewees about the physical limits of Commercial Drive. This also translates into a feeling or a sense that people have. Although the premise of defending your turf is honourable, the ramifications of misplaced protection can be severe. The mistrust and hostility that is sometimes created through territoriality needs to be considered because much of these threats are not legitimate but are instead based on fear of the ‘other’

Art organizations can also be a vehicle to create spaces that are commonly owned as well as strengthen narratives of tolerance, diversity and joy. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, Vancouver, which contains a rich proportion of cultural players, does not have a very good system of supporting them financially or creating links between
themselves and other people who influence neighbourhood change. Instead, artists are often isolated through non-recognition, under-funding, ill-advised business planning, locality and even trends. City leaders still seem to prefer creating ‘hubs’ and ‘clusters’ of cultural areas, leaving organizations that do not fall within strictly defined guidelines or situated outside of designated ‘precincts’ at a loss. As planners and government officials begin to grasp this, more support for arts and culture in the neighbourhood and community development realms could become reality. Even so, we must not leave with the romantic vision that artists and their groups are miracle workers who are the main vehicles to support local myths, foster strong identities and contribute to community wellbeing. They must be in the mix to create the ‘Good City’ (Amin 2006) but with their sense of the moral high ground, denial of the consequences of their actions and cliquish tendencies they cannot be expected or mandated to be the sole providers of the neighbourhoods that they consider theirs.

6.2 Challenges and Future Research Opportunities

Most artists that work in art organizations that are mandated to foster communities are not exclusively dedicated to these directives but are instead creative in many areas of their lives and enjoy a multiplicity of occupations and careers. Their dedication to communities varies along axes of loyalty, health, economic wellbeing, political persuasion, and even friendship. These people and their organizations are complex social groups with a great deal of influence in their respected communities. Art organizations are comprised of a spectrum of people who work in many different aspects and ways. Thus, to research art in the community and the ramifications on the neighbourhood is not a simple task. Indeed, race, class, occupation, density, language, culture, neighbourhood
attraction, speculation and the financial system, geography and religion are only some of the factors that must be considered if this small survey was to be ‘networked out’ to a larger scale.

In relation to policy concerning the work and roles of artists in neighbourhoods, the challenge is to figure out how to provide city leaders and decision makers with information that is helpful and beneficial to urban dwellers. We also need to remember that artists themselves are not the sole providers of neighbourhood wellbeing and can in fact be a detriment to people that are marginalized by communities that become more ‘attractive’. This means that it is important that we explore both the negative and positive impacts of the arts, other players and the many relationships between artists and other residents, in neighbourhoods such as Commercial Drive. In fact, we need to find those neighbourhoods that have not yet moved towards gentrification in order to minimize marginalization when changes occur and encourage local participation so that communities remain strong. The particular neighbourhood that I focus on, Commercial Drive, is a unique and desirable model. However, to try to bottle it up with specific ingredients to pass on as a commodity for other urban areas will not work. If there is a desire to promote citizenship in the city then we need to look seriously at the organic and sociological aspects of these vibrant and liveable urban areas. If not, we risk forcibly changing neighbourhoods by developing them as ‘walkable’ or ‘pedestrian friendly’ without incorporating these features into planning.

Thus, I am suggesting that this is not a one size fits all formula but instead the success of The Drive should only be used as information or, at best, a goalpost to create strategies to provide people of influence with tools and strategies to foster the arts in
communities. Further research is needed, then, in looking at the linkages between artists and their neighbourhoods. Indeed, the connections that this (relatively) small community has with each other both inside and outside their respective communities are also in need of further investigation since many artists do not only stray in their neighbourhood but instead spread their ideologies and stories throughout the city and elsewhere. Alternatively, other artists and events from outside their respective communities influence them. Researching these linkages would reveal how important it is to explore community oriented artistic work beyond the local scale.

Due to the scope and size of this project, it was not possible to address the many varieties of culture and ethnicity, age-based communities or even common geographies of people that flow through and within Commercial Drive. These are layers that overlap and integrate groups in various ways – from middle-class Chinese communities where elderly Chinese ladies walk together around the block while their grandchildren attend the Parade of the Lost Souls to the mix of First Nations and punk rock hipsters who frequent some corners but also belong to art collectives that paint murals for the BIA. So, not only is there a dearth of research that explores the many expressions of the residents in a neighbourhood like Commercial Drive, such as ethnicity or other non-artistic community clubs, but there is also a need to explore other artistic and politically based groups. For instance, there are Asian and First Nations artists not considered in this thesis that are influential on Commercial Drive and throughout the city. Indeed, the artists I spoke with and the art organizations I studied make up a small group of the artists on The Drive, and the focus was generally only on performance-based art, which certainly has an impact on analysis. However, the research in this thesis provides a documentation of the impact
that art in a political context has on residents. It shows that art is important in facilitating a citizenship based on action and performance that can be incredibly territorial and exclusionary. The research illustrates how participation in events and festivals can be both empowering and provide ammunition for othering those groups that do not subscribe to the dominant small-town myth of Commercial Drive. Further, the narrative that I have given provides us with a glimpse of how people use art, music and performance to consciously resist the impulses of capital to individualize and marginalize by providing spaces of citizenship for communities. Artists and art organizations are integral to the vibrancy and narrative of Commercial Drive but they do so in contradictory ways that can supplant residents, integrate other groups and provide both economic and social capital in unique and controversial ways.


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APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What does your organization do? Why is this important?
- Briefly, please explain what you do in the organization?
- What are the main objectives of your organization?
- In what ways are these objectives met?
- Why do you think it is important for organizations to have a vision that includes the public?
- Tell me about your feelings about this neighbourhood
- Why do you focus on the Commercial Drive neighbourhood?
- Why do you feel that it is important to have events such as In The House Festival?
- Is art inherently political? Does it have an agenda?
- In what ways do the arts help people?
- How do you think the arts make people feel more inclusive?
- Can art have a negative effect on a neighbourhood?
- In what ways could the arts marginalize people and communities?
- How do you think people should act in neighbourhoods and community?
- Do you believe that the arts are useful as a political tool? Why or why not?
- Many believe that artists are actually the catalysts for gentrifying changes in urban neighbourhoods. How does this make you feel?
- Whose or what narratives do you think art represents?

Any other contacts?
Readings that you recommend?
Can I call or email with follow up questions and clarifications?
APPENDIX 2: SELECTED ART AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN EAST VANCOUVER

Amnesty International
Bicyclettes
Black Crow Project
Britannia Community Services
Car Free Vancouver
Community Arts Workshop
East Side Culture Crawl
Environmental Youth Alliance
Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House
Greenpeace
In The House Festival
Latinos in Action
OXFAM
Portland Hotel Society
Public Dreams Society
Summer Cinema in the Parks
The Purple Thistle
Vancouver Dyke March and Festival Society
Vancouver Pride Society