

**LANDSCAPES IN TRANSITION AT THE NORTHERN EDGE OF DOWNTOWN**

**VICTORIA**

By

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## ✧ Abstract ✧

THIS THESIS TELLS THE STORY of the transition—from an industrial area to a Design District—of a few blocks at the northern edge of Victoria’s downtown. The story is presented as a subjective narrative, grounded in my own experiences of the study area but bringing in other voices. To develop the meanings embedded in the emerging landscape, I have described a variety of places that have existed there, together with the people who were associated with those places. I have done this by looking at the area as five distinct overlapping landscapes, each one representing a different viewpoint, a different social group, and different tensions and compromises. Each landscape played a role in the emergence of the Design District. The first landscape is that of the *flâneuse*. This is a descriptive chapter, presented as a stroll through the area, enhanced by pictures. As I move on to the industrial landscape I review the history of the area both as a part of Victoria’s contested working harbour, and as a contaminated landscape awaiting remediation. A chapter about the derelict landscape is a look at the area as the social turf of the street community, a chance to ponder the real needs and nature of the street community, to see how derelict spaces become important places for our most vulnerable citizens, and to consider the position of the street community in the face of gentrification. The creative landscape is an exploration of the vibrant arts scene of northern downtown in the 1990s and the contribution of artists to gentrification. A chapter on the residential landscape then examines the successes and frustrations associated with the gentrified live-work lofts that have come to mark the southern half of the study area. In conclusion, consideration of the cohesiveness of the Design District brings each of these separate landscape versions back together, to reiterate how each shaped the Design District, and to trace the history of the Design District’s theming and branding.



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✧ *Dedication* ✧

To Sean Nattrass – twin soul.



## ❧ Chapter One ❧

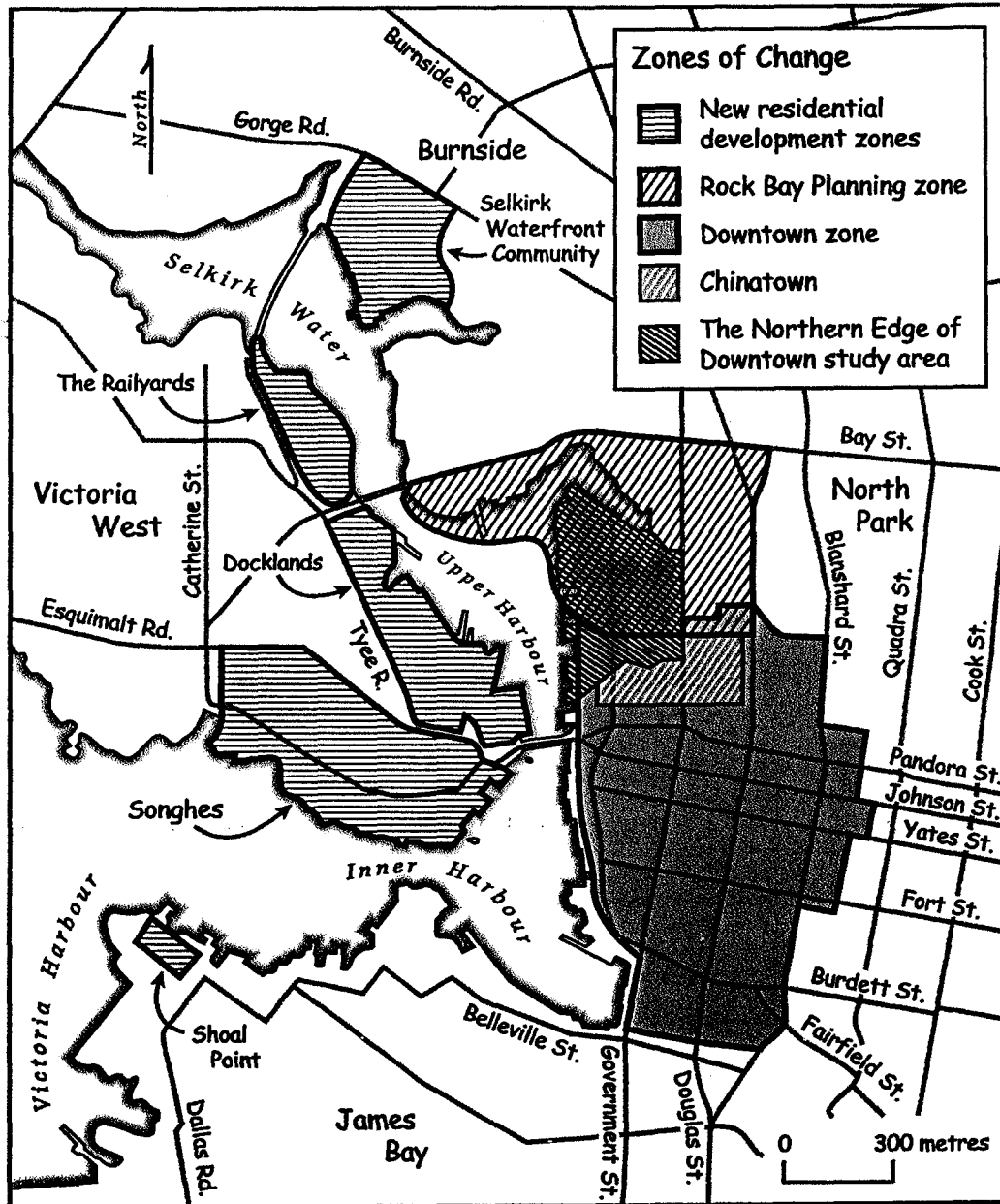
### CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGY

"Nobody stuffs the world in at your eyes.  
The optic heart must venture: a jail-break  
And re-creation."

- Margaret Avison, "Snow"

THE NORTHERN EDGE OF VICTORIA'S downtown business district is currently an area in transition—functionally, physically, and socially. Once industrial, by the 1980s it was becoming derelict and a haven for an edgy arts scene. By the new millennium, artists were abandoning their cheap digs and the area was in process of becoming residential and the setting for Victoria's "Design District." Despite much evidence of change, the area is quite small, hemmed in by Swift and Herald streets on the south, Government Street on the east, the Inner Harbour on the west, and by Rock Bay on the north (*Figure 1*). This thesis will examine the area's changing landscapes from the mid-1990s to the present (2004). During this period, I was intimately involved with several social groups competing for space in this district. In fact, an insider's approach and narrative techniques are adopted to examine the social tensions and compromises underlying the recent development of the area and the shaping of a transitional landscape.

In choosing a methodology, I opted to become a qualitative "*bricoleuse*," a person who uses methods and data presented in the streetscape to create a cohesive narrative from tools at hand. First introduced by anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, the concept of the *bricoleur* was clarified by Weinstein and Weinstein who define the *bricoleur's* task as creating "a complex, dense, reflective, collage-like creation that represents [your] images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis" (1991). This work is a "*bricolage*." It is an interpretative construction reflecting my understanding of the overlapping



(Figure 1)

landscapes of the northern edge of downtown. The tools, methods and techniques for creating the *bricolage* change as I review the different layers of the subject matter, leaning more or less heavily on different types of "bricks": descriptions of places, photos, artwork, narrative voices, and the written record.

My narrative considers the area in terms of five overarching (in time) and overlapping (in space) landscapes. I use documented sources and voices from both formal and informal semi-structured interviews to enrich the understanding of the social forces shaping the visual landscape. I am particularly interested in capturing the stories of the area within the focus of the study's time period. The dominant voice throughout the narrative is my own, but I have included other voices from both influential agents of change and people experiencing change from a position of relative powerlessness. I discuss the tensions and compromises that characterize this changing area, and some of the future directions imagined for the new "Design District." All of this is informed by various literatures in qualitative methodology, landscape analysis, the new cultural geography, creative mapping, and also by concepts derived from urban studies about themed environments, brownfields, homelessness, the new middle-class, and artist-led gentrification.

### Landscapes

THE CONCEPT OF LANDSCAPE AS used in the study of the city has evolved mainly within the field of cultural geography. Landscape is distinct from the concept of "place." While a place is a fixed location, landscape is continuous and more often a product of the senses than of the heart (Meinig, 1979, p. 3). A landscape, rooted in subjective experience, exists in the separation of the eye and the view, a panorama that is seen or, as Porteous adds, seen and heard and smelled (Porteous, 1990). Thus there is not only the visual landscape, but also the smellscape, the soundscape, and all variety of other extra sensory "scapes." In fact, as Meinig tells us,

"[Landscape] begins with a naive acceptance of the intricate and intimate intermingling of physical, biological and cultural features which any glance around us displays. Landscape is, first of all, the unity we see, the impression of our senses rather than the logic of the sciences" (Meinig, 1979, p. 2).

The area that I have chosen to study is very familiar to me. It is where I have both worked and played over my lifetime. J. B. Jackson, the founder of *Landscapes: A Journal of Landscape Studies*, has argued that we need to learn to love our own corner of the world before we focus on landscapes that are foreign and exotic to us. Jackson's own study and writing combines landscape theory with personal experience and an appreciation for the landscape he describes (1979, p. 215-219). This is true, too, of Donald Meinig and his colleagues. In Meinig's *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, an edited collection of writings, various authors describe the ways in which a geographer can search for meaning in the study of landscape. As Meinig summarizes, "[We] regard all landscapes as symbolic, as expressions of cultural values, social behaviour, and individual actions worked upon particular localities over a span of time" (1979, p. 6).

For some geographers, learning to "read the landscape as a book" (Lewis, 1979, p. 12) involves looking at the same landscape again and again through different filters, visualizing multiple layers set down at different times and by different processes, overarching and overlapping. Thus, some might look at a landscape as a palimpsest and try to see the layers of landscape left through time.<sup>1</sup> This applies to my work where the industrial landscape at the southern edge of the study area has been erased, but still shows its character through architectural facades, left behind clues, and

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<sup>1</sup> A palimpsest is a paper or slate where many layers of writing have been erased so that it could be reused, always leaving a trace of the last surface layer. David Harvey can be credited with introducing the term in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989, p. 66) by suggesting that the urban landscape in the postmodern city is a fragmented palimpsest or collage. Meinig (1979, p. 6) also picks up on this metaphor, along with a wealth of others inside and outside the field of geography.

newly-added symbolic markers. Indeed, the derelict landscape is retreating, replaced by a gentrified landscape as the most recent layer. A similar approach to reading the landscape through multiple layers is outlined by Pierce F. Lewis, who gives us several axioms or rules to guide the researcher in finding meaning in the landscape, including "the axiom of landscape as clue to culture," "the axiom of common things," and "the historic axiom" (1979, p. 15-22). Meinig, not unexpectedly, supports the theme of layering, stressing somewhat differently that our "beholding eye" can see "ten versions of the same scene" (1979, p. 33).

The approach to layering that I have chosen involves five interrelated landscapes distinguished one from another by social action. These five, overarching in time and overlapping in space, are:

1. The landscape of the flaneuse.
2. The industrial landscape.
3. The derelict landscape.
4. The creative landscape.
5. The residential landscape.

These five layers are really five versions of the same scene, the synthesis of which coalesces to form a new identity: Victoria's emerging Design District. When interpreting each, I use a different literature and lean more or less heavily on lived experience, interviews, documents, archival material, and visual evidence to explain landscape character.

*The Landscape of the Flaneuse.* The first version of the landscape captures a slice of time, framed by memory, as the *flaneuse's* stroll. This captures the district as a whole, punctured with moments of curiosity and a voyeur's delight. This is the method for introducing the visual and sensual landscape and for discussing some of the clues that are present for interpreting the character of change. There is no intent to analyze the landscape but only to describe its features, and to make note of what clues are there to be seen and interpreted. I include many photographs of the landscape as I pass through on my descriptive walking tour. I am using

these photographs as an informal instrument to enhance my eye.

*The Industrial Landscape.* The second version of the landscape considers the area as a working harbour. Although most of the industrial activities of the district were at one time land-based, many of the land-based uses have relocated elsewhere, leaving mostly industry that relies on its access to waterborne facilities. Although this version of the landscape pays homage to the area's past and explains how processes of de-industrialization affect the Rock Bay section of the study area, my focus is on those industries whose future is in question due to their dependence on water access. I lean on evidence from government studies, reports on the condition of land, and two key agent interviews to understand how the industrial landscape is a contested landscape, and to explore some of the regulations and realities that will ultimately shape the future prospects of the industrial working harbour.

*The Derelict Landscape.* This version of the landscape is both critical and compassionate. It entails the survival of four places in the study area that serve the street community, ranging from informal to formal uses. My use of the term "street community" includes, but is not restricted to, the homeless who hang out downtown, addicted people, the workers whose job or calling is to serve them, and the community that shares a social identity with the street people. As well as using excerpts from interviews, this landscape version introduces personal anecdotes and recollections. It also uses a photographic record of the graffiti of the street community, specifically icons of territoriality and symbols of tension. Despite the clear tension between the haves and have-nots, I have sought to avoid stating the problem as a sharply-defined clash of two unequally powerful classes, presenting it instead in terms of the survival of four places that serve the street community. In doing so, I will reveal something about the diverse make-up of Victoria's street community.

*The Creative Landscape.* The fourth version of the landscape seeks to capture the spirit of three places, all transitory, where groups of creative people came together to make art or music. For this, I rely strongly on my

descriptions and experiences of the places and images of some of the art that was created at these places. The meaning of this landscape draws upon recent literature in urban theory that reveals the cultural dimensions of gentrification: iconography, theming, identities and cultural capital. My intention is to reveal fragments of a landscape that did not leave a strong archival or public record, source points of the "poetry of the area" (LeFevre, 2002). Some fragments are still visible, even though these places of creative activity no longer exist.

*The Residential Landscape.* The fifth and final landscape comprises the residential landscape, which is fully gentrified. Here, contextualized by the literature on gentrification, are my own experiences of place coupled with excerpts from interviews with agents of gentrification. These agents are the people who moved into the renovated buildings and the architects and developers who designed and built them.

## Places

IN THE MID-1970S, YI FU TUAN wrote extensively about the concept of "place." By his reasoning, a place is an experiential unit, a location that has a centre of value and personal meaning. The character of a place can be communicated and shared, but many of the world's places are unnamed and unrecognized except by the person who experiences them. Consider a well-used rocking chair by a fireplace, or the site of a first kiss. In short, "Place is a special kind of object. It is a concretion of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which one can dwell" (Tuan, 1975. p. 2).

Like others, Yi Fu Tuan has distinguished between "space" and "place." For him, space is impersonal, undifferentiated, and liberating; place is intimate, personal, and safe (1977). But for many geographers, geometry is the context of definition, where space is the dimension in which places exist. Michael Curry (1977) has challenged this view, however, saying that in fact we live in a world made up of places, while space is a construct only

made possible by communications technology. Following Cosgrove, other geographers have argued that places are less private, they are socially constructed, and defined by hegemonic forces such as capitalism and class-consciousness (Cosgrove, 1985, Berg, 2004, Harley, 1988. pp. 123-138.). This is a very different perspective than Curry's places, which can exist as multiple versions, temporary events depending on the individual, and can even multiply within one person's imaginings and memories. The concept of multiple versions is reflected in my presentation of layers of landscapes. But I have also given attention to those agents from the creative field—architects and artists—who are by trade engaged in generating a new sense of place for this district.

To our understanding of place, Anne Buttimer has added the concept of "insiderness," which is a concept that has informed the methodology of this study. According to David Seamon (1984, para. 2),

Buttimer argues that the need is to understand locality and region in terms of the insider, the person who normally lives in and uses the place or region. The insider's world is grounded in the everyday experience of living in a particular environment; it involves processes and events normally unnoticed and unquestioned. The insider generally takes his or her place and region for granted, rarely conceiving of them as explicit entities that might be made objects of directed attention. In relation to planning and policy, says Buttimer, the trap for the insider is that "one lives in places and may be so immersed in the particulars of everyday life and action that he or she may see no point in questioning the taken-for-granted or in seeing home in its wider spatial or social context.

The importance of insiderness and its opposite, outsiderness, has also attracted the attention of Edward Relph. He identifies seven modes of insiderness, ranging from "existential insiderness," where the subject has complete and utter identification with a place in a non-reflective way, to "existential outsiderness," where the subject is completely uninvolved with a

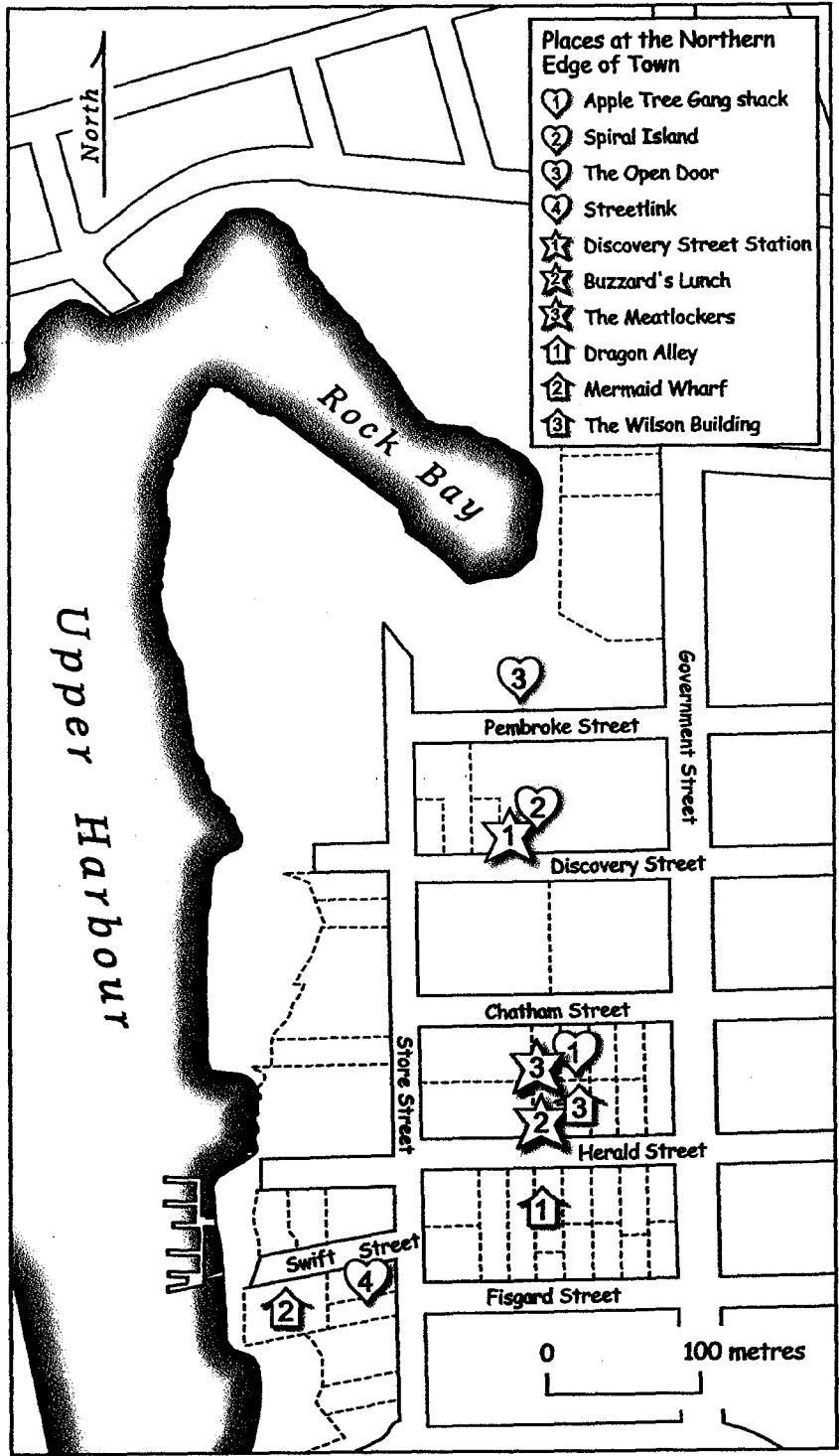
place, and with no reflection (Relph, 1976). Because the existential insider does not question or reflect on their places of experience, which are simply a part of that subject's lifeworld, Buttimer (1980) suggests that the best mode of observation for the humanist geographer is one of empathetic insideness, that is, a position where the researcher " . . . as outsider, tries to be open to place and understand it more deeply. This kind of experience requires interest, empathy, and heartfelt concern."

My research methodology has been informed by these concepts. As an example of my approach, I attempt to capture the sense of place by describing Spiral Island (see Chapter 4); and elsewhere in other chapters I describe a series of places that I have come to know experientially through my own lifeworld and through my research (*Figure 2*).<sup>2</sup> Thus, in the case of Discovery Street Station and the Meatlockers (see Chapter 5), I am able to approach these places as an empathetic insider, but in the case of Buzzard's Lunch, my degree of insideness was much more involved. My account of the sense of place here is both more detailed and filtered through my own set of memories. However, I do not write entirely from the perspective of existential and unreflective insideness when I describe Buzzard's Lunch and the surrounding streetscape, because even while experiencing the place, and certainly while remembering it, I have been conscious of a variety of concepts from within the academic discipline. These include, for example, artist-led gentrification, theming, multiple identities, place and landscape. In short, my geography texts were illustrated by the places I know.

By contrast, the three places presented in Chapter 6 are approached from an empathetic outsider's perspective because they were created after my research had begun. My understanding of them was unaffected directly by my previously-lived experiences. When studying the "experiencing" of these places, I talked to and befriended the people who lived and worked there. I also observed the construction and use of the places with an interest

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<sup>2</sup> Lifeworld is an individual's everyday world, the realm of their normal lived experience, which is taken for granted. For more about the specifics of the concept read Buttimer's 1976 article, "Grasping the Dynamism of Lifeworld."



(Figure 2)

driven by a genuine desire to understand not only what intangibles shaped the physical structure of these places, but what meaning these places held for their denizens.

Because of the experiential qualities attributed to the concept of "place," and because of my desire to capture something of the "soul" of the study area and the sense of place that existed, or has come to exist there, I have chosen to examine the study area through the interpretation of these five quite different landscapes. Anecdotal evidence is an essential part of this analysis. It has a particularly clear role in fleshing out my description of the atmosphere of the derelict landscape, liminal artistic places of the 1990s, and the new gentrified landscape that currently characterizes the study area.

### Voices

THE DOMINANT VOICE THROUGHOUT THIS narrative is my own. My lived experience and long-term fascination with this area of downtown is the glue that holds together the variety of other sources and voices I bring to the discussion. Like the study area itself, my sense of identity has been in transition over the last decade; and like the landscapes of the study area, I have shifted from a time of dereliction and vitality to a more stable but prosperous identity. Because of these personal changes, each of the landscapes that I describe is a landscape about which I feel some personal connection and investment.

My understanding of the study area has been enriched over the last five years by many unrecorded conversations that involved people from four different social groups: industrial workers, the street community, artists, and developers/gentrifiers. From various discussions with people in these groups, I isolated interview subjects whose stories would help me explain the changes that have occurred in the northern edge of Victoria's downtown. Interviews with these people were unstructured or semi-structured and lasted between one and two hours. I tape-recorded them but

also kept notes to help me in their transcription. For the most part, this method was successful, but in a few cases, background noise made it impossible to ensure that I had a legible recording. Because I had given each subject his or her choice of place for the interview, I could not control the level of background noise. In these cases, I kept more detailed notes, and then talked again to these people to fill in gaps after the initial interview.

My subjects fell into two groups. The first group comprised public figures and agents of renewal whose names I have consent to use, as their activities are a matter of public record. These people, mostly gentrifiers/developers, are: Chris LeFevre (architect and developer), Tom Moore (architect, developer, Cool Aid Society board member), Nick Bawlf (architect), Todd Dougherty (property manager and business owner), John Sanderson (Harbour Authority board member), and Ron Greene (business and property owner). The second group was made up of personal acquaintances or friends—industrial workers, people in the street community, and artists—who agreed to be interviewed but whose names have been changed or omitted to respect their privacy unless they have asked me to use them. This second category of interviews tended to be much shorter and in some cases, much harder to keep on topic. The perspectives of these different social groups provided much information about group dynamics, development issues, relations between people, and the politics of change. These perspectives gave substance to my focus on social and cultural change shaped the landscapes of the study area.

Although the interviews were guided by a loose set of questions, my emphasis on the particular questions was different for each interviewee. Prior to an interview, I prepared myself by becoming familiar with each person's biographical details and with the properties that they had influenced in the study area. At the beginning of each interview, I showed a map of the study area and explained my thesis topic. Then I asked each subject to tell me the story of their involvement in the area and of the changes they had seen or shaped. Throughout an interview, I tried to steer a person as little as possible, preferring to let them talk for as long as twenty

minutes about things that were not strictly relevant to my research, but which sometimes revealed, unexpectedly, a gem of information. This approach was very rewarding and many of the excerpts that I have included in the thesis were uncovered in this way.

Each of the layered landscapes at the northern edge of downtown Victoria has changed in the decade since the mid-1990s. As the gentrified landscape currently takes shape, other landscapes are under pressure to make room. By presenting evidence of both places and the voices of four interlinked social groups—industrial labour, street people, artists, and developers/residents— I intend to show different forces at work and to give character to the landscapes. By focusing on micro-scale case studies that exemplify each layer, I will reveal tensions and compromises associated with change in the study area. Finally, each landscape will be considered in terms of the area's emerging identity as Victoria's Design District. The objective is to offer evidence and explanations of the evolution of Victoria's Design District.



## ❧ Chapter Two ❧

### THE LANDSCAPE OF A FLANEUSE

"I will go lose myself  
And wander up and down to view the city."

- Antipholus of Syracuse  
Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* (I.ii:30)

TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT in which Victoria's new Design District has taken shape, I have explored five views of the area, each one treated as a landscape layer. The Design District fits into the new residential landscape as the retail component of an emerging mixed-use neighbourhood. But its form has been inspired by an industrial past and by artists and architects who have translated that industrial past into a trendy new look. The landscape has had a facelift, erasing all but traces of its once derelict state. To give an overview of the area from my own perspective, I first present the landscape of a *flaneuse*, based on a descriptive walking tour through the northern edge of downtown Victoria.

#### The Flaneuse

SINCE HIS APPEARANCE IN Charles Baudelaire's Paris of the mid-nineteenth century, the character of the *flaneur* has captured the interest of scholars of urbanity. Many scholars have discussed the *flaneur's* position as a gentleman of leisure in Parisian society. Some have discussed the appearance of the *flaneur* in relation to changes in the socio-economic make-up of an industrializing Europe, a herald of the advent of modernity (Benjamin, 1983; Jenks, 1995). However, feminist scholars have pointed to the non-existence of the female *flaneuse* and the implications of this for understanding the privilege of men in that era (Wilson, 1991; Wolff, 1990). Regardless, what is especially interesting about the *flaneur* is his relationship

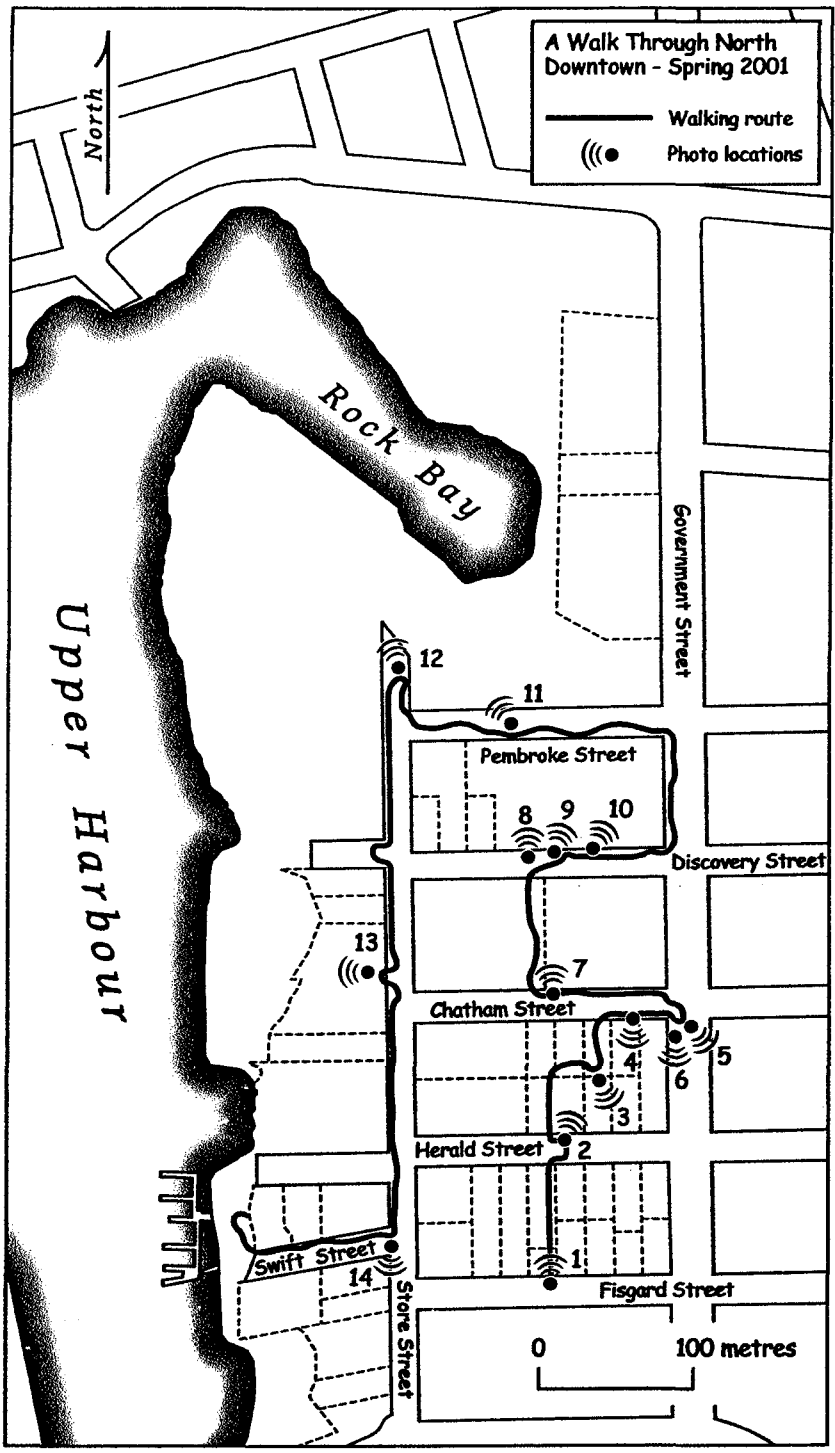
to the city. While Baudelaire's *flâneur* was at home in the city "as a citizen is in his four walls," Walter Benjamin highlighted the *flâneur's* sense of separation from the crowd, his role as the dispassionate observer, the hobbyist detective seeking clues in the cityscape (1983). David Frisby takes the idea further. He proposes that the *flâneur* serve as the model of the sociologist trying to read the urban landscape, trying to find meaning in a post-modern display (1981).

To the *flâneur*, the city becomes spectacle, viewed in glimpses, a set of montages. The *flâneur* meanders through the urban landscape, enjoying a show where the actors have become part of the set. He is both tourist and citizen. He stands at the intersection of disinterest and fascination. He treats the city as though it were his private garden, but where a gardener would 'stop to smell the roses,' the *flâneur* inhales the scents of urban life, and appreciates the textures of city scenes. The *flâneur* is the ultimate voyeur, drinking in the city, intoxicated by its ephemeral qualities, celebrating the ordinary as heroic and absurd. His stroll is through a series of momentary distractions; each distraction is a clue for interpreting the pulse of the city. The *flâneur* could be considered a street level ethnographer, but in the end, it is the urban pulse that the *flâneur* considers his area of specialty, for he is drawn to what is vibrant (Baudelaire, 1965).

It is as *flâneuse* that I explore the landscape of my study area as it was in the late summer of 2002 (Figure 3). I do not pretend to take a feminist perspective in my exploration, but, my gender is relevant to the exploration, as my comfort level, degree of "insiderness," and dependence on description all fade when I pass through the masculine environments of the study area. When discussing predominantly masculine environments such as the industrial landscape, I rely more heavily on secondary research than my own lived experience.

## The Landscape

RECENTLY MY CHOSEN PATH of entry has changed. I used to walk



(Figure 3)

along the waterfront, feel the wet wind and the salt breeze, pass by tall ships and look out over the sparkling water to the grey and red of Point Hope Shipyard where the sound of metal workers can still be heard over the noise of traffic. But since the transformation of the Hart Building, gentrified to become Dragon Alley, I have preferred the hidden approach. From Chinatown it is now possible to slip into a narrow brick alley (*Photo 1*). Once inside, the hustle and bustle of Chinatown's painted streets is muted. There is a feeling of mystery, of adventure, and of secret knowledge in winding my way through Dragon Alley, away from the cars and the press of bodies. Even the shops that front the alleys are special, tiny pockets of local flavour waiting to be discovered. Inside I am in old Victoria, not as it was, but as it should have been. Aged brown bricks, hanging baskets, a water fountain, and old-fashioned street lamps set the stage. Somehow the central buildings inside the walls do not interrupt the early-Victorian feel, despite their square shape and stucco that is coloured butter-yellow. There is an aura of antiquity here, but it was built quite recently. Two middle-aged women in fleece and gortex sports wear sit chatting outside La Cucina, a three-tabled Mediterranean restaurant from which the scent of roasting lamb and the sound of Italian opera waft enticingly from a utilitarian brushed-steel and slate grey painted interior. A pause to eavesdrop reveals that these two ladies are among the new residents of the area. They are speaking of yoga classes in Fan Tan alley, kayaking down near the Canoe Club, and the pleasures of life after divorce.

Stepping out of the alley onto Herald Street, I face a large brick building. On my right a dark window hides the 'Persons with AIDS Society.' No sign advertises its presence, nor are its clients visible, and my eye moves instead to the decorative fence and the architectural details of the Wilson Building, opposite me. Along the street are an antique shop, art supply store, and of course, the Herald Street Café. Outside of the café is a well-dressed cluster of people all smoking, the scent of their tobacco mixing with the delicious smells of Herald Street cuisine. Like Dragon Alley, the Wilson Building uses brick and iron to create an olden-day flavour, but this



**(Photo 1) Inside Dragon Alley, a narrow walkway replicates the fine-grained urban texture of Chinatown.**

structure takes a step towards being rougher, and industrial (*Photo 2*). The fence is made of refrigeration pipes, welded and then rusted to remind viewers of the days when this building was Victoria's flour storage warehouse. In the parking lot a man in jeans is crouched, surrounded by various tools and bits of old metal. He is welding the frame of a sculpture to its base outside his studio home. Past the artist, and the oversized wooden door of the Wilson Building, past some worn down graffiti is a little stairway... another secret.

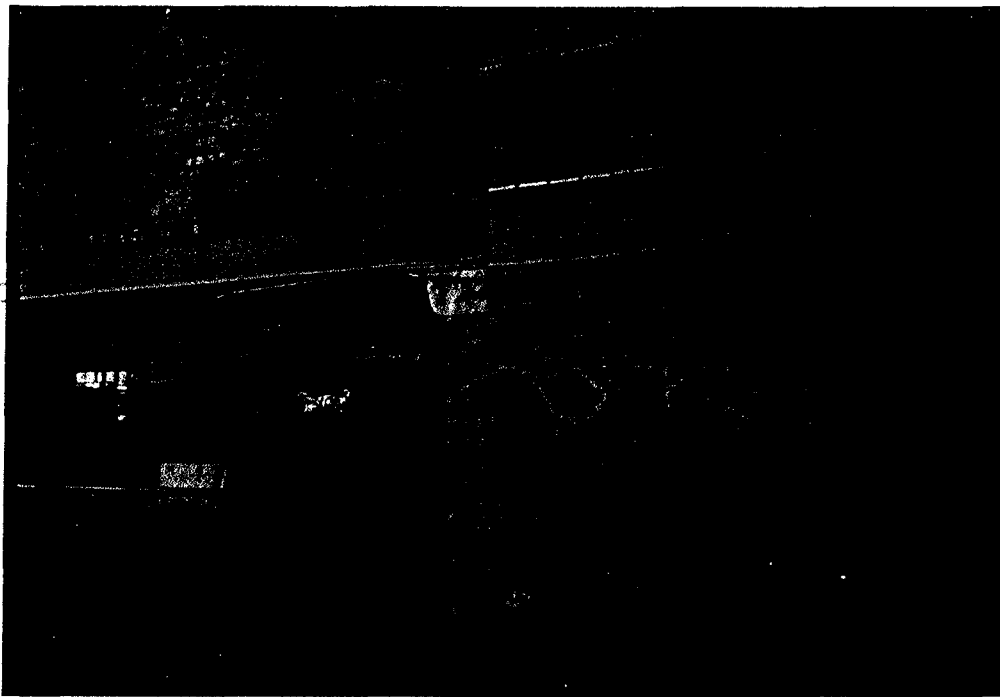
This stairway is the insider's entrance to Chatham Street. The smell of Herald Street Café's cooking fades, replaced by the sharp scent of gravel, metal and asphalt. The stairs open up to a small, empty courtyard, in the centre of which is a slice of West Coast rainforest: wood chips, a nurse log and ferns. This is backstage Herald Street. The brick has given way to walls of concrete and corrugated metal that is painted the same grey and red as the Point Hope Shipyard across the water. The dark recesses of the courtyard reveal hints of a sad nocturnal invasion; someone has written 'the Pricks' on the wall and then drawn a needle under the words; and someone has dropped a condom and a charred spoon (*Photo 3*). One side of the courtyard is a tiny window, decorated with a metal screen made in the shape of a wrench and a collection of gears. On the other side of the courtyard a peek through a window reveals a surprise: the interior is a nicely finished office; it is the developer's domain.

More curiosities await the *flâneuse*. To the east there is a white building, shiny and still new (*Photo 4*). It boasts a playful treatment of the industrial theme. There is no confusing the painted transmission parts that make up the balconies, sign brackets and lamps for the real thing. Authenticity is foiled by the intersection of pristine whitewash, industrial references, and the cheerful sign pronouncing that this is the happy new home of the Oriental College of Traditional Medicine. If Herald Street was a clever and subtle blending of new and old, this building laughs in the face of subtlety, proudly proclaiming its post-modern intentions.

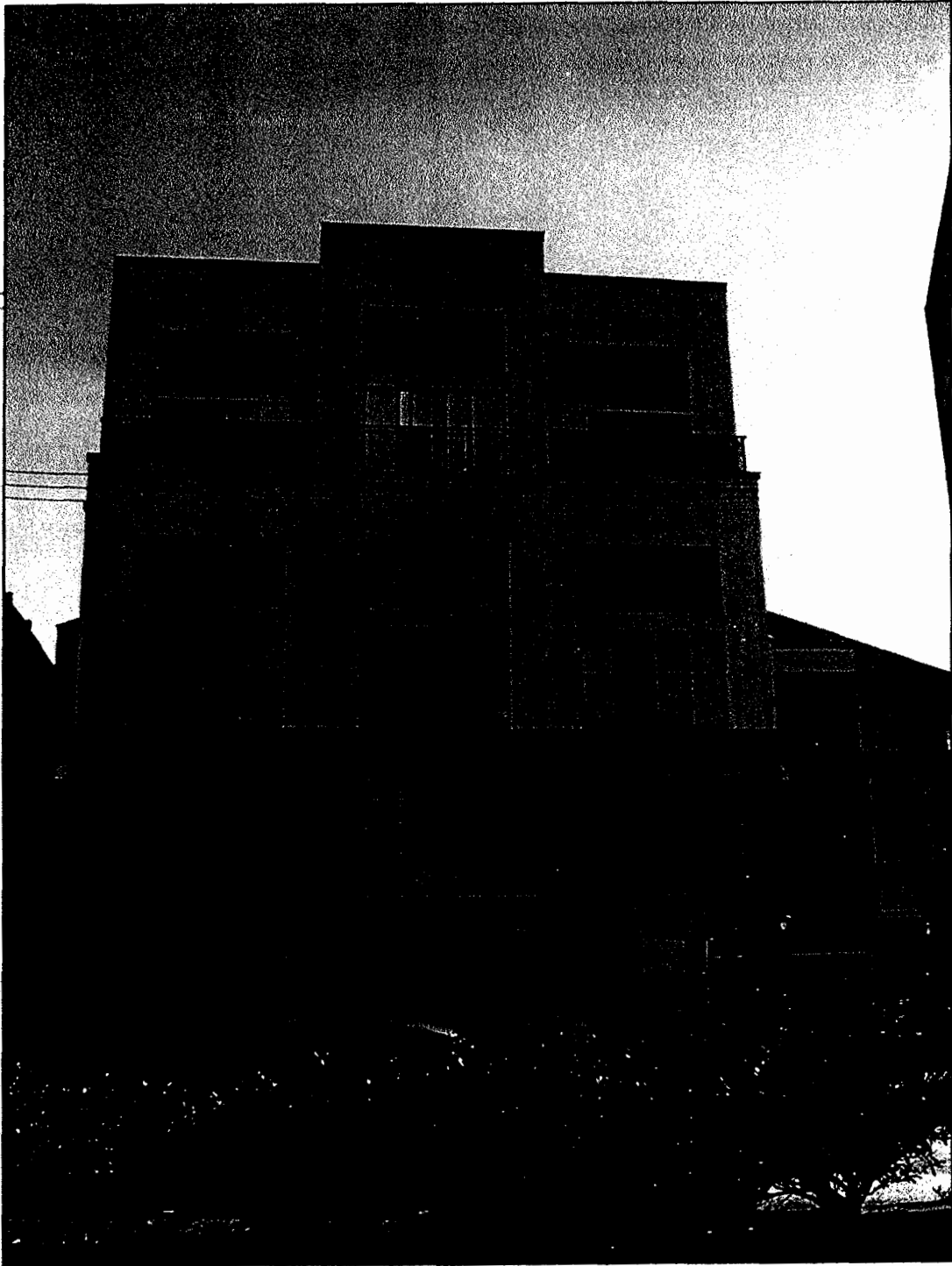
A look around the corner to Government Street reveals a strange



**(Photo 2) Beside the Wilson building on Herald Street are the offices of Chris LeFevre, owner, architect and developer of the new rental accommodations. The renovations are still ongoing in 1998 when this picture was taken - as evidenced by the blue port-a-potty**



**(Photo 3) This graffiti is behind the Wilson building beside the artist welder studio. I often found used needles and bleach containers here. Todd Dougherty, property manager, explained that one of the advantages of renting the space to the artist was additional security.**



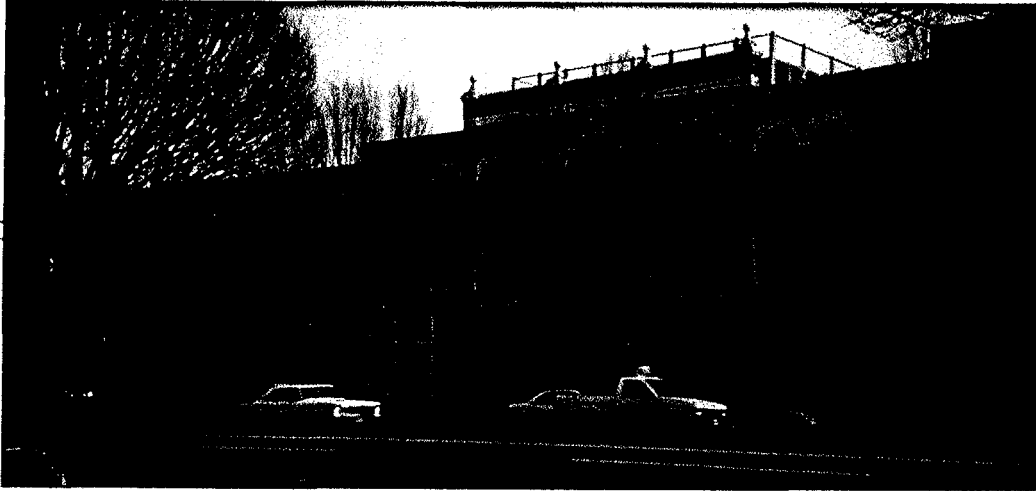
**(Photo 4) 555 Chatham Street façade.**

face-off between the east side and west side streetscapes: On the west, a row of quaint and folksy gift shops, hair saloons and retail furniture shops and on the east, transmission and automotive shops, parking, and light industry (Photo 5). Granted, the east side of Government Street has been painted recently, but the bright primary colours seem to be a concession to neighbours (Photo 6). The contrast is not successfully painted over. On the west side streetscape, young men and women, dressed in the latest fashions, walk lazily along, or jingle keys as they approach the door of their upper-floor loft apartments. On the east side, the dress code is denim, and the insides of the shops are decorated with men, hard at work, shouting to each other above the noise of power tools.

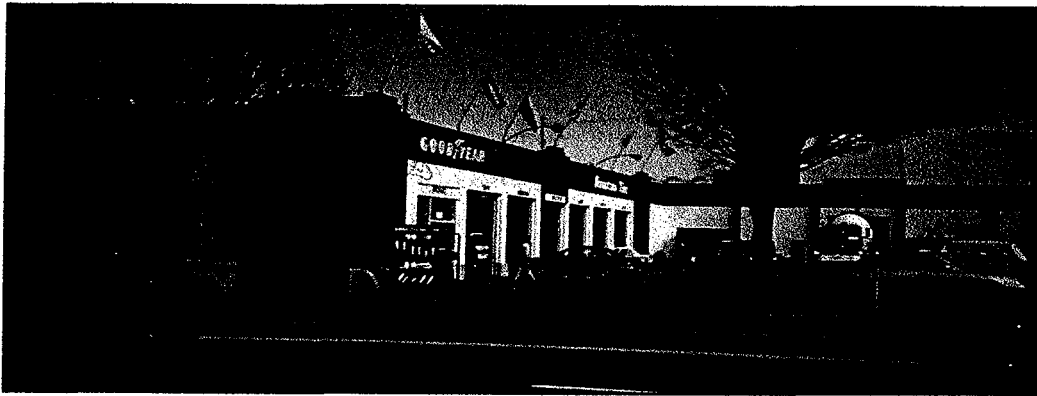
This landscape is full of identity. As I stroll through my study area, "botanising on the asphalt," the landscape tells some of the story of this part of downtown (Baudelaire, 1986, p. 36). Although the urban stage on these blocks is dominated by pleasant loft condos with cute retail outlets on the main floor, the architects have left hints of what was once here. Choices in finishing materials and artistic detail allow this *flaneuse* to move safely through a familiar bourgeois downtown while experiencing a little thrill of participation in the blue collar workingman's world, the territory of industry, metal and sweat.

Further north, the industrial past is no longer a subject of detective work. In fact the blue-collar landscape is still very much alive at the north end of my study area, and I doubt that Baudelaire's gentleman *flaneur* would still feel comfortable and at home once he crossed Chatham Street and progressed towards Discovery Street. Nor does a contemporary female student such as myself, and I feel increasingly like an outsider. However, my appreciation of urban spectacle is still engaged.

At the corner of Government and Chatham Streets, Marks Work Warehouse dominates the streetscape (Photo 7). Despite careful landscaping (more evergreens and woodchips), the building stands in contrast to more recent construction. It is a modernist box more in keeping with the utilitarian panorama on the eastern side of Government Street than with the



**(Photo 5) The west side of Government Street, between Herald and Chatham streets.**



**(Photo 6) The east side of Government Street between Herald and Chatham Streets.**

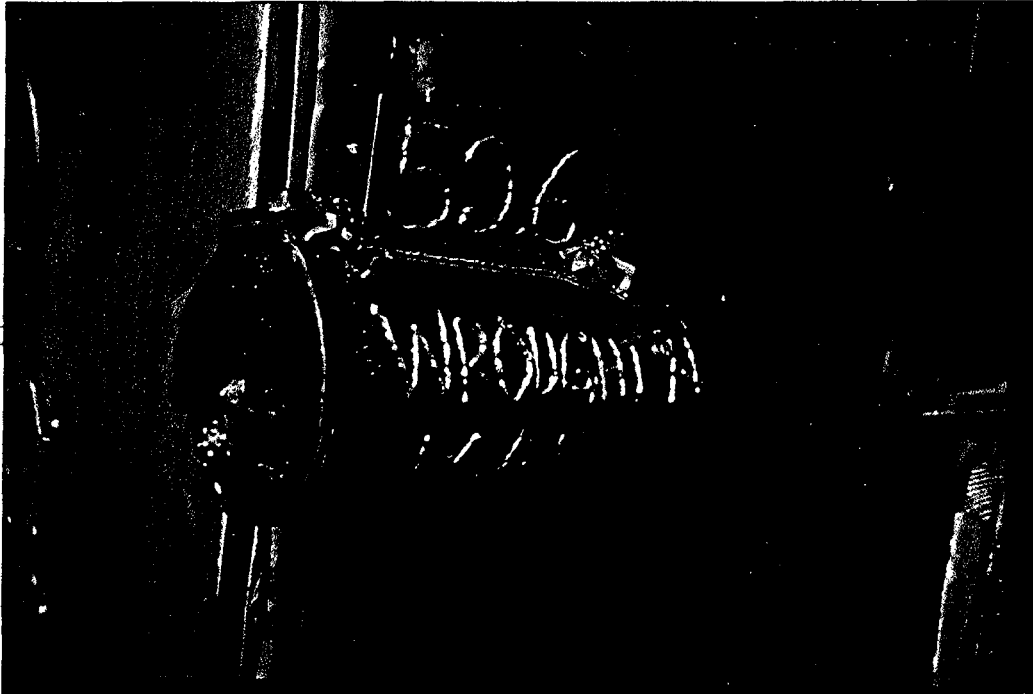


**(Photo 7) Marks Work Warehouse on Chatham Street with a view of Discovery Street behind. The flash of red is Discovery Street Station. The picture is from 1998.**

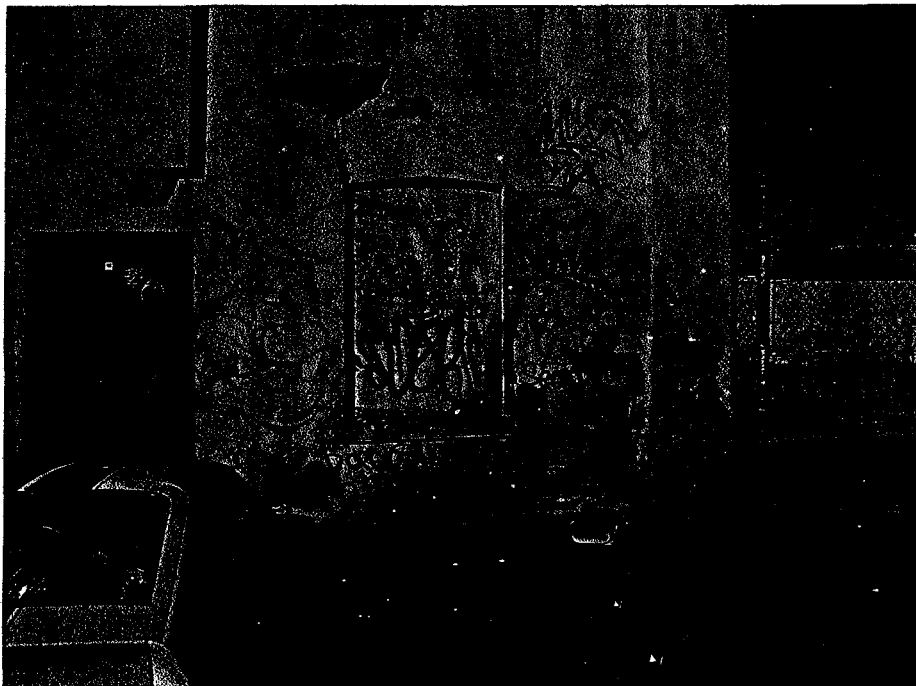
nicely gentrified environment I have been wandering through. Passing behind Marks Work Warehouse, over the bleak expanse of the Capital Iron Parking Lot, once a train marshalling yard, a giant mural depicting bears frolicking in the rainforest attempts to cast some sense of regional character on the scene.

At the other end of the parking lot is a gap in the chain link fence through which I can see the entrance to Sports Traders. Down at the southwest corner of the parking lot is a little kiosk selling hot dogs and smokies. It stands next to an electrical box that has been painted to resemble something vaguely old-fashioned. Families stop to buy a smoky on the way back to the car, children racing to the stall while their parents struggle under the burden of their newest purchases. Standing in this parking lot, I feel I could be in any North American town. But through that gap in the fence, continuing my progression north to Discovery Street, there is another distraction for my *flaneuse* curiosity. A blaze of red next to Sport's Traders attracts the eye, but what holds my eye are the bizarre shapes fashioned in iron that decorate this corrugated metal building. Iron is twisted here to create a mass of organic spirals and blossoms. It is crafted to form a mail box with a metal lizard perched upon it and the words "Wrought'n Mail" in handwriting, like icing on a cake across the tin can side (*Photo 8*). What is this place?

There is something about the transition to Discovery Street that makes my heart pound a little faster. There is a feeling of excitement, an awareness that I have left the domesticated areas of downtown and that here, I have entered the urban-industrial wilderness. As I make my way back and east to Government Street, stopping to read the graffiti and pick my way around the piles of free palettes and the rubble, that sense of excitement increases, mingling with a little bit of fear (*Photo 9*). Next is untamed Pembroke Street. Although there are few people here, the noise is loud and the smell of fuel and asphalt are overwhelming. While piles of lumber and pipes are stacked neatly, many of the buildings are crumbling, their windows broken and boarded-up. Every corner is alive with small



**(Photo 8) The mailbox at Discovery Street Station is an example of the creative metal working of Wrought'n Art.**



**(Photo 9) Back in ol'Vic - older graffiti behind cars on Discovery Street.**

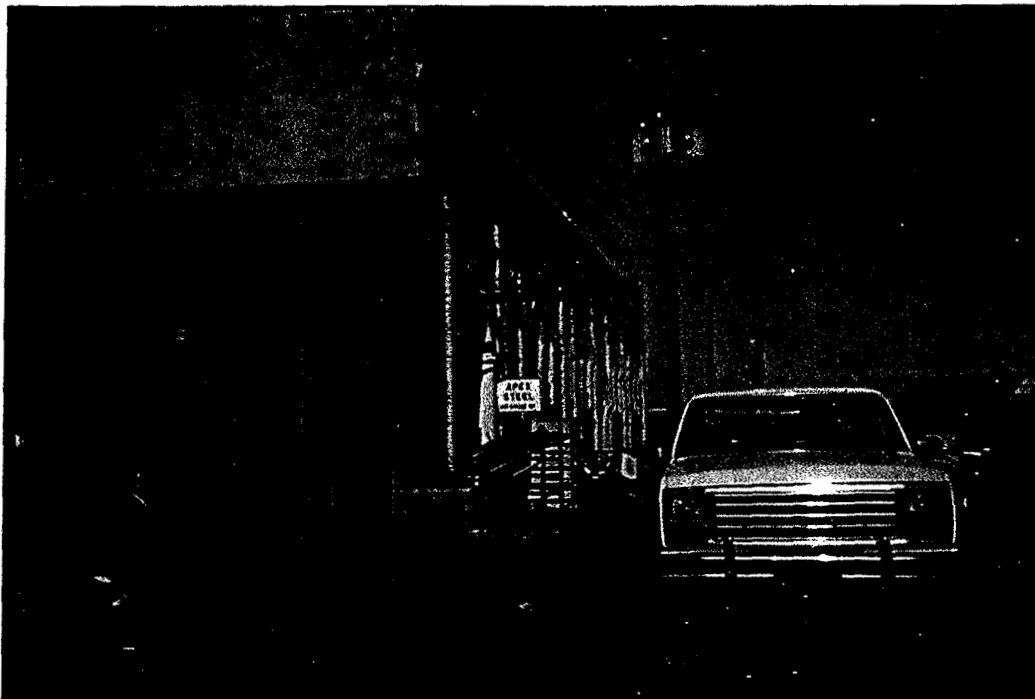
piles of rusting metal and broken glass. Behind a row of warehouses and down a sharp incline are school busses parked, row on row. On the street, large trucks are the only traffic. On the north side of the street is a friendly looking little building with a painted wooden sign swaying in wind, "The Open Door" (*Photo 10*). On the broad wooden porch there are a few men sleeping while others sip coffee and smoke. They wave and shout some ribald greeting as I approach, but I feel out of place. Fancy clothes that helped me fit in a couple of blocks back now make me feel like an outsider, or possibly, a target. Waving back, I pass by on the other side of the street, and do not cross over again until the end of the block, where I am drawn to explore the industrial landscape.

Down a driveway at the end of Pembroke Street an adventure waits. The ground is littered with metal scraps: coiled springs and bits of an engine, mysterious pipes inside which the spiders have woven their homes, and discarded barrels filled with metal shavings, beard trimmings off the Tin Man. The hues are all reds and browns with the occasional hint of the green of oxidized copper. The dominant colour is rust. The building itself is a study in dereliction. The words Apex Steel are written between empty windows on painted brick. It was once white in the days before the paint began to chip away, before the grime covered it, and before young people decorated it with spray paint and jiffy markers, proclaiming this forsaken place as their playground (*Photo 11*).

Out onto Store Street looking north the atmosphere of dereliction is banished. Island Asphalt guards its territory behind chain link fences marked clearly with signs that say, "DO NOT ENTER," "KEEP OUT" and "TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED." On the other side of the fence large machines move giant piles of gravel and sand. Three enormous blue and white hot mix silos loom over the site, but even with their high tech filters containing the smoke, the smell of molten asphalt and dust is intense. At the edge of this scene, the sea washes up to the ramshackle docks, blocked off from the pedestrian for our own safety; condemned. On the water, looking out onto Rock Bay, kayaks and rowboats glide across the



**(Photo 10) The Open Door on Pembroke Street, Spring, 2000.**



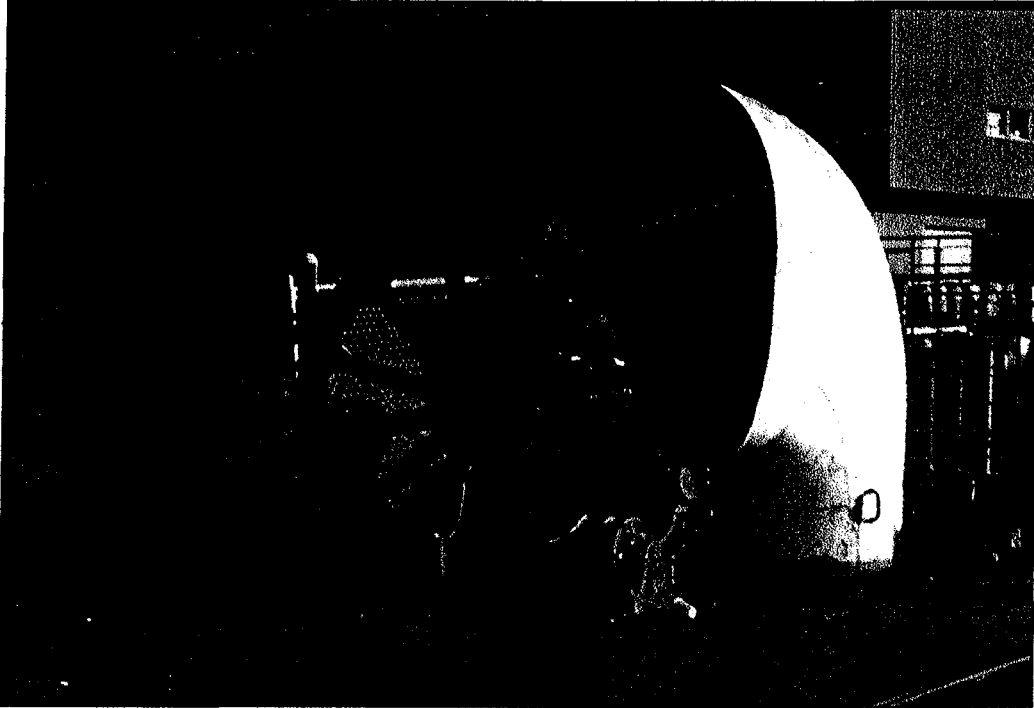
**(Photo 11) Apex Steel.**

surface, picturesque but incongruous against this industrial landscape.

Kitty corner to Island Asphalt is a brown brick heritage building with porthole windows which houses one of Victoria's trendy nightclubs, Evolution, where UVic students often spend their evenings. After the club closes, the patrons spill out onto Store Street, passing a little brick building with the glittery words "Women's Collective." Nearing Capital Iron there is a series of rusty red painted shacks and behind a rickety fence a dark, litter-filled ditch covered in corrugated metal siding where homeless people have been known to sleep during nights when it is not raining. But out beyond the shacks are several scenes: in the background, the sea, and in the foreground, Capital Iron's garden display and a variety of maritime relics. The anchor and periscope were once quite functional, but stand there now merely for the sake of artistic form (*Photo 12*).

It would be unthinkable for a Victoria *flâneuse* to visit this area without being drawn to the basement of Capital Iron. Here, the leftover bits and pieces of maritime and industrial activity have become curios, for sale at startling prices. For those who love junk, this basement is paradise. Aisles are stuffed with old compasses, antiquated tools, a ship's wheel or an ancient typewriter. Strange old men, curious tourists, and kids in dark trench coats lurk in the aisles, while home carpenters root through bins located in the back of the room, looking for that obscure tap or doorknob that will match the one they are replacing.

Outside again, Store Street connects to the water via Swift Street. The view from the head of Swift Street is peculiar. Scuffed doors, pitted wooden windowsills, and worn paint make the entrance to Chintz and Company quaint and inviting. The windows are filled with expensive, ready-made antiques and *faux* stone chandeliers, all carefully weathered. Opposite to Chintz and Company is a crisp brick building with roman columns at the door and a clean, crisp, classical appearance. This is Streetlink, which houses the Swift Street Medical Centre, a homeless shelter, and a limited supply of low-income housing (*Photo 13*). Outside it, near the front door, a



**(Photo 12) Outside Capital Iron are relics of the shipbuilding and industrial past.**



**(Photo 13) Swift Street side of Streetlink with the entrance to the Swift Street Medical Clinic showing. Also notice the construction of Mermaid Wharf Condominium behind Streetlink.**

handful of dishevelled men gather, smoking and sipping coffee from styrofoam cups. A few have dogs as their companions and many carry blankets or support huge backpacks.

Back to back with Streetlink is the Mermaid Wharf condominium building, with a view over the water. Like other new buildings in this district, the exterior is finished in grays and reds and corrugated steel. This time, proximity makes obvious the association with the colours of the Point Hope Shipyard, directly across the water. The wharf itself is interesting. Kayaks for rent and a landing pad for the harbour ferries are not unusual along Victoria's waterfront, but this little dock is also home to a big black Russian submarine, offering tours within its belly. Unbeknownst to most, a few feet under the submarine is the wreck of 'The Green,' British Columbia's last whaler.

Overlooking the submarine is the Canoe Club, a trendy bar and restaurant where the lattes are foamy, the martinis are fancy, and the food is an exercise in garnish. Sporting oversized metal piping, huge raw wooden beams, exposed barrels and steel bars, the interior reproduces the feel of an old factory, but without the dirt. The newly sanitized and meticulously-reproduced industrial setting is the stage where a fabulously-clothed clientele and a shiny bald-headed bartender strut their stuff. It seems the perfect place for this modern day *flaneuse* to stop and enjoy lunch.

On Store Street, each element of the eclectic mix that makes up the northern downtown district is represented. If my whole study area were one of Walter Benjamin's arcades, Store Street would be the window displays. Island Asphalt is an example of still active industry, while Capital Iron's basement celebrates the transformation of that industry to a new urban aesthetic. Streetlink is a strong reminder of the presence of homelessness in Victoria, while Chintz and Co. flaunts luxury home furnishings. There are hints of dereliction nestled up against heritage knick-knacks. The diversity of the neighbourhood of northern downtown is evident, as is the effort that has been put into making it all somehow fit together. But underneath are traces of the industrial origins that

characterized this edge of downtown for the last one hundred years.



## ❧ Chapter Three ❧

### THE INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE OF THE WORKING HARBOUR

"Jack hammer me a love song  
car alarm me a poem  
power tool me a story."

- Ken Horn, *The Urban Man*

#### Introduction

THE SHORELINE BEHIND CAPITAL IRON is inaccessible. Looking down to the water from the Store Street—past derelict shacks, tall grass, drifts of garbage and chain link fences—I see broken-down wharves that jut into the Upper Harbour. Beyond the wharves is Rock Bay, a panorama of silos surrounded by piles of sand and gravel framed by the open sea and sky (*Photo 14*). This is the industrial landscape. Its story tells something of the past and shows tensions guiding the future. Its character can be realised by discussing problems of contamination that complicate redevelopment plans around Rock Bay and the Upper Harbour; by linking processes of change in this area to global processes of port retreat and brownfield redevelopment; and by considering the role of public and private tensions and compromises in shaping possibilities for the future of the working harbour near Rock Bay.

One of the defining features of a brownfield is the presence of contamination, and in two micro-studies I show the problems associated with contamination in the industrial landscape. These two case studies highlight not only the severity of the contamination, but also expose some of the tensions between public and private stakeholders and show how important changes in public policy and ownership have influenced remediation efforts. Two key agent interviews enrich this chapter, providing voices that help explain the story of this landscape. Ron Greene, owner of the land between Chatham and Discovery Streets, explains some



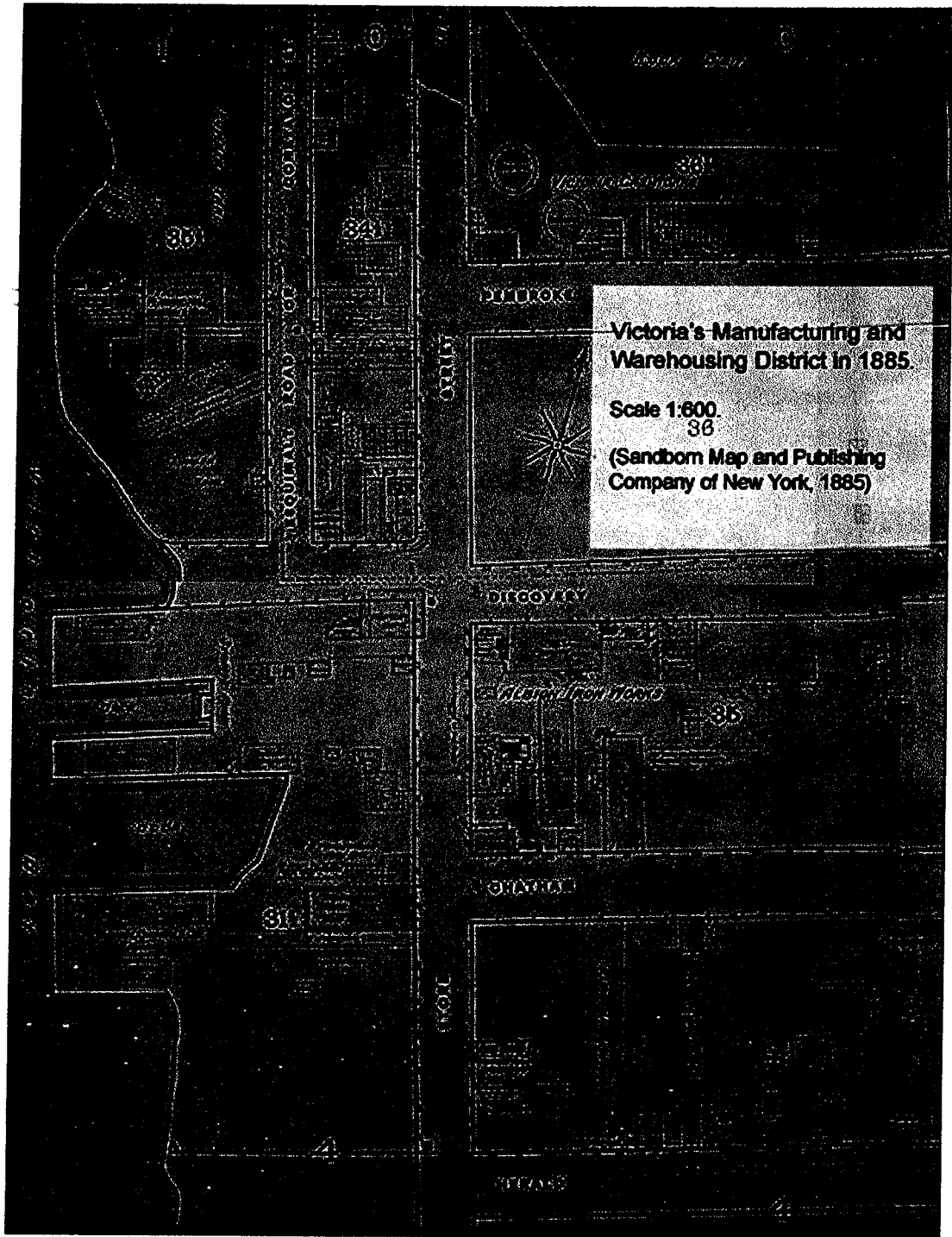
**(Photo 14) A landscape of gravel piles, silos, water and sky, viewed from across Rock Bay.**

of the frustrations of a major stakeholder in the area. His voice gives an insider's perspective, allowing me to show some of the tensions that help to shape this landscape but that are not obvious from the formal record. John Sanderson provides the second voice, that of a champion of the working harbour. His position as a member of the board of the Harbour Authority allows him to explain the federal and local governance changes that have impacted the industrial landscape around Rock Bay. While Greene's narrative is mostly retrospective, Sanderson looks to the future with an optimism that casts doubt on the commonly held notion that the days of the industrial landscape are over.

With the voices of Greene and Sanderson, and excerpts from less formal interviews, I build the story of the recently-changing industrial landscape at the northern edge of downtown. Supporting evidence from city planning documents and newspaper articles adds detail to the narrative. I present the industrial landscape early on because it forms the template for the area's character and because current events regarding remediation will have a major impact on the future development of the area as a whole. While the area's history includes land-based and water-based industry, it is the working harbour that seems most likely to compete successfully with new residential land uses. This chapter concludes with a discussion of possible futures for the working harbour and ways that existing forces will reshape the Rock Bay landscape in years to come.

### **Industrial Heritage**

THE STRIP OF LAND I GAZE upon is the southern section of a piece of the city that the *2001 Harbour Plan* tells us "has always been an industrial area." The area north of where the Johnson Street bridge was built in 1922, up to the Selkirk Waterway (p. 59). In 1885 when the Sanborn Mapping Company produced Victoria's official Fire Insurance plan, my study area was a substantial manufacturing and warehousing district (*Figure 4*). Albion Iron Works—its factories, outbuildings and company-owned cottages—stretched



**Victoria's Manufacturing and Warehousing District in 1885**  
Scale 1:600  
36  
(Sandborn Map and Publishing Company of New York, 1885)

(Figure 4)

from Herald to Discovery Streets, dominating the block (*Photo 15*). A few other businesses, including warehouse space, the Novelty Iron Works shop, the Indian Church, a hay barn and a planing mill, shared the landscape. Soon afterwards, in the 1990s, railroad tracks were laid through buildings and into loading dock areas. It is still possible to see signs of the railroad, for instance, on Herald Street where the entrance to Opus Framing and Art Supply is flanked by two protective concrete bumpers. At Pembroke Street, the Victoria Gas Works looked over Rock Bay. Down Constance Street, where the Asphalt Company now stands, were several sawmills. Storage sheds, lumberyards and mills made up the rest of the Store streetscape along the waterfront behind the docks. This is not to say that residential were absent. Along Rock Bay, Indian shacks were thrown up amidst the noise and dust and wind. Tenement buildings were wedged in between working spaces. Worker's houses and shanties were clustered at the corner of Discovery and Government Streets. At the corner of Discovery and Store streets stood the Western Hotel, the temporary home of transient workers, visitors and presumably, prostitutes.

A century ago, the landscape of Rock Bay was a political hotbed, Albion Steel and Victoria Machinery Depot (VMD) were both centres of union organization, their employees members of Lodge 191, chartered by the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers in 1898, a significant moment in British Columbia's labour history. The tradition of union labour continues today. About 2,000 union jobs are still provided by the industries that are gathered around Rock Bay (City of Victoria, 2004, p. 3).

### **Port Retreat and Brownfields in Victoria**

**BUT THERE IS TENSION CONFRONTING the historical industrial landscape. With the move towards a globalized economy, changes in technology have contributed to the abandonment of the working harbour. On a global scale, container cargo, forklifts, cranes and other instances of mechanization have**



**(Photo 15) Albion Ironworks, 188-? Looking West from Government Street, Chatham Street to the South Discovery Street to the North BC Archives Accession Number 193501-001, Photographer Undetermined.**

replaced the traditional labour of dockhands. The advent of truck and air transport has added to the relocation of activity away from ports (Moore, 2000). Ocean-going ships require more depth, so port activity has moved towards deeper water. Advances in technology and changing types of cargo have encouraged industries to rebuild their factories and storage facilities on greenfields, instead of trying to adapt obsolete sites to new requirements. Much of the heavy industry and manufacturing that once clustered around the docks of Canadian cities like Victoria has moved to developing nations in pursuit of cheap labour and weak environmental legislation.

In Victoria, industries around the harbour were also affected by these global trends. Ron Greene explained that freight rates kill any industry that needs to ship its goods to the mainland. Across the harbour, Laurel Point was once also industrial, the site of the Pendray Soap Factory, a predecessor to BAPCO Paints. According to Ron Greene, freight rates dictated that BAPCO move their plant to Vancouver, closer to the market. Laurel Point was sold and redeveloped in the mid-1970s to become the Laurel Point Inn, an upmarket hotel and tourist centre designed by Arthur Erickson. Similar pressures were at work in the closing of the Victoria Foundry's harbourside location. Today, the people who bought it are producing their product elsewhere (R. Greene, Interview, July 10, 2002). Ron Greene predicts that the pressures of technological change will continue to push industry away from the Inner Harbour. As economics dictates a move to larger barges, there will be problems moving them around the big rocks at the corner of Rock Bay. However, Ocean Cement has already, he believes, made arrangements with Ralmax to unload at their more accessible site just across Rock Bay.

Changes in passenger transportation technology have also affected the vitality of the harbour. Until 1961, Victoria Harbour was the terminal for passenger ferry traffic run by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, but in 1958, Premier Bill Bennett announced that the Province would be entering into the ferry business, as a public endeavour and extension of the provincial highway system. The new terminal was to be located at Swartz

Bay, not in downtown Victoria. This decision contributed to shifting activity away from Victoria's Harbour (BC Ferries Corporate History, 2004).

Because of the extreme nature of dockland deterioration, industrial ports have often been among the last parts of the inner city to undergo revitalization and renewal. The story of contaminated docklands is a common one and is part of the reason for the emergence of "brownfields" as a familiar feature in the landscape of any post-industrial city (Moore, 2000). The term "brownfield" refers to any "abandoned, idled or underused industrial and commercial facility where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination."<sup>3</sup> In order to develop brownfield land, portions of it have to be decontaminated, an expensive proposition which discourages reuse unless the incoming activity is expected to return a large profit. Recently, cities around the world have been tackling the remediation of brownfields near their urban cores. Although brownfield sites are much more expensive to develop than greenfields (14% - 34% more expensive in Canada), there are significant advantages in redeveloping brownfield sites (Regional Analytics Inc. 2002, p. 5). Empirical evidence shows that brownfield developments use less than one quarter of the land that the same development will use on a greenfield. Brownfield developments also provide indirect benefits such as a reduction of sprawl, reduction of pollution, reduced costs for infrastructure extensions, better waterfront access for communities, opportunities for affordable housing, increased market housing downtown, and the promotion of revitalisation of adjacent neighbourhoods (Regional Analytics Inc. 2002, p. 6-7). For these reasons, governments have become increasingly willing to intervene in order to encourage brownfield redevelopment, including Victoria's Rock Bay area.

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<sup>3</sup> This definition is set by the USA Environmental Protection Agency, and has been increasingly used as the standard. The origin of the term is in contrast to "greenfields," a term that refers to previously undeveloped sites.

## Case One: Contamination at Rock Bay

I WOULD LOVE TO CLIMB THE FENCES near the Harbour's edge and explore the broken-down wharves. From the distance they look like prime scavenging land where I would be certain to find strange debris—unexpected and rusty treasures, perhaps (*Photo 16*). In the early 1990s my friends and I used to comb the industrial landscape along Store and Pembroke streets, searching for a twisted shape, an unusually pleasing metal form, which we could salvage and bring back to my boyfriend's studio for the thrill of watching his eyes light up as he contemplated how this new found object could become part of his next art piece. Beyond the chain link fences, the tangle of blackberry bushes and the KEEP OUT signs we found adventure (*Photo 17*). But it's not really a good idea to be sifting through the soil lying behind these fences. Warning signs state that the land is condemned, too toxic to allow any use, one of the legacies of an industrial past (*Figure 5*).

Ron Greene owns quite a large chunk of land in my study area, including some of the land along the polluted waterfront. He offered the following explanation:

Rock Bay is not full of potential, it is full of contamination. There are two problems with Rock Bay. One, there are two outflows which may be connected to ... sanitary outflows that flow into that Bay. That alone would make it quite toxic because there is not a lot of tidal flushing in the Bay at all. Secondly, there is a gas plant that was built in 1922 approximately, and dumped a massive amount of coal tar on the bottom of that Bay and a lot underground. Then the transformer shops left a lot of PCBs. Now the PCBs I understand have been removed... but the coal tar contamination is terrible (R. Greene, Interview, July 10, 2002).

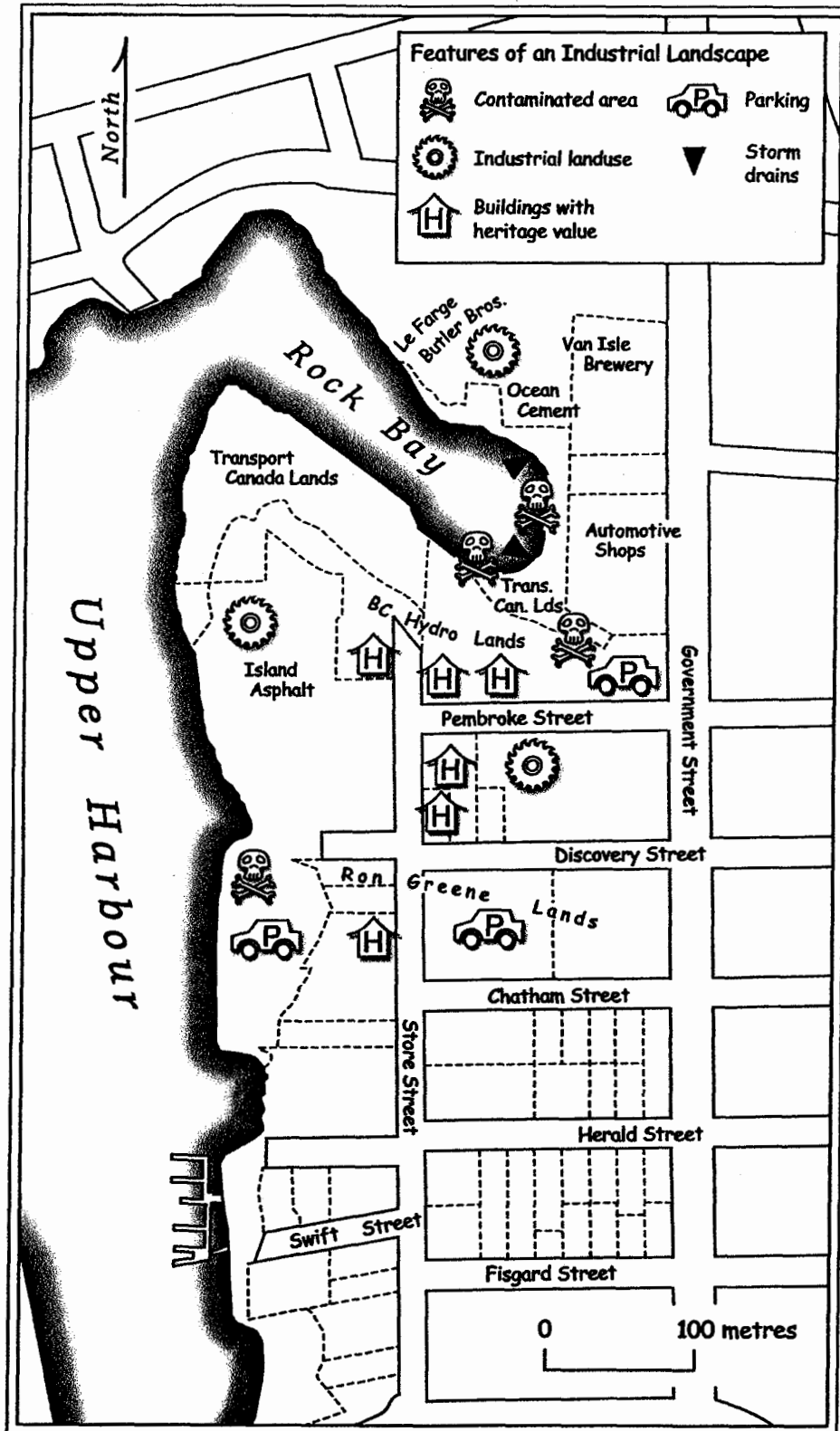
Another major landowner in the area, BC Hydro, discovered these PCBs while inspecting its site (with the intent to sell it) in June, 1988—366 damaged PCB containers in a concrete bunker. Thinking that the PCBs



**(Photo 16) Behind Apex Steel, an old drum covered in pigeon droppings evokes an antique atmosphere. This is a registered heritage building, and may one day be restored as part of a heritage enclave.**



**(Photo 17) Behind a screen of blackberry bushes, Pembroke Street warehouses and factories lie empty, the brickwork crumbling and the windows boarded up.**



(Figure 5)

could not have leaked beyond the concrete walls of the bunker, BC Hydro continued testing. By August the headline in the *Times Colonist* read, "Nightmare Uncovered" (Heiman, August 16, 1988, p. A1). PCB contamination had leached far from the site itself, possibly into the waters of Rock Bay. BC Hydro was looking at the biggest cleanup of toxins that a provincial crown corporation had ever faced to that date. The task force responsible brought together all levels of government—federal, provincial, the Capital Regional District and the City of Victoria. Hydro told the newspaper that they suspected that the PCBs were dumped at the site in the 1950's, twenty years before their adverse health effects became known (Heiman, June 23, 1988; Hume, June 23, 1988). Today, the PCBs have been removed, but the coal tar remains, buried or dumped in Rock Bay when the plant supplied fuel to the coal-gas lamps of nineteenth-century Victoria. The old Hydro building itself is beautiful, and is recognised on the City's heritage registry, although it is not designated. When Nick Bawlf, a leading figure in Victoria's heritage scene, was invited by BC Hydro to look at the building and offer advice about potential uses, he thought it would be a great site for an art gallery (N. Bawlf, Interview, July 16, 2002). That vision never manifested. Instead it became a temporary home for "The Open Door," a soup kitchen and safe hang out space for the street community.

### **Case Two: Contamination at Capital Iron Docks**

ADJACENT TO RON GREEN'S PROPERTY is an abandoned dock that is the site of more contamination, and of a bitter quarrel between Ron Greene and the Ministry of Transportation. Calling them "...impossible to deal with" and saying, "If they can postpone something or delay it or study it they will...they [bureaucrats] have no incentive to develop solutions," Greene tells his side of the quarrel (R. Greene, Interview, July 10, 2002). According to Greene, for a long time the Ministry of Transportation told him that he was forbidden to do anything with the toxic dock. Then he received a letter telling him that he was expected to clean the site within thirty days.

Refusing to be “stampeded,” he sent a letter back stonewalling the Ministry with requests for further clarification. In the end the Ministry did an environmental assessment of the site, found significant contamination, and capped it. Wanting his water access back, Greene sent in a request. However, the Ministry told him that it now had other plans for the site:

Their plans were to bring contaminated soil from thirteen other places and dump it there on the waterfront. I told them I would fight it all the way to the Supreme Court. The only access to it is across my property and I am not going to accept that. Two years later they finally backed off that plan but ... every time I have tried to discuss something they have turned down every proposal.... The sooner we get a Harbour Commission up and running and get the feds out of here the better it will be (R. Greene, Interview, July 10, 2002).

Greene recalled more tension with government bureaucracy that arose when two branches of the Federal Government clashed over the future of Rock Bay. A representative from Environment Canada told property owners that the best thing to do with Rock Bay would be to dam it and cap it. This might suit the long-range plans of the property owners who would like to see something significant built there. But the Ministry of Fisheries has a rule that if you take one square inch of habitat from one place, you have to add one square inch somewhere else. In the end, this was seen as too expensive, and plans to cap the Bay were abandoned (R. Greene, Interview, July 10, 2002).

The City's 2001 *Harbour Plan* details the nature of contamination that remains in Victoria's Upper Harbour (p. 45). A nod to this tension with the two federal ministries can be detected in the rhetoric of the Harbour Plan which was created in consultation with representatives of neighbourhood associations, harbour transportation, industrial and marine users, the Victoria/Esquimalt Working Harbour Association, government officials, tourism interests, members of the fishing fleet, and the Rock Bay Ratepayers Association:

Most of Rock Bay is contaminated and is undergoing analysis by Transport Canada. Given the importance of preventing further unnecessary alteration of our shoreline, the possibility of remediating and rehabilitating Rock Bay in its current state should be vigorously explored as the option of choice. The possibility of sealing and filling Rock Bay should be considered only as a last resort and on the condition that marine habitat can be created or rehabilitated in other areas of the harbour to ensure a net benefit to the natural environment (City of Victoria, 2001, p. 45)

The report explains that chemical contaminants tend to bind with sediment particles, which makes remediation more challenging. For this reason, preventing further pollution is important if there is to be any hope for a future clean-up. The *Harbour Plan* calls for a reduction in impervious cover such as asphalt all around the Upper Harbour. More permeable surfaces along the shore would slow run-off, reducing sedimentation, and allowing for some filtration before run off enters the sea. While contamination exists, the area around Rock Bay, will remain industrial as little else can be done there safely (p. 18).

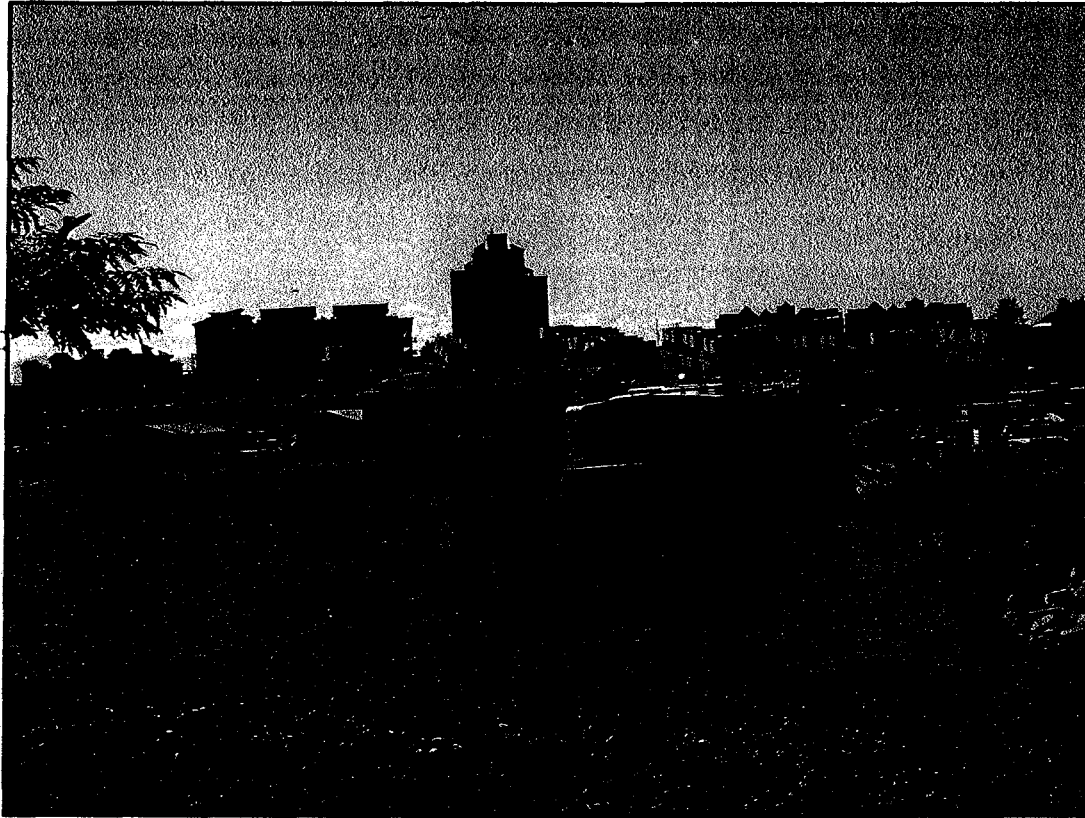
But remediation of Rock Bay will drastically alter the landscape in the next few years. The Federal Government has recently approved a thirty million dollar grant for clean-up of the bay (J. Sanderson, Interview, May 13, 2004). Remediation will involve digging up the polluted soil and coal tar contamination, shipping it away for incineration, and replacing it with fresh material. The federal money was made available only because the City of Victoria has already taken care of the major source of continuing pollution by installing best practice interceptors and a drainage basin in the run-off system leading to outflows that empty into Rock Bay. But after the area is cleaned up, will industry still retain its status as the dominant land use around the bay?

From a kayak out in the Upper Harbour in the summer of 1999, the industries that surrounded Rock Bay looked much more accessible. They face the water, with their backs to the city, names painted boldly across the

fronts of the buildings. The industries around the bay include Island Asphalt, Butler Bros, Ralmax Sand and Gravel, and Ocean Cement (recently acquired by Lafarge). Surrounding these businesses is a landscape of silos and machinery rising above piles of rock, sand and gravel. Although there has been a shift in ownership since then, the landscape is still essentially unchanged. In Ron Greene's opinion, which he believes to be shared by the industrial users, there is nowhere else for these businesses to go. They are water-oriented, relying on shipping large volumes of material (*Photo 18*). One barge can bring 60 tons into Rock Bay by water, while to accomplish the same task by road would take a fleet of trucks (60 one ton trucks) and an expanded highway system to accommodate them. For these harbour-side industries, toxins in the soil and water may be tolerable as part of the working environment. The waterside location is important enough to keep them at Rock Bay. Other more mobile industries have abandoned the area already, or have simply become obsolete, leaving behind a collection of derelict warehouses and factory spaces.

### **The Future of the Working Harbour**

NEAR THE BEGINNING OF MY thesis research, in 1998, I was invited to watch a structure explode down at the Point Hope Shipyard. There was a movie company in town and many of my friends were making money from contracts passed only by word of mouth. My boyfriend and his studio mate were doing set design for the exploding warehouse scene. While waiting around, I had the opportunity to talk with three men who worked at Point Hope. I asked about the new condo units that were going up around the harbour, and pointed out my study area across the water. These three told me about complaints against the Point Hope Shipyard by the residents of the Songhees and explained that the Point Hope Shipyard sometimes has to work around the clock. One of the three was particularly vocal. He believed it was only a matter of time before the new residents forced the city to close Point Hope. He scoffed at the "yuppies" who want to live near the



**(Photo 18) A barge unloads at LaFarge. Across the water, the Point Hope Shipyard, recently purchased by Ian Maxwell provides the architectural palette for the area, including inspiration for “The Edge” loft style condominiums seen behind and to the left.**

ambiance of the harbour but then do not want to be kept awake by industrial noise (Anonymous, 2000). These concerns for the prospects of the working harbour, challenged by developers who want to build more residential units in the city centre, were also shared by Ron Greene: "How do you put housing next to a plant that might have to operate 24 hours a day, or unload a barge at 2am? Already there is tension over at the Songhees buildings complaining about the planes... the planes were there before they were" (R. Greene, Interview, July 10, 2002).

The *2001 Harbour Plan* states, "Today, expanding residential and tourism related activities pose a threat to maritime linked industry" (p. 1). According to the *Harbour Plan* and the *Official Community Plan* that preceded it, there is municipal "support for an active Working Harbour with mixed-use activities, provided all uses, including residential, recognize and are compatible with Harbour" (p. 3). The document prohibits the use of the area north of Swift Street for residential uses in order to preserve the interests of the working harbour, but allows for properties east of Government Street to be open for residential potential in the long term, as long as buffers are created to mitigate the impact of the industrial uses (City of Victoria, 2001, p. 42 and 59). However, one influential developer told me that he believed that there were better places for these industrial uses. In order to increase housing downtown, he insisted that Rock Bay had to be cleaned up and become a residential hub. He explained that it was important to link downtown to the development further north with a strip of housing that would bring people and vitality to downtown. The idea of a housing precinct around Rock Bay has been around since 1981, when developer Sam Bawlf suggested 1,200 housing units be constructed around the bay, an idea that could have been given a Chinese flavour (Times Colonist, 1981, p. 1). In these visions the industrial harbour stands in the way of Victoria's future (Anonymous, 2003). In contrast, Brian Patrick works for Strongback Labour, a four-man company that does small jobs, from artistic brickwork to foundation repair. He explained that without the services provided by the gravel yard at Rock Bay, his company, as well as

many other small, self-owned companies who do business in and around downtown Victoria, would fold. The cost of trucking the material from Colwood (he speculated this was the next closest provider) would be out of reach for all but the largest companies. If Brian's assessment is correct, then the decrease in small contractors and the shift to larger contractors would alter one of the entry-level job sectors in Victoria, with repercussions beyond changes to the cultural landscape of northern downtown (B. Patrick, Interview, October 8, 2001).

The vision of a strip of residential and commercial development stretching up the harbour towards Selkirk seems to be coming true, at least across the water from my study area (see *Figure 1*). Across the water, zoning permissions are being negotiated for the Dockside property, which is slated to become residential condominiums. Further north, the Railyards development is under construction with finished portions already sold out. The Railyards developer, Chris LeFevre, is also responsible for the construction of both rental and condominium housing on Herald Street and Chatham Street, in what used to be industrial warehouses. North of my study area, working class housing built in the first half of the twentieth century is undergoing gentrification and infill while the Selkirk Waterfront Community has sold out phase two of its residential construction. The Burnside Gorge neighbourhood, housing lower income people, has benefited from the recent clean up of the once very polluted Gorge Waterway. Since 1995, community organizations with industry sponsors have worked to transform the Gorge and Cecilia Creek into a beautiful public amenity, popular for boating, fishing and playing. This in turn has attracted higher income residents and residential developments to the area, which puts in question the future of some of the industry along the Gorge.

In February of 2002, the Federal Government divested its harbour facilities to a newly created not-for-profit society called the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority (GVHA), and also to the Provincial Capital Commission (PCC). These two organizations formed a partnership with the intention of taking a business-like approach to harbour management. I interviewed John

Sanderson who sits on the GVHA Board of Directors. Once a fisherman and chair of the Working Harbour Association, Sanderson is still a champion of the working harbour. He told me about some of the recent possibilities for the future of Rock Bay and the surrounding Upper Harbour. One influential figure prominent in discussions about the working harbour is Ian Maxwell, who through corporate or land ownership controls much of the remaining industrial space along the Upper Harbour. His company, 654900 BC Ltd., owns the Victoria Machinery Depot (VMD) land occupied by Ralmax Sand and Gravel, just north of my study area. In September of 2003, Maxwell's company was assigned the lease on Point Hope Shipyard property, and he advised City Council that he intended to begin environmental remediation on the property and work with the British Columbia Ferry and Marine Worker's Union (BCFMWU), to restore jobs to laid-off workers (Stand By, 2004, p. 5). Sanderson says Maxwell also does business with Butler Brothers (a gravel company) and Island Asphalt, where he holds considerable influence (J. Sanderson, Interview, May 13, 2004). Together these properties make up almost all of the still active industrial sites in and around the Upper Harbour. John Sanderson describes Maxwell as a visionary. Rather than pitting the future of the working harbour against the future of residential downtown, Maxwell looks for compromises. He plans to work towards creating a public access pathway around the harbour, an idea once seen as an axe in the heart of the working harbour (Sanderson, 2004). He has an interest in industrial ecology, a field that works to create a holistic balance between the needs of industry and of nature. This is a far cry from the mentality of the rough and dirty industrialist of the past (J. Sanderson, Interview, May 13, 2004).

The influence of the champions of a working harbour is seen in the recently published *Rock Bay Plan Draft*, released by the City on April 20<sup>th</sup> 2004. Water-oriented industry is protected north of Pembroke Street and around Rock Bay. "The industrial waterfront will continue to be of prime importance because of the availability of water access. A key component of the plan is to ensure the ongoing operation of these uses while also

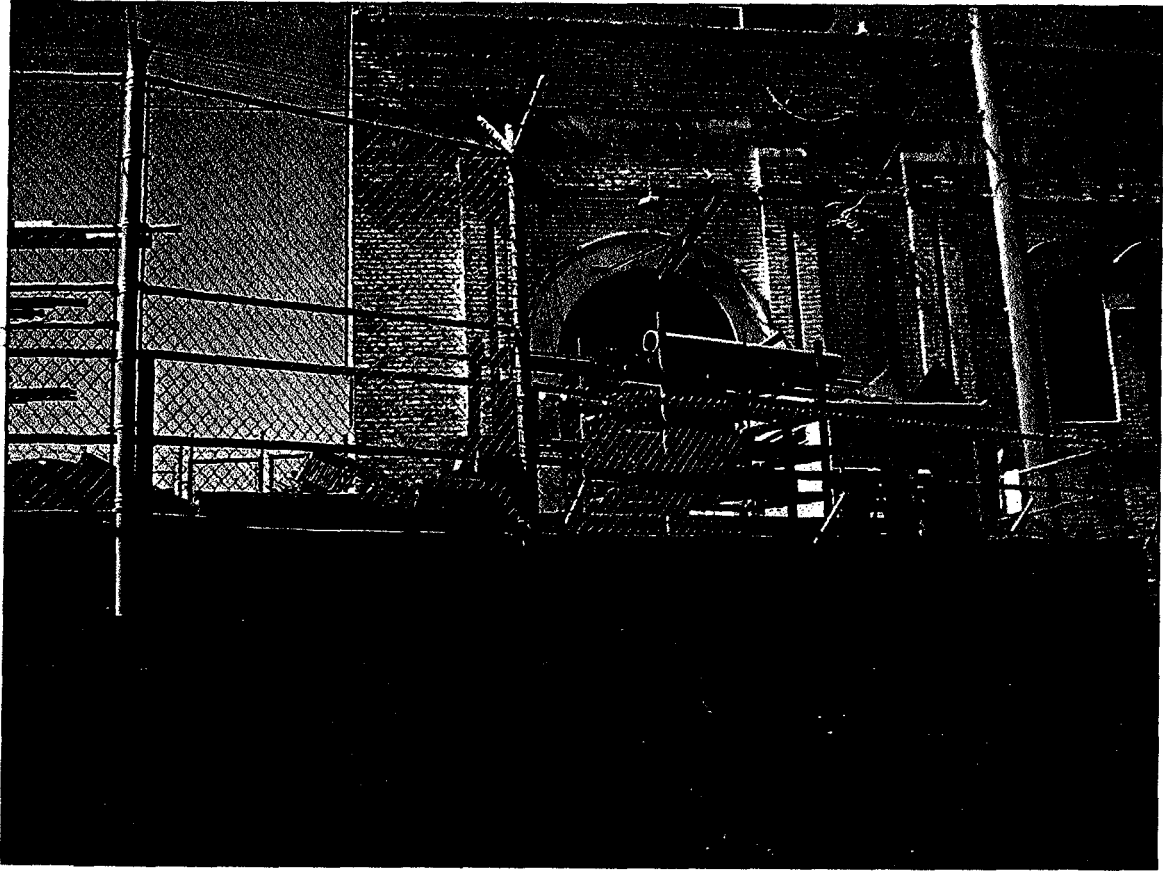
integrating them with the changing nature of the area from light industrial to business service" (p. 3). Although the City will consider adding an entertainment district, and opening up the waterfront to the public through paths, parks and open spaces, the plan acknowledges that residential uses are not compatible with the active industry, and provides buffer territory to prevent residential encroachment. *The Victoria Downtown 2020 Residential Action Plan* challenges that notion (DVCA, 2004). The plan suggests that industry and mixed-use residential can exist side by side (*Photo 19*). The Selkirk Waterfront Community, just North of Rock Bay is one very successful example of a harmonious adjacency of residential and industrial, overlooking the RalMax recycling yards.

It is sometimes possible for developers and industrialists to work together to find creative designs that mitigate the tensions between the land uses. Rock Bay's coming remediation, along with the progressive attitudes of champions of both residential development and the working harbour, may hold some hope for the future of a more environmentally sustainable, community-oriented and economically vibrant working harbour. While the seeds of revival are there, the neglect that has characterized this area over the last decade have given rise to another landscape, one of dereliction. During this time of disinvestment, when owners, banks and investors stopped putting money into the area, the City also relaxed its vigilance. The empty spaces of an industrial and commercial district at night provided safety for the street life, and promoted a sense of territory for street people (*Photo 20*). Stuck in between the competing interests of the gentrifying residential landscape and the struggling industrial landscape of the working harbour, the derelict landscape finds few champions and yet, as I will show, it too has a meaningful story to tell.





**(Photo 19) Seen from across Rock Bay, the industrial landscape of Island Asphalt in the foreground, with Mermaid Wharf condominiums behind.**



**(Photo 20) While the Apex Steel building looks derelict at first glance, it is still in use, if not maintained. Graffiti decorates the surrounding concrete walls, evidence of the dual use of the space, as a place of work, and a place for the street community.**

## ↻ Chapter Four ↻

### THE DERELICT LANDSCAPE OF THE STREET COMMUNITY

"So how can you tell me you're lonely  
and say for you that the sun don't shine.  
Let me take you by the hand  
and lead you through the streets of London.  
I'll show you something  
to make you change you mind."

-Ron McTell, *Streets of London*, 1974

#### Introduction

AS THE INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE eroded at the end of the twentieth century, another layer of landscape became more prominent. I call this the derelict landscape, composed of abandoned or run down buildings, as well as street people and the agencies that serve them. Vacant spaces and inexpensive rents, coupled with a location outside the more heavily regulated tourist-shopping district of downtown Victoria, have made the northern edge of downtown a place for the street community to develop a sense of territoriality. Some of the services located here during the late-1980s and the 1990s were government initiated and sponsored. Others were privately run, or even illegal, such as elements of the street community claiming space through squats and creating their own places. But by the late-1990s, the area began to gentrify, existing spaces were closed, or moved, leaving only Streetlink, a multi-million dollar government-funded service to assist the street community. Relocated services clustered at the eastern edge of downtown near Quadra and Pandora streets, while much of the prostitution and drug dealing moved further to the north and northeast, to Rock Bay and Douglas Street. As I explore the derelict landscape, I attempt to show the diversity of places that have supported the street community; and in doing so, to reveal something of the makeup of that community and

how the gentrification of the area has affected it.

What is a derelict landscape and what do derelict landscapes tell us about North American culture? In *Derelict Landscapes: The Wasting of America's Built Environment*, Jakle and Wilson answer that question by pointing to processes of deindustrialization and capital flight to the suburbs or overseas, leading to disinvestment, deferred maintenance and, eventually, abandonment and violation (1992, p. 1-13). From their perspective, a derelict landscape is a landscape of failure, at the end of its cycle of birth and decline, awaiting rebirth or renewal. Like many scholars of the urban environment, Jakle and Wilson focus on the reasons for the decay. They see derelict urban landscapes as a regrettable waste, and challenge the notion that they are necessary precursors to reinvestment. The people who populate these landscapes are portrayed as victims of change, trapped in a downward spiral of economic disintegration, or as offenders such as "idle groups of youth" and vandals (p. 6). This is part of a body of literature that asks: what are the agents of dereliction in North American society and what are the costs to the people who live there?

Understanding why dereliction happens is important in understanding the social, economic, and cultural forces shaping derelict landscapes and their relationship to other landscapes. But there exists another slant to take when exploring places in the derelict landscape. In *The Demolition of Skid Row*, Miller observes that Skid Row is "working as intended" and that the lifestyle of its denizens has its own ecology and culture, through which people access resources to meet their needs (p. 104). Like Miller, I see a functionality and value in derelict landscapes, not just as potential awaiting revitalization, but as territory for people who find themselves living outside the cultural norm in an alternative space that is often eroded by revitalisation. To me, a derelict landscape is a landscape of freedom as well as failure. The "idle" youth are not idle but are building their own social networks and meeting their own needs outside consumption-oriented space. The vandalism and graffiti are valid territorial markings, expressing a sense of ownership through occupation that is not

considered legitimate in our capitalist-centred society, and yet is felt instinctively by those "normals" that trespass in 'marked' territory. My questions are: what is the meaning of the derelict landscape to the street community, and what can we learn by exploring places created for and by them in a landscape where they have some degree of freedom?

To answer these questions, I first examine the make-up of Victoria's street community: its definition, diversity, variability and scale. Then I look at four different places in the derelict landscape, each one representing a segment of the street community that is characterized by variations in degree of social legitimacy and permanence. Finally, I consider some of the possible meanings of the derelict landscape to the street community, and the implication of those meanings in the evolution of the creative landscape and eventually the emergence of the Design District. Throughout this chapter, I depend on my own personal experiences and connections as someone who is linked to the street community. I lived on the streets in Victoria during my late teens and maintained ties there throughout my twenties. As street kids, we were offended by having our picture taken. Therefore, I have not included pictures of "street people" in my thesis. To represent the derelict landscape, I have instead used pictures of graffiti left by various segments of the street community. This graffiti is a record of their presence, etched on the landscape as an artistic expression of territory, an alternative flag saying, "I was here".

### **The Street Community**

SOME CONFUSION EXISTS IN the literature as to the definition of "homeless people." While some authors define homeless people as those who have spent a certain number of nights sleeping in the rough, others include people in shelters or temporary accommodation such as motels; or people staying at a friend's house while in crisis (Ploeg, 1997, p. 1-3). Not all homeless are centred downtown, and not all those who are recognisably part of the derelict landscape are homeless. A more useful concept for the

study of the human element of the derelict landscapes of Victoria comes from the term widely used by street people to define their group: "the street community." Victoria's street community is composed of homeless and housed youth, buskers, addicts, mentally ill people, sex trade workers, and social service agency workers—in other words, the people who live, work and recreate on the streets of downtown. While the community is relatively small, it is also diverse and contains several tight-knit subgroups.

Various social and government agencies and newspaper reporters have attempted to estimate how many homeless there are, but it is hard to determine the number, of those who are in fact part of the downtown street community. The one undisputed fact is that the size of this community is growing. Studies of the rates of homelessness across Canada, as well as locally, agree that the number of homeless is rising dramatically in urban centres everywhere in Canada. A national study of poverty in which the Capital Regional District participated confirmed that the majority of poverty and homelessness was concentrated in the downtown area of cities and revealed that Victoria has one of the most competitive housing markets in Canada, along with relatively high levels of income disparity, both factors in increasing homelessness (Capital Regional District, 1999). Reports from the front lines of social services agree with this assessment. In 1997 Reverend Al Tysick told a reporter that 200 people a day use the Open Door (King, December 20, 1997). By 2004 Tysick reported that the number had grown to 600 (Tysick, 2004, Personal Communication). In Victoria, while the client population is growing, the services available are experiencing funding cuts. Increased cooperation between service providers has helped to mitigate the crisis, but the situation is worsening.

The most visible members of the downtown street community have been typecast as lazy, criminal, addicted, homeless, unemployed, and from other cities.<sup>4</sup> This stereotype is then extended to the homeless population at

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<sup>4</sup> This sentiment was expressed again and again by members of the public who use the City Space at 725 Yates St, a storefront stocked with maps and ideas concerning Victoria's downtown. I have volunteered there from November 2003 to August 2004, listening to

large. The street community is under pressure from merchants and citizens who see homelessness as a blight on Victoria's downtown. They often lobby for strict and sometimes brutal solutions to the presence of street people on downtown streets, particularly in tourist season.<sup>5</sup> A closer look at the make-up of the downtown street community reveals a heterogeneous, under-housed (but not necessarily homeless), and underemployed (but not necessarily unemployed), and locally generated community that is growing in size while the services that care for them shrink along with their territory. As in other cities, the homeless population in Victoria is diverse. There are people of all ages. There are both addicts and non-addicts. There are people of different morals and values regarding criminality and violence (Ploeg, 1997, p. 1). While some people who are going through a period of nomadic behaviour may come from outside Victoria, the core group of hard to house street people are individuals who grew up in the Capital Regional District, and who have family in the Victoria area (D. Dunsmoor Farley, personal communication, June 27, 2004).

Where gaps exist in the formal provision of services, the street community invents illegitimate and illegal solutions to their needs and recognises territorial claims to space based on real social divisions within the community. A parallel can be drawn with the concepts of formal and informal economies, as used in literature describing economies in the developing world. The informal economy exists alongside the formal or regulated economy, encompassing under-the-table jobs, the black market and other uncounted methods of raising money such as begging and criminal activity. In seeking shelter, the street community has a similar

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people's concerns about downtown and recording them. The sentiment also shows up frequently in written responses to the Downtown 2020 ideas contest, where people fill out an Internet form expressing their ideas for a better downtown. My job is to collect these ideas and identify reoccurring themes. Interestingly, both those who are sympathetic to their plight and those who are not sympathetic, share the concept of a homogenous, criminal homeless population that originates from outside Victoria.

<sup>5</sup> Evidence of this attitude can be found in the City of Victoria's "Street Camping Bylaw" or in the recently drafted "Code of Conduct" proposed by the Chamber of Commerce to apply to street people.

duality, with formal, regulated, legal shelters supplemented by informal, unregulated, illegal shelters. In order to show some of this social diversity and to give a sense of the range of solutions within the landscape of northern downtown, I have looked at four types of places serving the street community, from informal shelters like squats to the more formal shelters like Streetlink (see Figure 2).

### Case One: Squats and the Apple Tree Gang

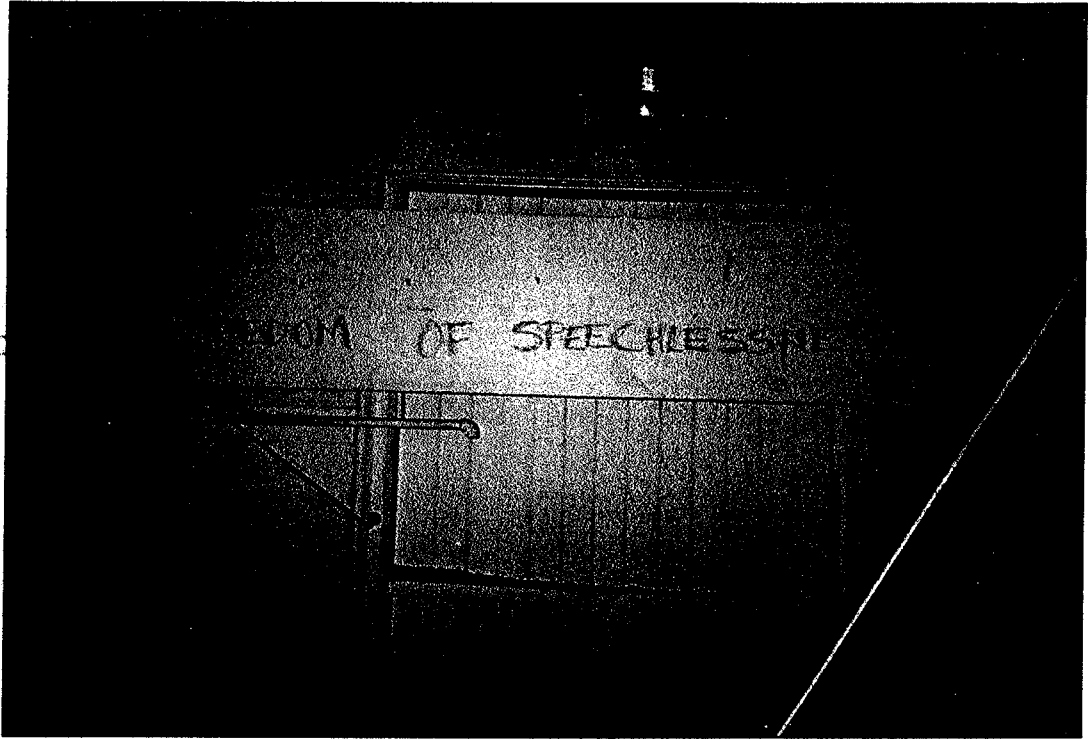
AS A STREET KID, ABANDONED buildings and shacks were welcome refuges for my little pack of friends. In the wee hours of the morning after the bars closed and the party-goers left, abandoned buildings downtown became a safe place to sleep. One person would know of a good "squat"<sup>6</sup> and after obtaining pledges of secrecy, others would be shown the place. The next morning we would tiptoe away as early and discreetly as possible to avoid the squat becoming a "heat score"<sup>7</sup> and being closed down. When one group of people was done with a squat, they would leave a piece of graffiti to alert others that this was a good sleeping spot.

Graffiti is one way to identify a building that has been squatted (Photo 21). A sheltered place with a lot of graffiti inside, in several different media, indicates a lengthy period of time that street people have used the building. More concrete clues include bedding, food packages and bottles or drug paraphernalia. In 1998 I saw evidence of five separate squats within the boundaries of my study area, while in 2000 there was evidence of one, and in 2002 there were two squats. In April of 2000, I talked to a group of three street people at the nearby Open Door soup kitchen about the average number of people who might share a squat, and agreed that on average, a squat is shared by three or four people before it becomes too well known, and risky. It is rare that a solitary person would squat a building because

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<sup>6</sup> A squat is a vacant building that has been occupied without the permission of the owner.

<sup>7</sup> A heat score is a behaviour, place or person that has attracted the attention of the police, and therefore has become dangerous to associate with.



**(Photo 21) Inside the Wilson Building, pre-renovation. There was quite a bit of graffiti inside, evidence that someone occupied this space over an extended period of time.**

among all sectors of the street community, even among the drug addicted, there is a strong clannishness and an ethic of sharing. If the five squats I uncovered in 1998 followed that average, then despite the growing number of street people, at least fifteen or twenty of them have moved elsewhere, or have become much more discrete about hiding their activity in the face of gentrification.

One squat did survive for a long period of time, even though its presence in the city was fairly well known. A shack behind Chris LeFevre's property on the block between Herald and Chatham served as a home to a group of older, generally aboriginal "rubbies," who were familiar characters in the Victoria streetscape.<sup>8</sup> These old timers spent their days panhandling. They were usually pickled on what smelled like Listerine, or sometimes on an over proof stove-top distillation of Chinese cooking wine.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, until the recent opening of a sobering centre in Victoria, they were generally not eligible for beds in any shelter due to their state of intoxication. From what I knew of them, they were also happier sleeping outside than occupying an institutional setting. They stuck together as a tight pack, were recognised by many in the downtown community as mostly harmless, and were even nicknamed: "The Apple Dumpling Gang" or "The Apple Tree Gang".

In an interview with Todd Dougherty, the property manager for

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<sup>8</sup> Rubbie is a local slang word used to differentiate older, male, usually alcoholic, street people from other segments of the street community such as "street kids" or "junkies." Although the word seems to have originated in the United Kingdom a google search for the word reveals that it is most commonly used in western Canada. Rubbies are often seen pushing shopping carts full of whatever they collect. They supplement their income by scavenging bottles or other sellable objects from trash cans around downtown. Rubbies have territorial claim to the garbage in different parts of downtown, and generally are given preference to prime locations for panhandling. Some segments of the street community, such as the street kids, defer to them a higher status and right to the streets, even while individuals fear ending up like them.

<sup>9</sup> One of these gentlemen showed me how to make this concoction on the hotplate of his apartment at the Ritz hotel almost a decade ago. He died several years ago, and the last piece of graffiti that I knew of commemorating his life and death was painted just three years ago.

Chris LeFevre, who owns the Wilson Building at Herald Street, I was told about the situation when he and Chris decided to have the shack torn down.

There was a carport behind the [Wilson] building, we had to knock it down because the bums were living in there, and it reeked of piss. They were dumping stuff in there; couches and even a TV. There was an ugly scene; I would say the worst I saw in years working in that area. It was the Apple Dumpling Gang, 8 of them. They were yelling at the demo guy and so I had to call the cops. They treated them very rough, and they were still yelling when they shoved them in the paddy wagon. "You're tearing down my home." I would say they were the first to lose out. They used to hang out on the paved loading dock. They have gone elsewhere now, I am not sure where (T. Dougherty, Interview, August 17, 2001).

Dougherty's sympathy for the rubbies is not atypical of the attitude of people who live and work in the area. While policy makers, business owners and shoppers may feel hostility to the unsightly street people, residents and employees indicated a general attitude of acceptance, were often on first name basis with some of them, and even adopted one or two street people as mascots.

The Apple Tree Gang is an example of what the geographical literature calls a "bottle gang." Miller writes, "Bottle Gangs are a group of Skid Row drinkers who pool their change and send one of their more-or-less-respectable members to "make a run" for (another) jug. Bottle gangs are composed almost exclusively of older men, and have their own ethics, and etiquette. Belonging to one is a mark of true acculturation in Skid Row subculture" (Miller, 1982, p. 50). While the territorial reach of Victoria's bottle gang encompasses much of downtown, the centrality of the shack as their home base made the northern edge of downtown of special significance for many years in the social fabric of the street community, a fundamental component in the area's derelict landscape. Since the destruction of the shack, the surviving members of the Apple Tree Gang

have found many temporary shelters, including their most recent home, a nest underneath the dry docks across the Upper Harbour.

### Case Two: Streetlink

A BLOCK AWAY FROM THE SITE of the Apple Tree Gang's illicit shelter is Streetlink, a government-sponsored emergency shelter and medical clinic. Streetlink was opened in 1991 (*Photo 22*). Streetlink evolved from the Cool Aid Hostel, a youth hostel for travellers that had opened in Victoria in 1968, and also a free medical clinic run by volunteer doctors in the 1970s. Both occupied a church basement in the Fernwood neighbourhood of Victoria (Victoria Cool Aid Society, *About Us*, 2004). The hostel and clinic found themselves coping with a growing complexity of social health problems, which pushed them to form a society and centralize the services downtown. In 1992 I frequently babysat for a friend who lived in the subsidized housing part of Streetlink with her two children. The apartments were clean, had all the amenities, and seemed very "grown up" to me. In addition to housing, my friend received abuse and drug counselling and help learning how to care for her children in an appropriate fashion.

Empire building is the term that describes the recent trend of social agencies growing and branching out in order to secure a stable source of funding in an economic climate of cutbacks and funding crises (Wilson, 1998, p. 19-20). The Victoria Cool Aid Society (VCAS) can be seen as one of these social service empires, with its head office at Swift Street. Cool Aid runs the emergency shelter at Streetlink, as well as Swift House (an income assisted housing complex), the Swift Street Medical Clinic, kitchen and laundry facilities for the homeless, counselling services, and meeting space for groups like Narcotics Anonymous. Along with these on-site services, the Cool Aid Society also operates the Sandi Merriman House for women in crisis, and Pandora House for youth in crisis. The Society provides outreach services and is a portal to other non-VCAS services throughout Victoria. At the beginning of the millennium, the Society had a staff of more than 130,



**(Photo 22) Streetlink emergency shelter, 2005.**

and an annual operating budget of almost \$5 million (VCAS, Annual Report, 2004). Streetlink employs 16 full-time staff with 8 on-call relief staff. There are up to 25 client and community volunteers each day, with more on holidays like Christmas, and 55 beds in total. Streetlink serves 100 to 200 clients a day. To look at the role of Streetlink in the wider context of Victoria's derelict landscape I am going to develop two examples—two voices from my personal experience—where Streetlink has played an essential role in enabling private individuals to help someone in a transitional phase or crisis by providing backup assistance. I first entered the Swift Street Clinic in 1998, while accompanying a suicidal man seeking help. The clinic was clean, and the doctor allowed me to stay with my friend throughout the examination, and listened to us both with respect and patience. Talking about it later, we both agreed that the doctor had given us confidence that he would be taken care of, that help would be found. The doctor acted as both a medical professional and as an advocate for my friend. My last contact with Streetlink occurred by placing an ad in the paper for a roommate. Sarah, whose name has been changed to protect her privacy, was a 35-year old Ojibwa woman, who told me she was clean, but only recently, and had hepatitis C; and that she had just been discharged from the hospital where she had been staying because of a schizophrenic episode. She told me, "I want to get off the streets, but someone needs to give me a small break here, it is really hard to stay clean at Streetlink." During her tenancy, Sarah often went back to Streetlink to attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings, to receive medical services and for support during her unstable times. The practical impact of this was that this support came from professionals, not her roommates. This mitigated many of the stresses of renting and sharing a home with someone who would normally be considered "hard to house."

But despite the social importance of Streetlink to Victoria and the size of the organization, the Cool Aid Society has had to appease the gentrifying neighbourhood by attempting to reduce its client's contribution to the visual landscape of dereliction. In 1998, when I took my friend to the Swift

Street Medical Centre, I found just inside the doorway a poster admonishing the clients not to stand around the medical centre door, but instead to go around the corner to the Store Street entrance. The doctor explained that they were trying to limit the effect of the medical centre on the surrounding neighbourhood, and that they worried that if they did not keep their clients from hanging around the doorway, it would jeopardise the clinic. At the time, next to Street Link, so close that the two buildings almost touch, Mermaid Wharf was under construction, styled as a new luxury loft building. Across Swift Street was the upmarket Chintz and Co, and just down the street was The Canoe Club, a new and trendy restaurant in what was once the abandoned City Lights Building.

By keeping their clients away from shoppers, Streetlink seems to have found a compromise that allows them to co-exist with the newer landscapes along Swift Street. It was difficult at first. In 2000, Streetlink's web-site read defensively:

Streetlink is located in the downtown core where its client base is best served - but it is also in the midst of a business and tourist district where more and more high-end furniture stores, restaurants and smaller businesses are flourishing. There is increasing pressure from the community concerning Streetlink's location. Some perceive Streetlink to be contributing to the problem of panhandling and the visible presence of the homeless on Victoria's streets. However, others believe the shelter is a solution to the issue of keeping people off the streets and providing alternatives. One of the main challenges is to build understanding between Streetlink and the community (VCAS, 2000).

But, by August of 2004 the tone of Cool Aid's website had changed, reflecting a new sense of legitimacy and a balance:

There were, at first, problems: emergency call-outs, acts of vandalism, psychotic episodes, and drunken behaviour. In response, the tenants banded together and the project soon developed into a tenant-involved community: it was the residents who set up a social

space, became involved in decision-making and took on care taking duties of their building. The model continues to be successful to this day (VCAS, 2004).

Not everyone thinks that hiding the presence of the street community is proper. Developer Tom Moore sits on the board of Cool Aid. During my interview with him he spoke about the concessions his clients at Cool Aid had to make in order to stay in the area. "Our clients have been in the neighbourhood for [a century or more], alcoholics and drug use has a long standing history in this part of town." In his view it is the developers and the retail community who should have been more careful in designing facilities in such a way that does not force confrontations with the clients of Streetlink (T. Moore, Interview, July 16, 2002). But others are happy with the compromise. Speaking for nearby Capital Iron, Ron Greene agreed that Streetlink had been successful in fitting into the district. "When the city opened up the Harbour to the Cool Aid people [Street Link] to go in there we [Capital Iron] had some trouble at first. They then put in rules and regulations with their community and the problem pretty much went away" (R. Greene, Interview, July 10, 2002). It is not the presence of services that stakeholders like Greene frown upon. It is the associated presence of the derelict visual landscape they find objectionable. These objections were shared by the merchants of Chinatown who saw Streetlink as an example of the City dumping services for street people on Chinatown's doorstep. However, in 1996, Dr. Chuenyan Lai and other prominent members of the Chinese community visited Streetlink with food, and entertainment to celebrate the Chinese New Year, building what Lai called "an invisible Bridge of Harmony" at the west end of Chinatown (Lai, 1996, pp. 39-42).

While the Cool Aid Society's "empire" has had to take steps to erase the visible effects of their street community clients, Streetlink has been the most permanent of the places in the derelict landscape. By minimizing the appearance of the derelict landscape, and by growing in size and bureaucracy, the shelter has competed more effectively with other land uses, securing for itself and its clients the funding and legitimacy it needs to

survive as the Design District takes shape. In Victoria's derelict landscape, Streetlink provides a northern anchor with sufficient standing to protect its territory and with the resources to serve a diverse range of needs.

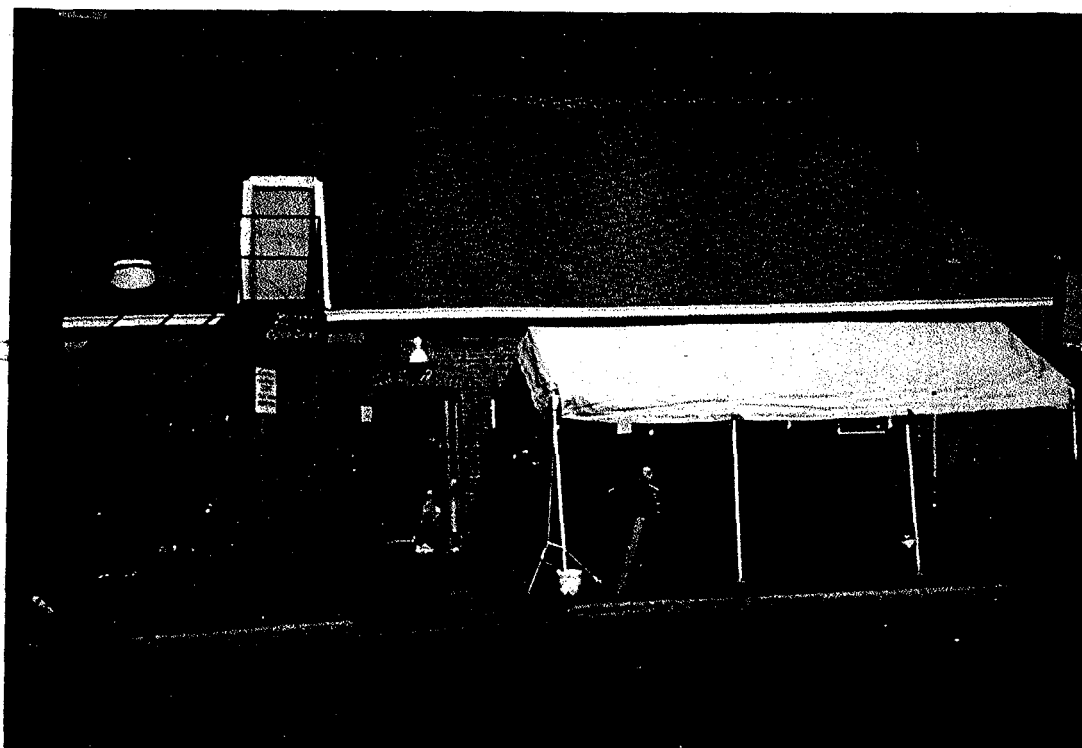
### Case Three: The Open Door

AT THE TIME OF MY INTERVIEW with Ron Greene, The Open Door was located a block from Capital Iron (*Photo 23*). The Open Door was a less formal and less funded outreach service run by the United Church. Greene's opinion of The Open Door was much worse than his opinion of Streetlink. He claims that the Open Door was put in with no consultation, and that although he wrote a letter about it to the City Manager, his letter was ignored.

"The people who are attracted there are not the kind of people that customers that go shopping want to encounter. We are forever running panhandlers off our property and pushing them along" (R. Greene, Interview, July 10, 2002).

The Open Door moved into the old Hydro building at 502 Pembroke Street in late December of 1997, after its original location, in the Metropolitan United Church at 1405 Quadra Street, was sold and became the Conservatory of Music. The Pembroke Street location was a temporary one, only meant to last two or three years while a permanent location was negotiated, but it became an important place in the derelict landscape of the northern edge of downtown for almost six years. Renovations were to be paid for by the sale of the Metropolitan Church. Cost estimates came in under budget thanks to the help of volunteers, including the crew of the HMCS Protecteur, who pitched in to get the building ready for use as a temporary shelter (King, 1997, p. A5).

Reverend Allen Tysick, widely known as "Reverend Al," runs the Open Door. Unlike Streetlink, the shelter is funded by donations. It offers a drop-in centre with two beds for daytime sobering, breakfasts and lunches, spiritual services, advocacy, crises intervention and referrals. The Open Door also coordinates the Peers Helping Peers program and has an adult



**(Photo 23) The Open Door: The sheltered porch area often had people sleeping under it in the day.**

street outreach project with an outreach worker on the streets downtown five days a week. The Open Door's philosophy is "unconditional love in a non-judgmental way to all" (The Downtown Service Providers, 2003). The Open Door recently relocated to a new location at 935 Pandora Street, very close to its original site. It now shares a building with the Upper Room soup kitchen. The moving date was September 10, 2003. A few months later, I met Reverend Al at the site of a model of Victoria's downtown, built specifically for the Downtown Victoria 2020 Conference. The model was interactive, and various people were scheming to alter Victoria's urban landscape to reflect their ideal plan. I was responsible for recording those ideas. Reverend Al's contribution was a large building for the Open Door located on a site facing Rock Bay. I asked him why he chose Rock Bay instead of his new location on Quadra and Pandora. His response was that because the industry in the Rock Bay area was usually shut down at night, the working people were less likely to mind the presence of his clients (A. Tysick, personal communication, November 18, 2003).

In fact, the new location, set amidst a cluster of social services on Pandora Avenue, has created tensions. At its old home right across the street, children are picked up and dropped off for music practice, and the increased concentration of the street community on that corner has made parents nervous and upset. Among the street community there is also stress associated with the clustering, particularly because the majority of the Open Door's regular clients are male. As one woman explained:

The Open Door is right next to the Sexual Assault Centre, and I went to the Sexual Assault Centre for the first time the other day and I felt threatened. I got hit on, like four times. If you are afraid, if you have been attacked and you have to deal with that - that's not good. For me this is weird because the guys at the Open Door at one time they were my bros. I don't know all the people there now, but I am not that far from it. And the Open Door is this wonderful magical place that is feeding people - so what can you do? It is also right next to the Upper Room and they let people sleep in

their doorways, and that is huge right now cause people have no place to sleep (Anonymous, 2004).

While appreciating the need for the Open Door's services, this woman's story illustrates the need to keep some separation between the various subsections of the street community. Like Sarah who found it hard to stay clean surrounded by drug addicts at Streetlink, problems are intensified for some, particularly when people with different problems are crammed into a small and concentrated area of dereliction. The same rough clients also dominated the streetscape around the Open Door at its Pembroke street location, but there the impact was buffered by surrounding industry as well as by derelict and unpopulated spaces. This problem of condensing the derelict landscape and treating the street community as one undifferentiated mass arises again in an even more extreme way when considering another subgroup of the street community – street kids.

#### **Case Four: Spiral Island**

WHEN I LEFT HOME AT SIXTEEN, I did not feel that I could return. At first, I wandered the streets of Victoria, with no idea how to survive. I could not imagine myself panhandling, or climbing into a dumpster for food, so I was always hungry, and often afraid. While other street kids disappeared from the streets at night, I did not know where to go, and so I tended to be stuck with the hardest and most hopeless members of the street community. Sometimes, I would hang out at my school long after it closed, sleeping on the school grounds, but mostly I gravitated back to downtown, where others like myself could be found. It took about two months of existing like this for me to find a pack of friends, and to learn from them how to make the streets my home. The year that followed holds many wonderful memories. Thanks to a network of street kids, I found places to stay on people's couches or in their basements. In the daytime we were rarely apart. We helped each other wholeheartedly. The freedom and excitement of life as part of the street community outweighed the sense of constant insecurity.

Downtown became my home, the territory of my little tribe, borrowed from us in the daytime, of course, by the "normal" Victorians.

While street kids represent a fairly small percentage of kids, there is a huge amount of research on them from both academic and policymaking sources (Miller, 1982, p. 6-7). Much attention has been given to why kids hit the streets, to the dangers of street life for young people, and how to best help them leave the streets. What is known is that street kids very rarely even sleep outside. They drift from house to house, staying briefly with family, friends, acquaintances and strangers. They stay in squats or youth-only shelters, and only as a last resort in adult shelters or outside (Ploeg, 1997, p. 1). It is also known that while a prolonged period of living on the streets leads to a lifestyle where youth believe that they now belong to the streets and will not fit into normal society, the homeless youth of today are not the homeless adults of tomorrow (Ploeg, 1997, p. 3, p. 12-13). Most of them do find their way off the street once they establish an effective support network.

For a three-month period from creation in September, to its eviction in December 2001 there was a self-run shelter, meeting space and outreach service for street kids at 526 Discovery Street. This project was called Spiral Island, a cooperative venture (*Photo 24*). Young people had worked together to raise the rent, and the building was sub-let from Ron Lund, a local businessman who owned a bead shop in Dragon Alley. When Spiral Island opened on Discovery Street, I went down to talk to the people making it happen. The space, named after organiser Ron Lund's nearby bead store, "Spiral Monkey," was open and airy. In one corner a group of people sat drinking coffee. Someone was posting a chaotic art project on the wall. I was told proudly "everyone helped make it." In the front, in the spot with the best lighting and visibility, was a children's sand box loaded with donated toys. One of the Spiral Islanders, who approached me as soon as he saw me looking at the sand box, explained that the sand box was there because a few of the women in the community had kids of their own, and creating a friendly and well-supervised space for them was one of the main



**(Photo 24) Spiral Island: The graffiti style signage says "Loveworks" and "Hopeworks"**

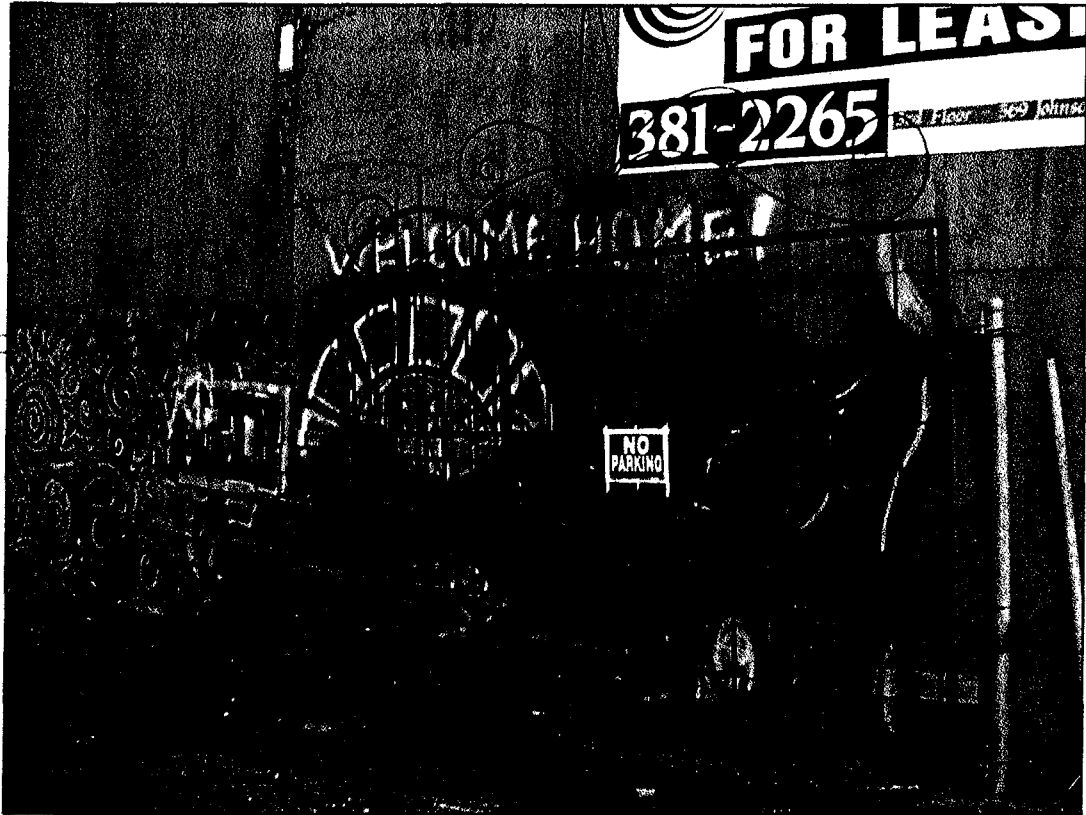
priorities of the collective. They called it the "Sacred Sandbox."

While photographing the building, I spoke with a security guard I knew when I had worked at a small bookstore in Market Square, from 1989-1998. The ex-guard told me that he was going to be teaching, for free, self-defence classes for street kids at Spiral Island. I laughed because these were the same street kids I had so often watched him kick out of Market Square for being unruly. "Well, yeah," he said. "You don't want them in the Square, but that doesn't mean they are bad kids" (Anonymous, 2002).

Ron Lund and Jonathan (who introduced himself as "Tree") told me about their dreams for Spiral Island. They explained that this was not just a drop-in centre, but rather a home for the 30 or so young people who lived on and around the streets of Victoria. These kids were not typical street people, and although many of them were fleeing abusive situations, or struggling with mental health issues, they were not hard-core drug addicts. They were urban transients, with sub-cultural roots that reflect glimpses of local history, including draft dodgers, flower power, and the hippie lifestyle (*Photo 25 and 26*).

The Spiral Islanders are typically quite visible, dressing like hippies, playing their bongo drums incessantly, surrounded by dogs. They may or may not sleep on the streets, but they spend much of their lives downtown, especially during the winter. In the summer, many of them live in camps in the Walbran Valley. In my time spent at Spiral Island, I came to feel that the best description of this group of young people was a tribe, rather than a community. In fact, many referred to themselves as a part of the "Rainbow Family Tribe," which is an international, self-identified group that meets periodically in farmer's fields for "Rainbow Gatherings" in the spirit of Woodstock.

However, Spiral Island lasted barely three months before the City of Victoria Bylaw Officer declared that there were not enough bathrooms in the building to support the number of people hanging out there. This and other code infractions were considered serious enough to put pressure on the landlord to evict the Spiral Islanders, or for him to make major



**(Photo 25) Graffiti outside Spiral Island reads "Welcome Home", "Hope", "Love" and "Magic". The style and message are reflections of the hippie values of the Spiral Islanders.**



**(Photo 26) Elves of Pembroke Street: Many years worth of graffiti decorating a warehouse building on Pembroke Street.**

renovations. When the Spiral Islanders left I offered support and assisted with the moving of belongings to the "House of Roses," a communally-rented house in an Esquimalt neighbourhood where four of the Spiral Islanders lived. Many of the young people who had come to count on Spiral Island established a camp-style protest in Centennial Square. The police eventually moved them along, but one had taken video footage of the protest, which was shared with me at the House of Roses. One disturbing scene was Victoria's Mayor telling them to go to a shelter. Jonathan, who made the video, talked a little about how for these kids, shelters were not perceived as safe places. To stay in a shelter was to be separated from your friends and your dog, tossed in with a harder and scarier subset of the downtown street culture. To these young people, a safe shelter was a place where they could stick together as a makeshift family, and, unlike most of the older street culture, they were able and willing to pay rent in order to have this sanctuary.

### **Stability and Diversity in the Derelict Landscape**

The variety of services that have been available to the street community in the northern edge of downtown from 1995-2002 have ranged from informal and unregulated, to formal and government-sponsored. Squatted buildings, Spiral Island, The Open Door and Streetlink have all fared quite differently during the transition from an industrial and derelict landscape to a residential and retail design district. While the most formal example, Streetlink, has managed to expand while appeasing the neighbours by placing restrictions on its clients, the Open Door was tolerated, in some cases unwillingly, until a more permanent location was found. Spiral Island was shut down, and the Apple Dumpling gang's abode was destroyed. Although all of these places fit different niches as service providers, only the one place that had government funding and support from professional social agents has remained. Faced with competing uses, the territorial claim of the street community has deteriorated significantly

over the time period of this study.

The derelict landscape is a landscape that is constantly shifting, shuffled from one part of downtown to the other. Skid Row competes weakly with other landscapes and is therefore easily displaced, along with the missions and shelters that service it. However, the needs of the street community for locations that minimise distance between cheap or free places to live, liquor stores, opportunities to make small amounts of money, places to loiter undisturbed, and soup kitchens or other food sources keep the community clustered close to downtown (Wilson, 1982, p. 25-38). Thus, in Victoria, like in other cities, the derelict landscape is in motion, filling up spaces of decline in response to pressures from gentrification and shifts in funding. The consequences of this constant shuffling around of services is very disruptive to the fabric of the street community.

In order to show the importance of stability to the well-being of street people, I return to my own experience by introducing another home base that was created for street kids, and that at one time provided an anchor for the northern downtown street community. While homeless shelters like Streetlink and even the Soup Kitchens on which I depended for food several times a week always held an element of fear for me, Cooks Down Under, which existed on Herald Street during the late 1980s, stands out as a very successful agency for getting kids off the street. To understand more about what worked about Cooks, I conducted an informal focus group with three other women who had experienced Cooks Down Under during their time on the streets as teenagers. The focus group findings backed up my own memories of what made this place special. The agency provided continuity and a lasting relationship with adults who cared, and kept caring. Cooks took batches of fifteen street kids for six-month job and life-skill training programs. The graduates reported that the experience was one of friendship forming and community building. As one participant said, "Everything else is always changing, you are constantly moving, friendships are changing, the adults in your life are changing—this [place] stayed for almost five years. That is what got me off the streets" (Focus Group, November, 2004).

Another important factor in the well-being of the street community is the ability to cluster along natural social groupings. In the derelict landscape at the northern edge of downtown, we can distinguish between the more formal examples of Streetlink or The Open Door, where everyone is welcome, and the Apple Dumpling Gang's squat or Spiral Island, where specific subgroups carved spaces for themselves. These subgroups, the Bottle gang and the street kids, have distinct traits that differ from one another, including different demographics, political views, addictions, health needs and attitudes. During the time period when this area of town was a derelict landscape, these two groups were free to establish places and territories for themselves. Given this opportunity for self-distinction, it is important to note that they did not choose to share their spaces with one another, but instead claimed these spaces so thoroughly that it was clear, even from an outside perspective, which space belonged to whom.

Places like Spiral Island and The Apple Dumpling Gang's shack exist only in landscapes of dereliction (*Photos 27 and 28*). While this territorial claiming of space within the inner city was only possible for a short duration of time, attention paid to events of that period reveals the cooperative will within segments of the street community towards self-help, the existence of informal shelters that supplement formal housing, and the insecurity of those informal places of self-help in the face of landscape change. However, with the return of capital to the area, the anarchistic places of self-help have given way to gentrified landscapes.





**(Photo 27) A condom, cigarette package and syringe found on Pembroke Street in November, 2004—evidence of street activity.**



**(Photo 28) Graffiti found inside the Wilson Building, Chatham Street Side during demolition in 1998.**

## ↔ Chapter Five ↔

### THE CREATIVE LANDSCAPE OF ARTIST-LED GENTRIFICATION

We are the children who step out of the shadows  
furtive behind the dying giants.  
We are collectors of twisted iron and broken pasts.  
We are salvagers of roadside refuse...  
histories left to crumble  
back into the stripped and poisoned earth.

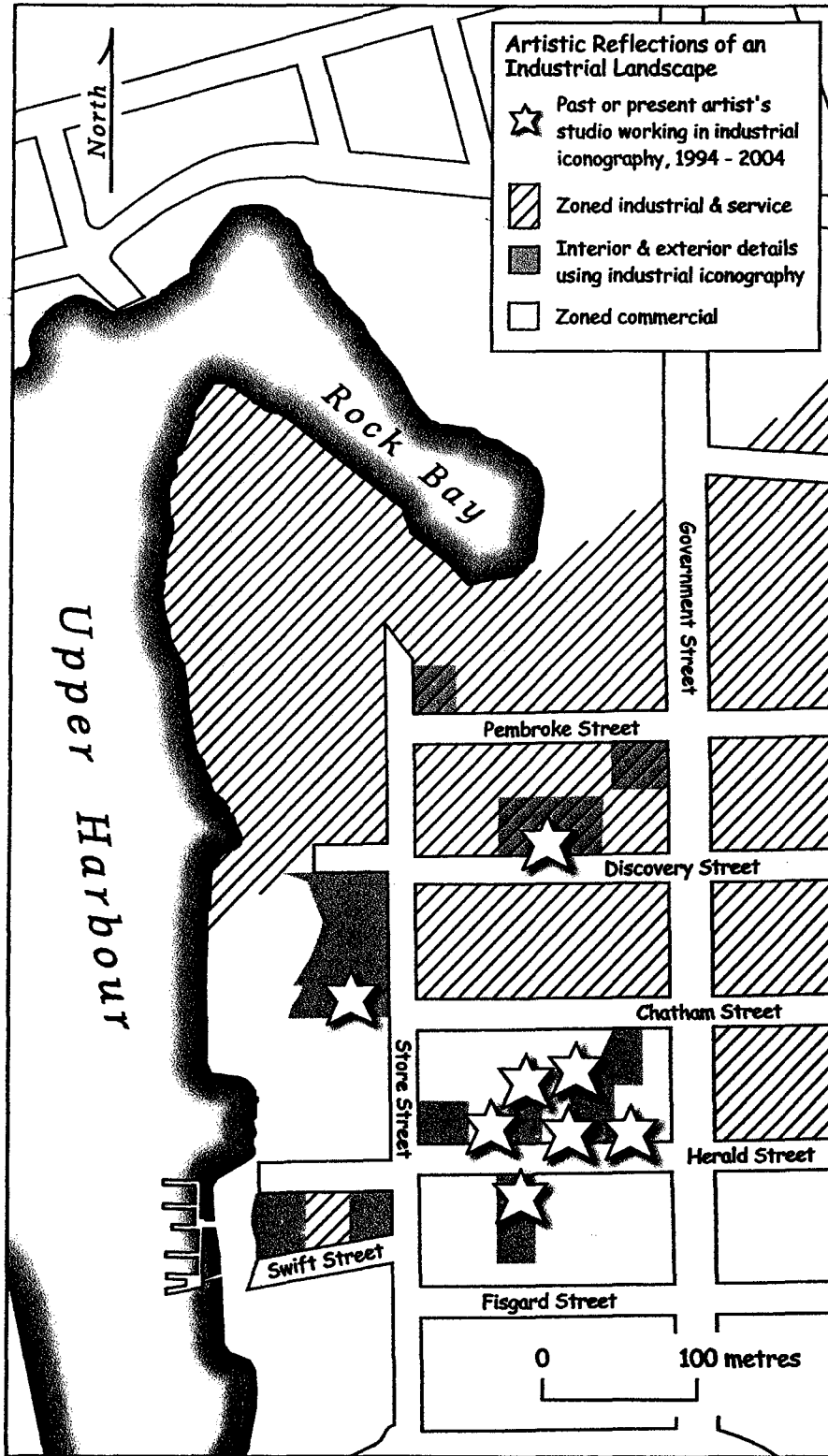
- Cara Segger, *Necroindustriophilia*

#### Introduction

THE CREATIVE LANDSCAPE IS the landscape of the artistic community. Vibrant and grungy, rowdy and eccentric, this landscape combines the counter-culture atmosphere of the derelict landscape with a trend-setting chic that is attractive to middle-class urbanites. During the 1990s, a blossoming of artistic ventures marked the northern edge of downtown (*Figure 6*). As in other cities this blossoming preceded a surge of revitalization. The artistic places were short-lived, but it was partially this trait of liminality<sup>10</sup> that made them seeds for Victoria's emerging "Design District." The artistic places that characterized the transitional space between Old Town's heritage landscape and the still active industrial landscape north of Rock Bay acted as both social and material agents of gentrification. By adding the ingredient of "edgy vitality" (C. LeFevre, Interview, July 21, 2002), the presence of artists and what has been called the "creative class" (Florida,

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<sup>10</sup> Victor Turner describes the state of liminality: "People or societies in a liminal phase are a "kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change" (1982, p45). Turner compared modern arts with tribal ritual in the ability of the artists to step out of normal social constraints and taboos (1977, p. 43).



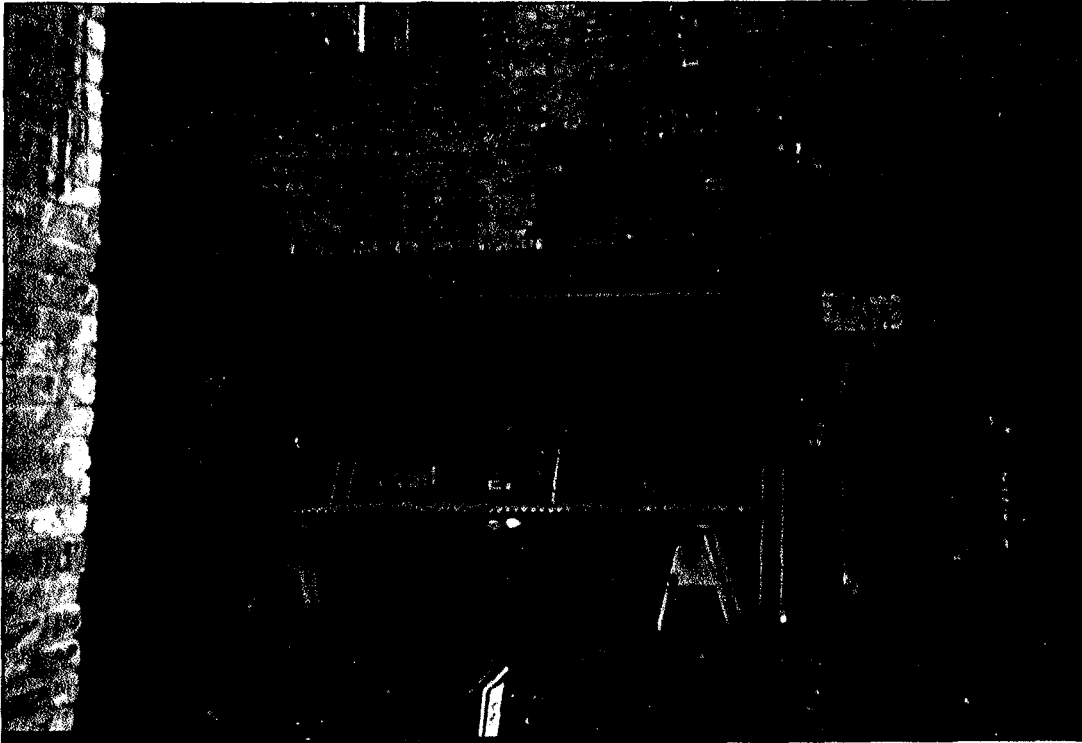
(Figure 6)

2002) has become an attracting feature of urban settings on the verge of transition (*Photo 29*).

In order to show the role of the creative landscape in transforming the area, I review literature on artist-led gentrification, particularly of industrial areas. I show how artist-led gentrification has played a part in the downtown revitalization of Victoria, and then connect the Victoria experience to that of other cities. To show the meaning and atmosphere of the creative landscape, I then describe three places in the arts scene of the 1990s – Discovery Street Station, Buzzard’s Lunch and the Meat Lockers (*see Figure 2*). Very little remains in the historical record of these places and so I rely mostly on my own experiences and recollections to tell their stories. All three of these places were short-lived, but left impressions on the residential landscape that followed. By tracing these impressions I argue that the arts scene acted as a bridge between the industrial landscape and the gentrified residential landscape, by repackaging the area’s identity.

### **Artist-Led Gentrification**

THE LAST DECADES OF THE twentieth century were marked by a reversal of the trend of suburbanization and inner-city decline. Certainly, the inner city has experienced a renaissance in the last quarter of the century. But the suburbs are still the location of choice for most people, and with the development of edge cities and village centres at the urban periphery, it is doubtful that the North American central city will reach the high density that advocates of sustainability would like to see. However, it is true that many people are returning to the central city as a place of work, play and residence. Their return has stimulated a significant upgrading of the inner-city building stock and a reinvention of the North American downtown. A significant amount of scholarly literature and marketing effort has been devoted to understanding what draws this subset of people to a downtown lifestyle. Answers to this question suggest that planners must incorporate a new set of values into their planning formula if they are to successfully



**(Photo 29) Fravashi Ironworks studio behind the Wilson building on Chatham Street is one example of an artist-welder's place in the creative landscape.**

encourage a vital inner city (Butler, 1997; Lambert and Boddy, 2002; Lees, 2000, Ley, 1996; Smith, 1979).

It is the “edgier” sub-cultures that typically have led the return to the inner-city. Central to this process is the re-imagining of the downtown, from a dangerous, dirty and impoverished area to an exciting, historic and bohemian nexus. This process of re-imagining generally began from the bottom-up, with a sub-cultural invasion of the abandoned or derelict areas of the city by an ethnic group or by a counter-culture community – hippies, squatters or artists. In dockland areas where heavy industry determines the existing building stock, and ethnic communities are unlikely to find refuge amongst the decaying factories and warehouses, the emphasis is on artists and counter-cultural groups, whose need is for unconventional spaces outside the confines of a residential neighbourhood; and whose financial constraints are often severe enough to conquer the fear of toxic contamination.

David Ley has argued that artists take part in the repackaging of derelict urban landscapes (Ley, 2003). Ley builds on Pierre Bourdieu’s work in the field of cultural production, and the role of cultural capital in giving symbolic meaning (and economic worth) to the mundane; and on Richard Florida’s (2002) conceptualisation of a creative class, which has replaced natural resources as an engine of civic growth.<sup>11</sup> By bestowing their cultural benediction, artists attract capital to the area. Ley confirms: “Note that the succession here is along the same occupational continuum identified repeatedly by Bourdieu within the dominant class, from a position of high cultural capital and low economic capital, through a position of lower cultural capital but high economic capital” (Ley, 2003, p. 2540).

While Ley calls artists the “colonizing arm” (p. 2533) of the middle-class and thereby implicates them as agents of gentrification, he absolves artists of blame for displacement and neighbourhood change, pointing out that the culture of the arts itself tends towards a subversive and anti-

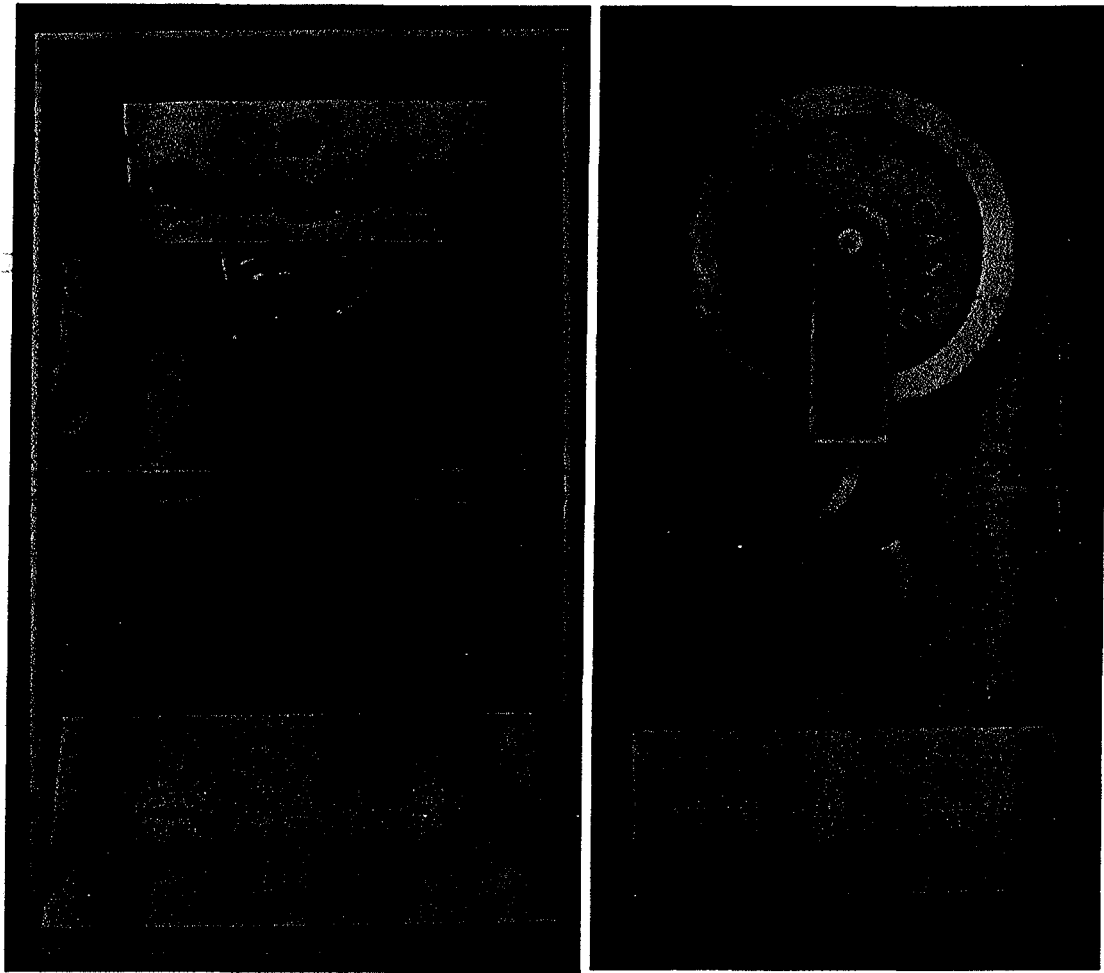
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<sup>11</sup> Florida and Gertler’s “Bohemian Index” ranks Victoria third after Vancouver and Toronto in the Canadian share of this creative population (Wells, 2002).

capitalist ethic, and in fact, according to Ley, the valorization of the authenticity of the artist's world by the rest of society is responsible for the change. Many artists do not agree with this absolution, and artists around the world tell of their struggles to come to terms with their role as an agent of gentrification. Certainly, there is irony in the fact that part of the cultural capital of the artists is the disdain for the economic capital that they eventually attract by their presence (*Photo 30*).

The term "gentrification" has been in use by social scientists since the 1960s. Initially gentrification described the conversion of inner-city housing by individuals and the upgrading of a neighbourhood, but at the expense of lower-income residents. The term has since been stretched to apply to more formal processes, including brownfield redevelopment projects. Public and private sometimes combine in top-down developments, as evidenced by Victoria's Dockside development area, located across the harbour from my study area. My area is experiencing gentrification as middle class condominiums replace the spaces of workers and the underclass—including industrial jobs, services for the street community and artist studios. While more formal agents such as government and corporations are initiators, they are composed of individuals with high cultural capital, and are influenced by the same trends as individual homeowners. Cultural agency is still very much in evidence.

These invasions may have happened organically at first, but city planners and developers were quick to recognise the power of bohemia as a tool to revitalize a declining city core. In some cases, agents of gentrification may consciously encourage the development of bohemian districts in the most derelict portions of the city in order to harness the ability of these groups to draw others to the core. In other cases, suspicious of the unlawful nature of many sub-cultural communities, civic leaders may try to skip this stage, and instead promote the re-imaging of the area through symbolic markers and advertising campaigns. Ultimately, it is the combination of top-down and bottom-up processes that influence the successful remaking of derelict central city spaces.



**(Photo 30) "Object" and "Symbol" by Buzzard's Lunch Artist-in-Residence, Sean Nattrass. Paint on collapsed cardboard boxes. Nattrass spoke of his preoccupation with images of derelict industry—his "fetish". Much of his work reflects a sense of irony at his role as an agent for gentrification.**

The relationship between bottom-up, sub-cultural territories and successful gentrification in waterfront areas is well understood by local agents of revitalization.<sup>12</sup> In his study of the redevelopment of Granville Island, Ley discusses how planners have inserted an arts school and studio space into the plan in order to create a bohemian flavour, which they hoped would help propel Granville Island towards success. Although the project was eventually successful financially, Ley argues that the artist community never really thrived there, and the sub-cultural flavour never took hold (1996). The truly bohemian do not fit well into pre-planned spaces, which in the end are too sterile for their unconventional needs.

In Victoria, an example of the deliberate harnessing of the ability of a community of artists to kick-start the revival of a derelict section of downtown can be found in Chinatown's Fan Tan Alley. When Dr. David Lai set about forming a series of recommendations for the revitalization of Chinatown in the 1980s, he suggested that artists be allowed to move into the decaying buildings of Fan Tan alley (Lai, 1991, p. 49). To allow this, the city had to take an uncharacteristic *laissez-faire* attitude towards its own zoning restrictions. A deal had to be worked out with the Fire Department, because the alley was too narrow to permit occupancy of the buildings on either side. Rather than widen the alley, destroying its character, an alternate fire safety measure in the form of a sluice system was set in place. Most of the studios were not legal to live in, but the city restrained its inspectors, and the artists were happy to participate in a consensual conspiracy that they lived elsewhere. A vibrant and exciting arts centre was born, attracting students and patrons of the arts. Around this anchor, coffee shops and other retail activities were able to develop. A couple of the original artists still remain in Fan Tan Alley. Some were pushed out by

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<sup>12</sup> Ley devotes a chapter to the impact of the bohemian trendsetters of the 1960's and 70's in his book, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City*. The chapter entitled "Follow the Hippies," is a personal retrospective of the ultra cool, artistic community that arose in derelict neighbourhoods near downtown. It is an account of how the anti-materialistic hippy sub-culture paved the way for a yuppified new middle-class with a whole new set of consumption patterns.

rising rents as the area was gentrified. Others became successful, or not, and moved on.

Many of those who moved on relocated north of Chinatown to form an artistic enclave around Kaleidoscope Theater, which had functioned in the area since 1974. The theatre occupied 556 Herald Street until it closed in 1996. During its lifespan a variety of other more transitory artist spaces surrounded it—artist’s spaces encroaching on the industrial landscape. One of my interview subjects, Chris LeFevre, the owner of the Wilson Building and a large portion of the property between Chatham and Herald Streets, told me about the “poetry” of the area pre-renovation. Fifteen years before (which would be 1988, if his recollection of time was accurate), he purchased the B. Wilson Company and Garden City Warehousing and Distribution Ltd.<sup>13</sup> LeFevre recalled the emergence of the creative class at that time:

At the same time that industry was still here there was an emergence of people who felt the area inspired creativity and they were the artists and artisans who started appearing about 15 years ago looking for hole-in-the-wall spaces and I started providing them with it. How did I provide them with it? I provided them with it as a result of me closing down the cold storage business and having these cold storage lockers. These lockers were interesting in that they were basically concrete bunkers and you could do anything inside them (C. LeFevre, Interview, July 21, 2002).

One feature of the artistic ventures that emerged in the 1990s was an aesthetic commonality that served not only as a social bridge between dereliction and gentrification, but also as a visual bridge. Artists became interpreters of the industrial landscape; they were active agents in the repackaging of the area for mainstream consumption. The aesthetic

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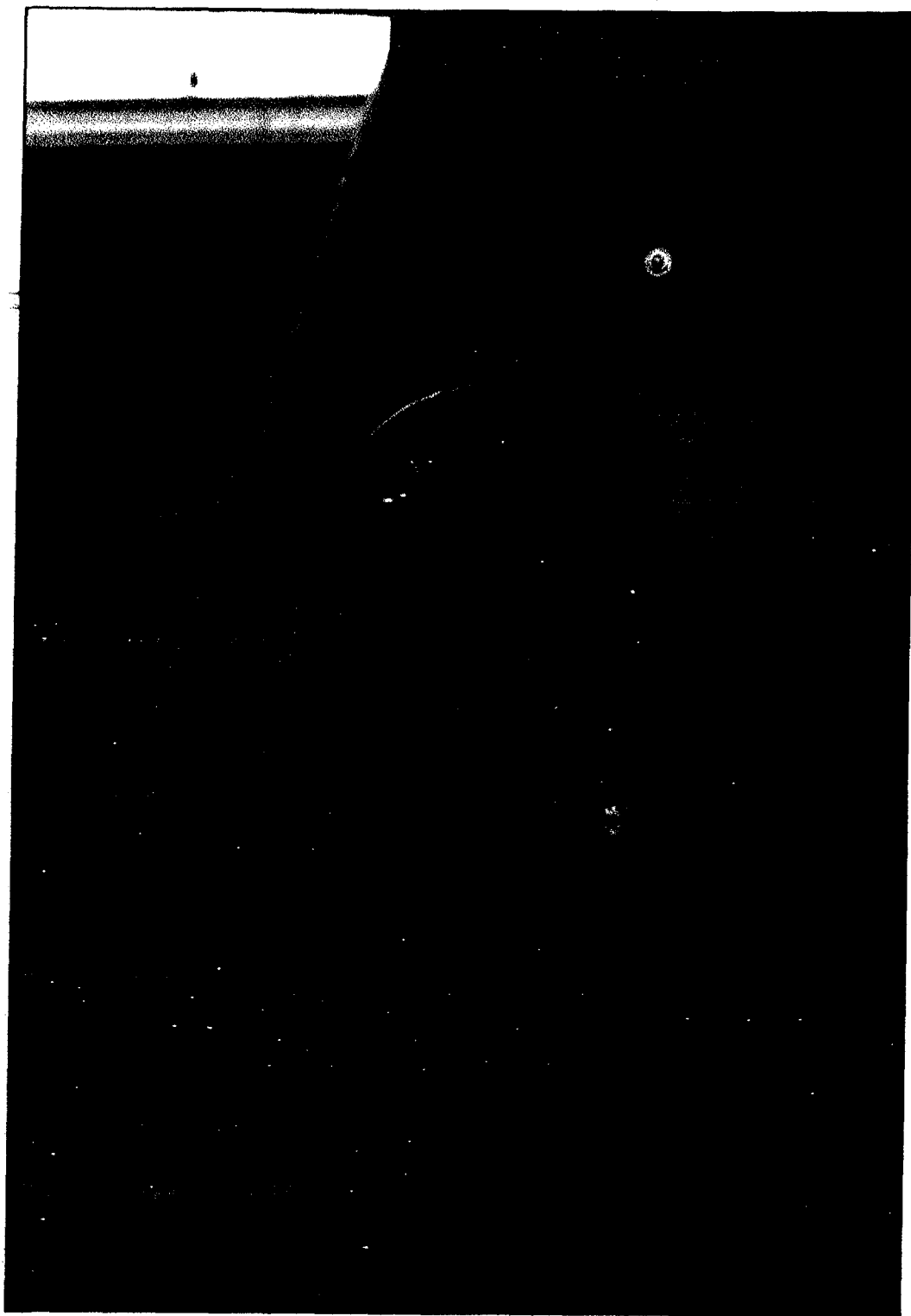
<sup>13</sup> B. Wilson Co. built the Wilson building in 1906. Garden City Warehousing ran a flour storage facility, with the flour brought in by boxcar on rail tracks that went up Chatham Street and into the building.

commonality was focused on the imagery of industry and decay. Materials, medium and inspiration were often scavenged from the surrounding area. Metal and processed wood, wire and concrete, carefully contrived rust, stains or worn away paint, common objects deliberately oversized and oversimplified, all evoke the dilapidated factories amongst which the art is produced and displayed (*Photo 31*).

Victoria is by no means unique in this characteristic of having a gentrified landscape reflect its industrial vernacular. Probably the most famous example of a purely iconographical industrial aesthetic replacing marginal industry and a lively artistic community is in New York's Soho district. Here, the sociologist Sharon Zukin developed her critique of the post-modern urban spectacle by examining the loss of an alternative artistic community to the archetypal high-priced loft-style condo units (1989). Zukin's work is fundamental to my own understanding of the gentrification process in older manufacturing areas, but in contrast to her economic and structural analysis with its focus on the agency of multiple political interests, I have been more interested in the individual agents of change—the artists, property owners and developers. This more humanistic focus in my work reflects the smaller and more personal scale of Victoria, and my personal connections with both the agents of gentrification and the people whose landscape is being eclipsed.

Another sociologist who has grappled with the idea of a post-modern and themed environment is Hannigen, whose book "*Fantasy Cites*" developed the idea of a themed and fake environment replacing the authentic.

They are "postmodern," which just means they rely on simulated thrills and virtual reality. As fantasy cities are built near you, you will hear a lot about a French theorist named Jean Baudrillard. Feel free to ignore it. All postmodern theory is an elaborate euphemism for the word "phony." If you find that overly pejorative, just say "unreal." This means that you will be shown all of the delights of a big, sophisticated city without the dangerous edge — muggers, dirt, bad smells... fantasy



**(Photo 31) A refrigeration pipe from the interior of the Wilson building now serves as a decorative element of the building's exterior.**

cities will offer us "faux experience," or risk-free risk" or "sanitized razzmatazz," as critics have coined it (Mallick, 1999)

Like Hannigen's fantasy city, the northern edge of Victoria's downtown has taken on an aura of ironic self-reflection. Images of the industrial are everywhere used as decoration rather than being inherent in the functional landscape. The iconography of the area evokes the industrial vernacular and it does appear sanitized when compared to the active industry of Rock Bay. However, this iconography is not purely an indication of the placeless corporate structure that Hannigen and other critics argue characterize "Disney-like," themed cities. In fact, the very artistic community that supplied the cultural chic of edgy vitality was active and in many cases very self-aware agents in imagining, producing, and selling the new consumption landscape at the northern edge of downtown. Some indication of the participation of the artistic community can be found in the businesses scattered throughout the area. For example, the Three Sixty skateboarding shop, run by people who were once known to me through the Herald Street social scene, uses utilitarian grey stone and rebar as décor. Next-door is the Grindstone Café, a coffee shop owned, run, and frequented by people who have connections to the arts community. Inside is an ornate wine rack created at Discovery Street Station. The signage in businesses around the area is often made of rusted metal. The interior of the Canoe Club restaurant on Swift Street was done in consultation with J.C. Scott, a Fan Tan Alley artist and patron of Buzzard's Lunch Gallery.

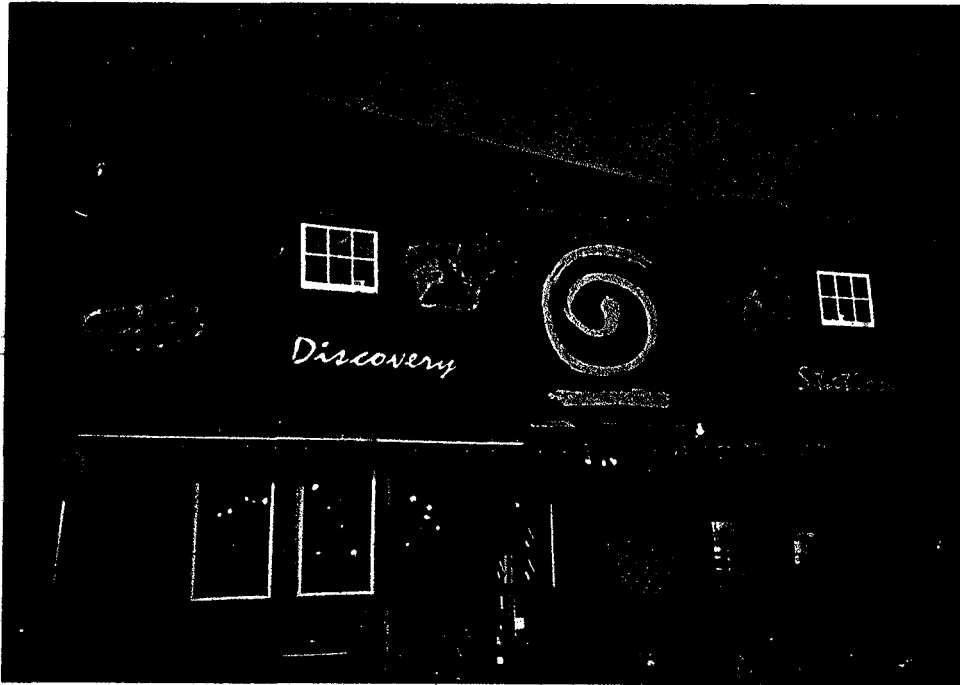
To explore the character of artistic involvement in the transition, I will focus on three places that existed, each for only a short time, as nodes of artistic activity (*see Figure 2*). This is by no means meant to be a complete inventory of creative activity in the area. Rather, it is an attempt to evoke the sense of place of each of these micro studies and to describe not just the visual landscape of each place, but also the experience of that place, including the people, the atmosphere and the connection with the surrounding area.

## Case One: Discovery Street Station

BEFORE ITS INCARNATION AS Spiral Island, the building at 526 Discovery Street was known as Discovery Street Station. Discovery Street Station was an artist's cooperative that showcased functional welded art (*Photo 32 and 33*). In the literature surrounding post-modern and themed urban environments, the idea of the authentic transformed to icon, of the original becoming spectacle, is frequently discussed (Bell, 2004; Frantz and Collons, 1999; Hancock, 2002; Hannigan, 1998; and Zukin, 1989, 1995). Discovery Street Station in its heyday exemplified the concept of the themed spectacle environment.

Discovery Street Station was both a space of production and spectacle. It contained several businesses, the most visible of which was Wrought'n Art, a decidedly non-utilitarian continuation of the historical landscape of welding and metal work (*Photo 34*). The welders at Wrought'n Art produced whimsical signage, furniture, candelabras and other custom work. The Station also included a recording studio and computers for graphic artists. The show room featured other merchandise, including candles, music, napkins and soaps. Most were functional items—hand crafted, unique and elevated to the status of original art. Unlike the functional production space of a typical welder's workshop, this was also a place of spectacle. A cappuccino bar in the showroom overlooked a window with theatre style curtains, through which one could see the back room welding space. The customers and artists could hang out all day, drinking their lattes and watching the welders at their craft. The work of the Wrought'n Art artist-welders includes signs on Herald Street and in Dragon Alley, parts of the interior décor of the Canoe Club on Swift Street, and the furnishings and design of a café on lower Herald Street.

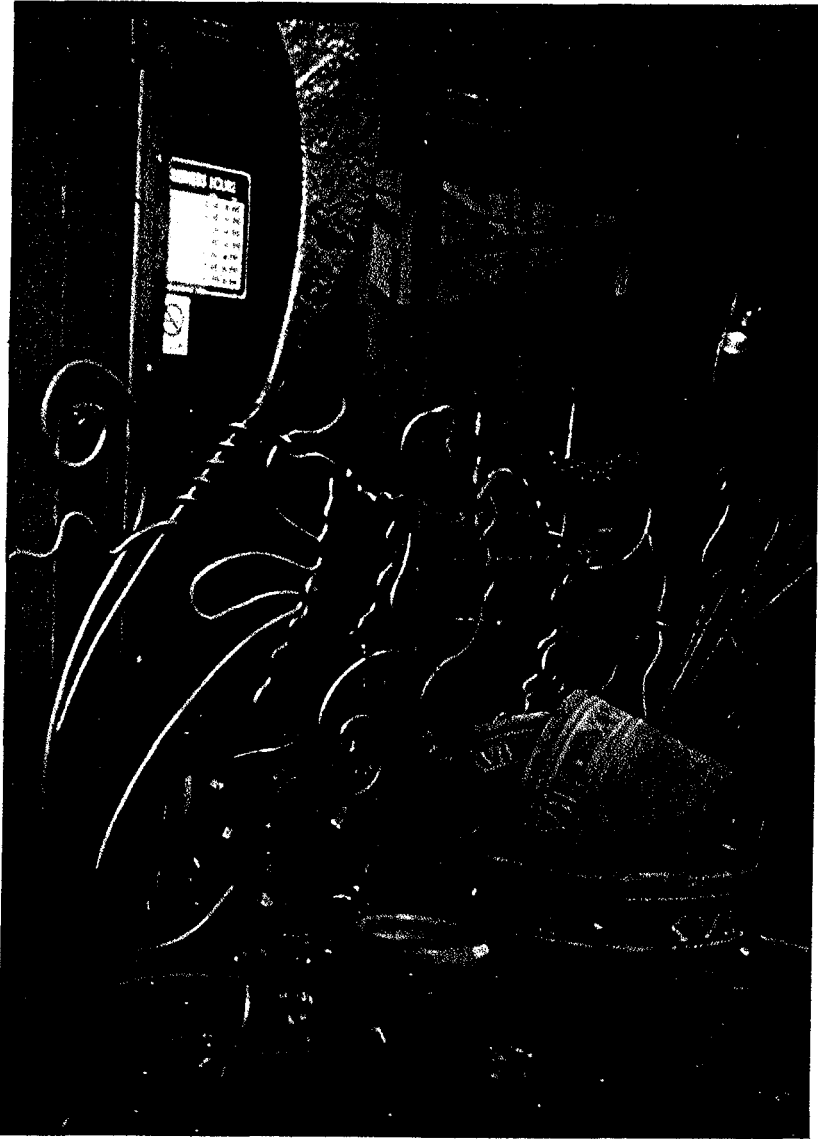
For those who became familiar with the group that ran Discovery Street Station, an eventual invitation upstairs was possible. Upstairs was the private lounge and recording space where a small and close knit artist's scene gathered daily. I had the pleasure becoming familiar with some of



**(Photo 32) Discovery Street Station, Home of Wrought'n Art welders at 526 Discovery Street.**



**(Photo 33) Gibbs Design has replaced Discovery Street Station.**



**(Photo 34) Metal sculpture outside Discovery Street Station.**

these artists, as I was in the habit of stopping by for a coffee each time I explored my study area. For the most part, the crowd that associated with the Discovery Street Station, which functioned like a co-op, was in its thirties, most of them students, or already graduated from university or art school. Animated conversations focused on making Discovery more successful and how to fit the artists who spent time there into the business operation. There was a lot of enthusiasm and entrepreneurial spirit present. I generally left with the impression that I was witnessing the beginning of a potential big money maker. However, the arts cooperative eventually imploded due to differences in opinion regarding direction and the division of profits. After Discovery Street Station folded, the front of the building remained empty for a while except for its brief existence as Spiral Island. Today, it is painted a dull dark grey, and is the home of Gibbs Design, the more stable and less communal enterprise of one of the original welders from Wrought'n Art (*see Photo 33*). Discovery Street Station is an example of the fragility of unstructured cooperation. This case reveals how a highly creative, energetic and liminal place is eventually replaced by a more structured, formal and permanent version of the business.

Discovery Street Station was not the only artist-welder studio within these few blocks. Between the time the renovations on the Wilson building began and the beginning of the construction of the new residential buildings on Chatham Street, another artist welder, Fravashi Iron Works, had a studio in a nook at the back of the Wilson building. Examples of Fravashi work can still be found in the detailing of the Wilson building, where the old refrigeration pipes became the external décor. Across Store Street, as part of Capital Iron, another welding business displays its sign: "Artistic Welders" still hangs on a banner at the side of Capital Iron. This fusion of industrial and artistic skills is a reflection of the transition occurring in the area. The well-ventilated warehouses and industrial zoning along with the cheap rent that comes with vacancies and dereliction are ideal conditions for artists whose work is loud and dirty.

**Case Two:  
Buzzard's Lunch and the Herald Street Scene**

PRE-DATING DISCOVERY STREET STATION was Buzzard's Lunch, a cooperative arts space founded by my circle of friends and roommates in 1993, but lasting only until 1995. This space was located in the Wilson building between the Herald Street Café and The Herald Street Arts Centre. The buildings on Herald Street at that time were in advanced stages of decay, but the energy on the street was vibrant at all hours. Inside Buzzard's Lunch, behind the storefront, was a maze of meat lockers that housed a woodworking shop, a tattoo parlour, and a lost-wax jewellery casting studio, a resident artist's studio, a digital music production space, and finally a huge room in which a theatre company practiced and performed. There were no restrictions on how we decorated the space, but we were not supposed to use the condemned upper floor for anything but storage, and we were not supposed to be living there. For us this space was a 24-hour hang out. Parties lasted all night and we turned people away at the door (*Photo 35*). Our theme was industrial, primitive, tribal. We did not disguise the raw concrete floors, the rotting walls or the refrigeration pipes. Rather we treated them as part of the display, arranging lighting in such a way as to accent the roughness. At Buzzard's Lunch, we tried to convey the experience of living on the edge.<sup>14</sup>

Factors enabling this artistic and "edgy" vitality were inexpensive space, the innate qualities of the architecture, and a hands-off management approach. Developer Chris LeFevre was waiting until conditions were right

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<sup>14</sup> The "edginess" of the arts community that existed in northern downtown during the 1990s was a product of its liminality, both in the impermanence of the venues and the seeds of new styles or communities that emerged from them and by the nature of the artwork that was shown there. One example of liminality and edginess from Buzzard's Lunch was a show devoted to the work of a BC artist named "Manwoman" who, inspired by a dream, tattooed his whole body with swastikas and set out to educate society on the benevolent meanings of the swastika in cultures around the world prior to the Nazi appropriation of the symbol. This show stepped outside normal cultural restrictions to offer a liminal experience to those who participated, consciously breaking taboos and offering potential for new ways of thinking.



LADIES AND

GENTLEMEN,

### **BUZZARD'S LUNCH**

IS PROUD TO PRESENT, TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME, A COLLECTION OF HUMAN ODDITIES AND ARTISTIC EXTREMITIES! THAT'S RIGHT, YOU'LL SEE THE MAD VISIONS OF **SEAN NATTRASS**, THE HUMAN PAINTBRUSH, YOU'LL SEE THE CAPTURED HALLUCINATIONS OF THE AMAZING **MITCHELL WIEBE** AND HIS PIGMENT MANIPULATIONS! YOU'LL HEAR THE AURAL CONTORTIONS OF **MARTENSVILLE**, HOT OFF THEIR NEW CD RELEASE! THAT'S RIGHT FOLKS! YOU'LL SEE THE DYNAMIC PIERCING DUO **ERNIE & MISHELLE** AS THEY DEMONSTRATE THE ANCIENT ART OF BODY PIERCING; THE FAINT OF HEART BE WARNED! YOU'LL SEE **JOHN PATRICK SULLIVAN**, THE HUMAN BRANDER! OUCH! SEE THE WORLD THROUGH THE SHUTTERED EYE OF **MICHEAL ANTON** AND HIS CAT SCRUFFY THE WONDERKITTY! AND FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, THE HIDDEN CORNERS OF THE PAINTED MIND OF **BARRY "THE MADMAN" CLARKE**! YOU'LL SEE AN EXHIBIT OF STRANGE AND UNUSUAL MEDICAL TOOLS THAT'LL MAKE YOU THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU SEE A DOCTOR! ALL THIS AND MORE THAT WE CAN'T EVEN MENTION! THAT'S RIGHT FOLKS. DON'T BE SHY! **ONE NIGHT ONLY! MARCH 26 AT 8:00 P.M.**

(Photo 35) An advertisement for a party at Buzzard's Lunch in 1994. These parties typically lasted all night and turned people away at the door.

to revitalize the Wilson building. During that waiting period the 7-room space rented for \$1,200 a month. LeFevre described his thoughts about the "edgy" years of the Wilson building:

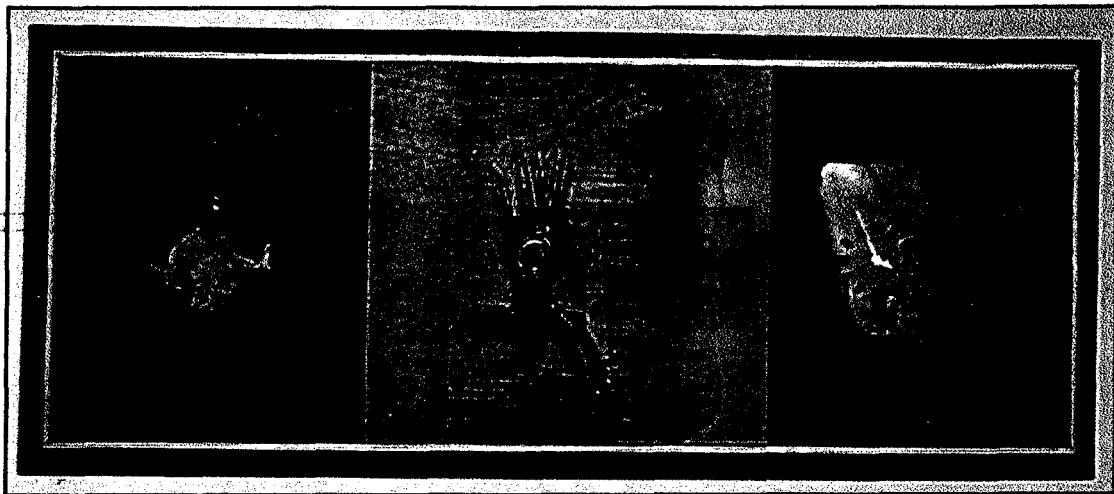
We had Buzzard's Lunch and Buzzard's Lunch would have to be regarded as part of that poetry. It was retro art deco, art disgusting, whatever you want to call it... pit bulls living there and people who I have no idea who they were. A vibrant underground cult of users all of whom I enjoyed, everyone of whom I enjoyed aside from my nervous tendency about their safety and well being, from a fire point of view, and at the end of the day we had a fire, we had two fires. One ... in fact at 2 Herald Street in 1996 which was reportedly from an extension cord from a tenant who was using it as a studio but was probably living there for all I know. And we had a second fire about 6 months ago, which happened when we were demolishing the building and there was a fire during the demolishing process. Those two fires have actually been a catalyst to the renovation process in an unfortunate way. But fortunately there was no loss of life or anyone injured in either event.

The only sad part about that is the fact that those people are not able to afford to remain here after the place changes, and that is very sad because they in some ways have been the inspiration for the change (C. LeFevre, Interview, July 21, 2002).

Although the buildings on Herald Street in the early- and mid-1990s were run down, there was a lot of life and creative energy on the street. Many of the businesses had chairs outside on the sidewalk, a hang out space for the people who lived and worked in the neighbourhood. The energy was youthful, often taboo breaking, and always riddled with the consumption of drugs and alcohol. Across the street was Morley Apartments, one of Victoria's longest-standing cheap rental apartment block, which was very run down in the 1990s. Further towards the water was Kabuki Kab. Victoria's bicycle-powered taxi service parked their cabs

in the old Harts Building and in the summer the cab drivers hung out on the street long after work was done. Near the corner of Herald and Store streets was the new home of Opus Art Supplies. Down towards the water from Buzzard's Lunch at 556 Herald Street was Kaleidoscope Theatre and the Herald Street Arts Centre. Kaleidoscope Theatre was Vancouver Island's longest running professional theatre for young audiences and families. Founded in 1974, it closed in 1999, unable to keep up with the cost of the lease (Yates, Thorn and Associates, 2003, p. 16). During the time that Kaleidoscope was open, lower Herald Street had peak busy times, and businesses like Buzzard's Lunch and the up-market Herald Street Café benefited from the trendy artistically-inclined clientele that Kaleidoscope attracted. Above the streetscape, another group of regulars resided in live-work studios, like the infamous 666 Herald Street, which got passed from artist to artist by word of mouth and had a reputation for being a bastion of weirdness in Victoria. Because of the very inexpensive nature of the rental spaces within these blocks, the young creative energy on the street, and the hands-off approach of owners like Chris LeFevre, a kind of seedy but tight-knit community was able to develop, of which I was an enthusiastic member. Many of the other participants had once lived on the streets, had ties to the local punk/dark-metal scene of the 1980s, and had even used the services of Streetlink or the Open Door in their less-together times.

In 1995 problems with drug dealers, addiction, and HIV hit our community and we closed Buzzard's Lunch, which had become the site of some of the networking to get drugs (*Photo 36*). In the years that followed, above the street Studio 666 and other low rent artist residences were evicted, redecorated and their rents raised in order to accommodate a higher-income group of urban dwellers. The artists who had lived there moved to Esquimalt or to other cities, having run out of spaces close to downtown. The street was no longer littered with chairs or occupied with people passing beers and joints. By 1999, the gritty, edgy heyday of the "creative class" on Herald Street had come to an end.



**(Photo 36) "Virus" by Sean Nattrass. AIDS, addiction and death are issues that the arts community has in common with the street community. In the meat grinder at the centre of the piece is a collection of used syringes.**

### Case Three: The Meatlockers

DURING AND AFTER THE TENANCY of Buzzard's Lunch, the Wilson building was managed by Todd Dougherty, who was one of the partners in The Meat Lockers, a band jam space business that occupied the Chatham Street half of the one-time refrigeration building. It was easy to rent one of the inexpensive refrigeration rooms for an afternoon, and the solid cement structure was great for muffling noise. Chris LeFevre gave this account of The Meat Lockers:

And the most prolific users were the rock bands and the rock bands were the people who came in, rented these lockers. It became known as The Meat Lockers and at one time we had 55 bands and they could never cause too much trouble because the insulation was so good around the cold storage spaces. That's the most interesting poetry about this area until there were actually people living down here. The rent went anywhere from 50-150 dollars per month per band depending on how big of a space they got. Having said that, we were living on borrowed time because the economic and functional life of the building was running out, and the fires (LeFevre, Interview, July 21, 2002).

Dougherty and his partner, Derek Brooke, could not always afford to pay rent on The Meat Lockers. However, LeFevre was willing to take labour instead, and so Dougherty started doing odd jobs around the Wilson Building. These jobs varied from fixing the roof to calling the police when the tenants of the Morley Apartments got out of hand. He tells me that he was also instructed to keep an eye on the crew at Buzzard's Lunch when rumours of human branding reached the ears of Chris LeFevre. Eventually, Dougherty became the manager of the Wilson building. He continued to run it until an accident crippled him in 2002 (T. Dougherty, Interview, August 17, 2001).

One of the legacies of the jam space rentals was the successful local

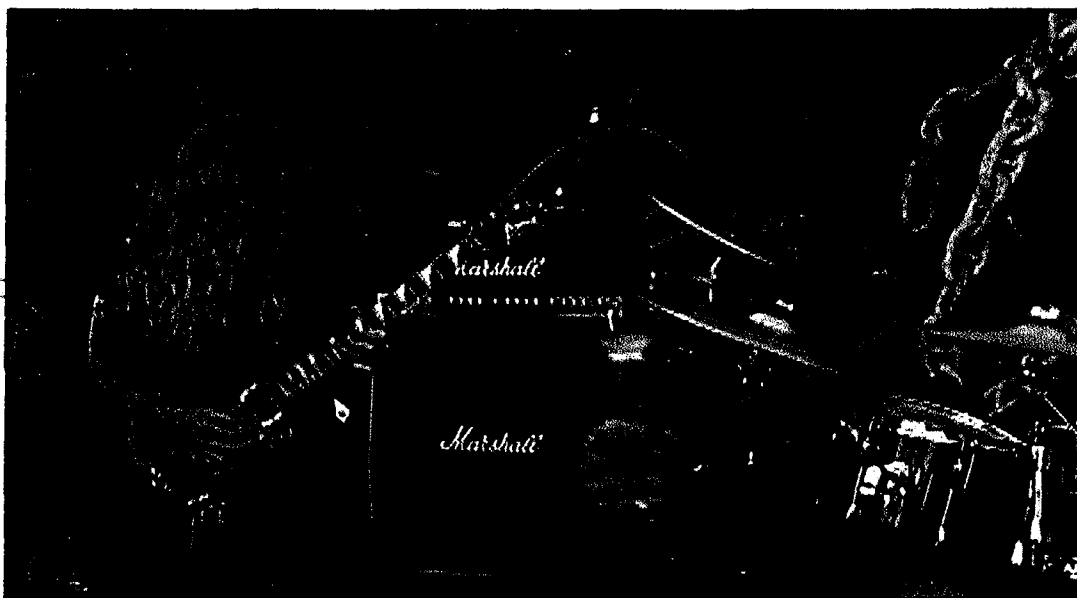
metal band "Meatlocker Seven," which was named after the space where the members began practicing together in 1995. Meatlocker Seven can be seen as the audio counterpart to the artist welders of Wrought 'n Iron or the tribal/industrial arts scene of Buzzard's Lunch. Their hit song "Systematic," a cut on the album, "*The Biological Mechanism of Hate*," is a critical look at the gears of industry and the effect of our industrial society on nature (Photo 37). The music video features the band playing outdoors in front of a pile of rusted chains. In the video, flashes of electrical wires and barbed wires alternate with natural scenes such as forests and bare-branched oak trees, lightning storms and racing skies. The lyrics read:

Relationships of systemic nature - one application and the damage is done. Now I see poison rain it falls. Dying to breathe, soil it calls. For me to meet face to face. Reminds me now, I'm mindless waste. Relationships of systemic nature - one application and the damage is done. Take us and bend them far beneath. Imagine every living thing with no heart, no words at all (Meatlocker Seven, 2003, track 2).

The raw, "crunchy" sound of Meatlocker Seven and their hard metal sound frames the environmentalist message of their lyrics. The legacy of contaminated land and industrial decay is first explored without polish, through music as well as visual art.

### **Artistic Reflections of an Industrial World**

THE INDUSTRIAL AESTHETIC HAS become part of the new residential landscape. Many of the new businesses in the area over the last years seem to have made some attempt to utilise icons of the industrial past in their décor (see Photo 37). The names of various businesses evoke industrial themes: The Grindstone Café, Wrought'n Iron, Machine Works nightclub (and its successor, Diesel Cabaret). Evidence of the work of local artist welders can be found throughout these few blocks, including the refrigeration piping by Fravashi at the Wilson building, the metal grillwork



**(Photo 37) This is a still from Heavy Metal Band Meatlocker 7's Album's video "The Biological Mechanism of Hate"**

on the skater/snowboarder shop at the bottom of Herald, the materials used on the Mermaid Wharf Condominium, the interior decor of the Canoe Club, the decoration at 526 Discovery Street, and the rusted metal signs in Dragon Alley that signal border of Chinatown. The incoming gentrifiers became the clients of the outgoing grunge artists. LeFevre says, "Well, take a look at that elevator in the photo over behind you, old punched out galvanized steel. And the refrigeration pipes from the inside now outside creating a rather nice piping for landscaping and toppers" (C. LeFevre, Interview, July 21, 2002).

Many of the individuals who were involved in the grungiest moments of the arts scene in the early 1990s are still present in the northern edge of downtown. During my study of the area, I was constantly finding examples of continuity of an artistic presence in the area. Meatlocker Seven and a few of the other bands that once rehearsed in The Meat Lockers jam space still play live at various venues in and around this area, as evidenced by telephone pole posters advertising their shows. One of the regular artists at Buzzard's Lunch became my gatekeeper contact in her new home at Mermaid Wharf condo development on Swift Street. Another has had his art hanging on the walls of the Mane Essentials, a hairstyling salon located between Herald and Chatham on Government Street. A former member of the Wrought'n Iron collective is the current owner of Gibbs Design, on that same site. These people no longer represent the highly collective, non-conformist, "edgy," and impoverished artistic presence. For at least some of the individuals who were part of that community, the success of the northern downtown has corresponded with their own success and personal transition from being members of the counterculture movement. I would include myself in this group, and like many of the others, I had to come to terms with the stigma given to me from within the edgiest areas of the artist's community for my "sell out" to the agents of gentrification.



## ✧ Chapter Six ✧

### GENTRIFICATION AND THE RESIDENTIAL LANDSCAPE

The very aspect of the world will change to our startled eyes. Out of the sea will rise Behemoth and Leviathan, and sail round the high-pooped galleys, as they do on the delightful maps of those ages when books on geography were actually readable. Dragons will wander about the waste places, and the phoenix will soar from her nest of fire into the air. We shall lay our hands upon the basilisk, and see the jewel in the toad's head. Champing his gilded oats, the Hippogriff will stand in our stalls, and over our heads will float the Blue Bird singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be.

- Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying* (p. 16)

#### Introduction

THE GENTRIFIED LANDSCAPE OF northern downtown is a stylized environment. There are many references to the industrial past, offered through the use of symbols and icons that decorate new buildings. This industrial themed environment has attracted a hip and urban middle-class who appreciate the characteristics of the renewed inner city—its cultural diversity, walkability and lifestyle. After considering this and other contextual features of the gentrified landscape of northern downtown, I will look at three residential developments and consider the ways in which they have given character to the landscape. I will also consider the viewpoints of some of the people who live in these places.

## Residential Construction in Northern Downtown

NEW CONDOMINIUM UNITS HAVE taken over the waterfront of much of Victoria's one time industrial harbour. Looking southwest across from my study area, the Victoria West neighbourhood is now fronted by the Songhees development, a series of large residential towers built on a remediated brownfield site. The towers mimic the monumental scale of the Empress Hotel and Parliament Buildings, not the architecture of the surrounding residential neighbourhood. The same is true of luxury developments like Shoal Point, which now divides the medium-density neighbourhood of James Bay from the picturesque houseboats of Fisherman's Wharf. North of downtown the Selkirk Waterfront Community is a highly liveable, mixed-use development at the entrance to Burnside Gorge. Across from Selkirk Waterfront, construction is ongoing at The Railyards, a residential cluster being built by Chris LeFevre which will offer fairly affordable condominiums in the industrial vernacular style. South of The Railyards is The Dockside area, a brownfield site awaiting remediation. Currently the process of rezoning is underway (*see Figure 1*).

The push for residential construction in downtown Victoria is intensifying. For the City, a downtown residential stock represents a significant tax base, and more guarantees of inner-city vibrancy. For the retail and service community, a local customer base is security against the seasonal ebb and flow of the tourism industry and long-standing competition from suburban malls. For the development community, the opening-up of brownfield land and tax incentives that promote the conversion of historical buildings is an exciting opportunity. The need for downtown residential sites is legitimized by references to the rise of an ethic of new urbanist sustainability, which favours densification at the core over suburban sprawl. Despite protests that cite the monumental scale of many of the newer developments as inappropriate, especially compared to the fine-grained texture of Victoria's Old Town, most people do recognise the

need for additional housing in the downtown of the city.<sup>15</sup>

Since 1998, the northern downtown district has attracted several residential developments of a smaller scale than those that rim the harbour. The majority are condominium developments, but there are also some additions to the city's rental stock. Stretching from Chinatown to Herald Street, Dragon Alley is developer Tom Moore's tribute to the maze-like structure of Chinatown, but enhanced with an industrial aesthetic. Across the street, the Wilson building has been turned into rental live/work lofts. Behind it, on Chatham, two new residential condominium buildings are draped in post-modern references to the industrial landscape. On Swift Street, another new condominium building, Mermaid Wharf, is nestled tight against the Streetlink emergency shelter, overlooking the harbour (*see Figure 1.*)

Building housing in northern downtown involves navigating a series of tensions and compromises between developers, the City, and other stakeholders. Conflicts between residents and still functional industry have to be considered, especially where noise levels are concerned. Unlike the new and even older suburbs, downtown has an active street and nightlife. Noise becomes a problem as nightclub patrons empty onto the street, or when people are kept awake by the penetrating sound of base amplifiers. The concern for the safety of residents can cause property managers to be inhospitable to members of the street community who spend too much time loitering, which further eats away at the spaces where these people are able to make a territorial claim. Buildings have to be able to accommodate mixed uses and be dense enough to be economically feasible, considering the high property values of downtown. Finally, the housing has to be attractive to those people who are likely to appreciate or at least tolerate the diversity of land uses around them. A key element of this attraction is the creation of an

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<sup>15</sup> In the public opinion gathering process conducted by the Downtown Victoria Community Alliance, more housing downtown scored within the top two most popular initiatives in every phase of the study that included focus groups, conferences, and open ideas submissions.

aura of high cultural capital, an edgy, trendy image that will lure tenants and buyers.

The City of Victoria has taken an active role in encouraging the development of downtown housing. One of the most influential ways is through the rehabilitation of heritage buildings, helped particularly by a tax incentive plan announced in 1998 for the restoration of heritage buildings (City of Victoria, 1998). The restoration and conversion of both Dragon Alley and the Wilson Building were immediate responses to the new tax incentives, which offset the prohibitive costs of seismic upgrading with a ten-year tax holiday. Tom Moore, developer of Dragon Alley, calls the incentives "unbelievably helpful" (T. Moore, Interview, July 16, 2002). Chris LeFevre, developer of the Wilson Building, explains that it was only because of the tax incentive plan that he was able to produce rental units instead of condominiums:

If that program had not existed, sad to say, these units today would be condos because that would have been the only way that it would economically work to do the gentrification of this district. And that allowed me as a property owner to turn them into rental units, which is much preferred for me as an individual. I don't pay tax and then say goodbye to the building. I stay with the building. I stay with the ethos. I stay with the new generation existing down here building and I can be part of the passion and work down here to further it even more (Interview, July 21, 2002).

This focus on rental units is significant, because adding rental stock to downtown is almost unheard of. In fact, of some thirty new developments that have been planned or built within a 15-minute walk from downtown since 2003, not one offered rental accommodation (2020 Downtown Residential Working Group, 2004). Most rental stock that stems from new development is the result of condominium buyers choosing to rent out their unit rather than live in it.

The City will continue to promote the addition of residential uses in

northern downtown. The *Rock Bay Plan Draft* (2004) permits residential construction south of Pembroke Street between Store and Government streets, and allows for conditional residential development, most likely live/work or targeted special needs housing along the harbour between Store Street and the waterfront. However, further north and east, the plan forbids the construction of new homes in order to protect the industries around the harbour from coming into conflict with residents. Instead, the plan suggests that a new entertainment and arts area could create a buffer, with nightclubs and even a casino concentrated on the noisy edge of downtown (p. 6)

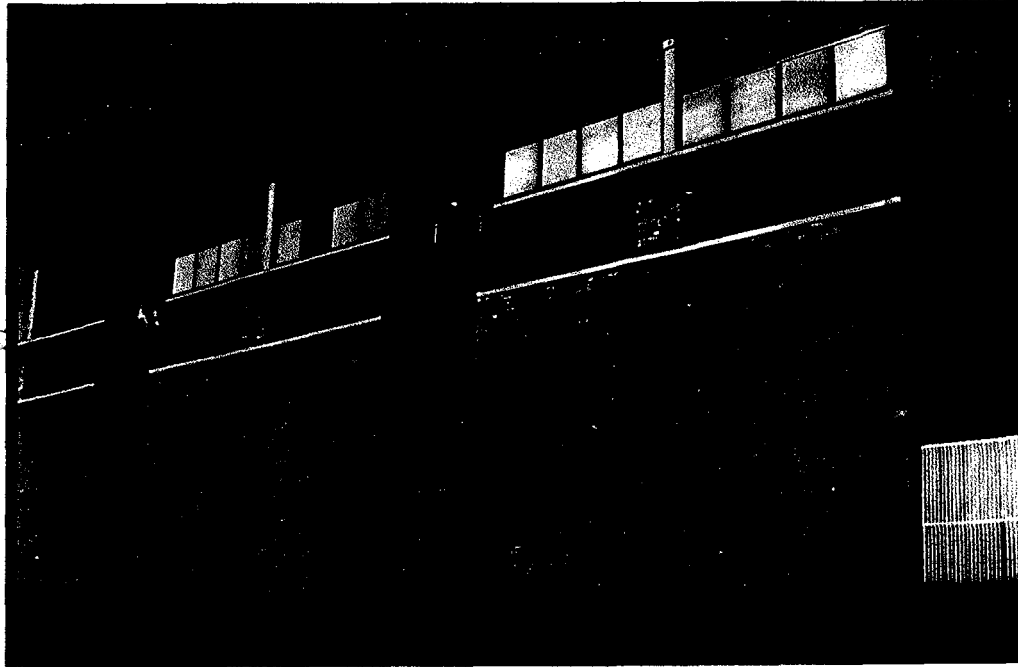
In order to understand the considerations of developers and architects in building residential units, and to investigate the character and experiences of people who live in northern downtown, and the appeal of the places where they live, I have examined three buildings: Dragon Alley, Mermaid Wharf, and the Wilson Building (*see Figure 2*). In each case, I interviewed at least one of the key agents in the development, and spoke with several residents about their experiences living in northern downtown. I also considered the visual impact of the design of these buildings, and the ways in which the buildings refer symbolically to the industrial landscape (*Photo 38*).

### Case One: Dragon Alley

IF I WERE TO MOVE downtown, I would like to live in Dragon Alley. An intimate cluster of condominium units exists within the brown brick walls of what used to comprise Chinese tenements, a stable and brothels (*Photo 39*). The heritage feel of the buildings that form the walls contrasts with the pale yellow stucco of six duplex blocks, crowned with roof gardens. On the ground floor, boutiques and offices line the alley and face out onto Fisgard and Herald Streets. On the Fisgard Street side, the building matches Chinatown's facades. The sign hanging above the entrance is red with a black dragon, in concordance with the colour scheme of Chinatown. A black



**(Photo 38) Discarded transmission parts make up the sign and the exterior details of this Chatham Street condominium building. Across Government Street, within sight of 555 Chatham is Victoria Transmission, where cars are still repaired.**



**(Photo 39) Dragon Alley condominium units with roof gardens visible.**

wrought iron gate with a yin yang symbol stands open in the daytime, and closes at night, mimicking the appearance of other alleys throughout Chinatown. On the Herald Street side, a sex toy store called Kiss and Tell opens onto the younger, rougher landscape of northern downtown; and the nearby offices of architect Tom Moore and Bill Patterson emphasize their dedication to stay close to the environment they built. At the eastern corner of the development, darkened windows mark the discrete presence of the Persons with AIDS Society. A foray into the parking lot of the neighbouring lot reveals traces of the grungier realities of urban living: used syringes, empty bleach bottles and condoms. However, the denizens of Dragon Alley are protected from all that by a tall iron gate. Inside it is tranquil, genteel, and safe (*Photo 40*).

Safety was a major consideration for architect Tom Moore, whose development this is. As a Cool Aid Society board member, Moore is adamant about the rights of the street community to belong in the study area. He admits that "some of the other developers in the neighbourhood do not like the fact that we are in the neighbourhood," adding that while Streetlink has worked very hard with the neighbours to make sure that everything that can be done is done, "there will always be people hanging out in front of Streetlink, and that is just the way it is" (T. Moore, Interview, July 16, 2002). Mindful of the potential for friction, Dragon Alley uses concepts of crime prevention through environmental design. Every place in Dragon Alley can be seen from several vantage points. Recreation and relaxing space is located on top of the buildings in the roof gardens, a secure perch looking down on the surrounding neighbourhood, out of reach. By designing a cloister of safety that is open to all during the daytime, Moore has protected the street community from being pushed away by the fears of his tenants and strata title owners.

Noise problems in Dragon Alley have been almost non-existent. According to Moore, "Everyone remarked on how quiet it is being in the middle of the block. They weren't sure with the parking lot next door, but that hasn't been an issue, there were no complaints from anyone about



**(Photo 40) Inside the Dragon Alley courtyards.**

noise." "To be honest," said Moore, "the nightclubs probably create more problems for the police and everyone else than the street people" (T. Moore, Interview, July 16, 2002). But even the crowds dispersing from the bar at Mermaid Wharf don't even really impact this building. Tenants and strata owners agreed. While one interviewed resident remarked about how quiet and peaceful Dragon Alley was to live in, the owner of one of the retail stores was not as thrilled about the quiet. "People don't know to come in here, so traffic is often slow, which makes survival pretty hard for a retailer when everything is tight" (Anonymous, 2002).

For most of the artists considering buying one of the units, two things usually prevented purchase. One is economics. Selling for around \$200,000 per unit, Dragon Alley is not an affordable option for most downtown artists because the majority of them live in poverty. The other barrier is the limit of space. Because of the nature of the restoration, the spaces are quite small and many artists need a fairly large and well-ventilated workspace. Compounding the space restrictions are bylaw restrictions regarding the types of activities permitted in such close proximity to residences. Three artists live in Dragon Alley. Only Rayola Design has a shop here (*Photo 41*). A visual artist has her studio in Chinatown and lives in Dragon Alley. A disc jockey mixes music at a recording studio on Johnson Street and manages the business from his Dragon Alley townhouse. Although Moore thinks it is possible to create a symbiotic relationship between industrial and residential uses, he points out that you couldn't have a woodworking studio in Dragon Alley, or live in a welding shop. A pottery studio might work.

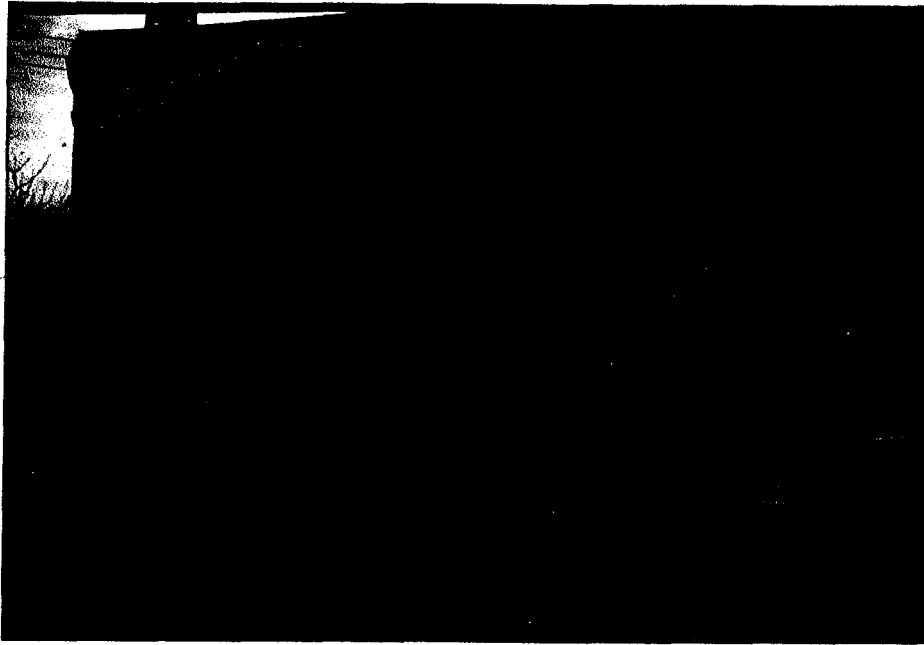
The form of Dragon Alley was not inspired by examples in other cities. Moore explains that it emerged as "...mostly a problem solving process. I wasn't aware of anything quite like it ... I was thinking locally and contextually in terms of what would work and what was appropriate for this space" (T. Moore, Interview, July 16, 2002). Dragon Alley was made up of three properties, the Hart Buildings facing Herald and Fisgard streets and the Quan-Yuen and Chow Block in the centre (Lai, 1991, p. 116).



**(Photo 41) An example of a welded metal style sign in Dragon Alley.**

The Hart building was built in 1891 and had once housed stables on the ground floor, a brothel up top, and shacks behind in the enclosed courtyard, including an opium factory. The Hart Building is where Kabuki Kabs were stored during the 1990s (*Photo 42 and 43*). It was abandoned but not too derelict and restoration was largely a matter of making it as historically accurate as possible. Facing Fisgard, the Quon-Yen and Chow Blocks were still partially in use. Restoration involved studying old photographs and determining the original appearance of the building. Unfortunately, the middle structure was completely derelict, beyond what could be restored, and Moore was forced to gut it. The problem that needed solving was what to put in the middle. Moore tells the story:

We had looked at this site for other developers and their interests were the usual instincts which were you have to have more density or whatever to make this thing viable. The more we tried to create density in the middle of the building the more impact it had on the outside buildings on Fisgard and Herald because of exit codes. So I had sold my building on Yates Street and we were going to move our offices and were looking for spaces. I was aware of this site because I had studied it, so we actually turned developers, my wife and I. I started playing with the notion that if we did less to the middle instead of more then our costs would go down because we would be less intrusive on the other building, the Hart Block and leave more of the original fabric of those buildings. I started running some numbers and thinking about the other aspects of the neighbourhood, which are the intricate alleyways of Chinatown ... We ended up taking a subtractive approach to the middle building. We restored existing masonry and kept it in place, put new window in the old designs, But in the interior we took the approach that we didn't want to replicate the older design. We wanted to do something that would stand out and actually contrast with the existing design so that you could have a better sense of history. [We took a] more contemporary approach to these insurgent townhouses. The corridor that ran though the building was actually



**(Photo 42) Hart's Block façade 1998 with the Kabuki Kab and 'For Sale' signs visible.**



**(Photo 43) Hart's Block in 2004**

the width between the townhouses, We were able to utilise the existing light wells, and I felt it was very, very important to make it liveable to open it up to the sky, so that's how we took the one building and because of the double H form, that it is made it into six townhouse duplexes (T. Moore, Interview, July 16, 2002).

Although Moore did not look to other cities or buildings for inspiration, he did consider using a harder, more industrial design for the townhouses. It is interesting that someone working with the local context would come up with a design much like what was later built in an adjoining block. Because the architects working in northern downtown were being inspired by their local context, similarities in style and materials keep reappearing.

I had actually two designs for the contemporary middle and one of them was much more industrial, and actually quite a bit harder. It used some corrugated materials and the forms were a little wilder in a contemporary sense-curves. And things like that and the heritage advisory and the design panel didn't like that design, so we ended up using the more conservative of the two contemporary designs. More towards an industrial aesthetic than the soft aesthetic we have now. The back of the buildings here is old corrugation, the old rusty corrugated piece that backs into Don Mees. Some people when I was selling the units, asked why don't you stucco this and I said well to me it is part of the character of the building, I think it is kind of cool. You know, put some plants out and make it yours and it will blend right in (T. Moore, Interview, July 16, 2002).

For the tenants of Dragon Alley, blending into the urban setting appears to be part of the lifestyle. The owner of Spiral Monkey, a bead store, was involved in the area by helping create Spiral Island on Discovery Street. La Cuchina, a three-table restaurant, is a dining room in the alley; its owner lives upstairs. One resident told me of her daily routine, buying food in

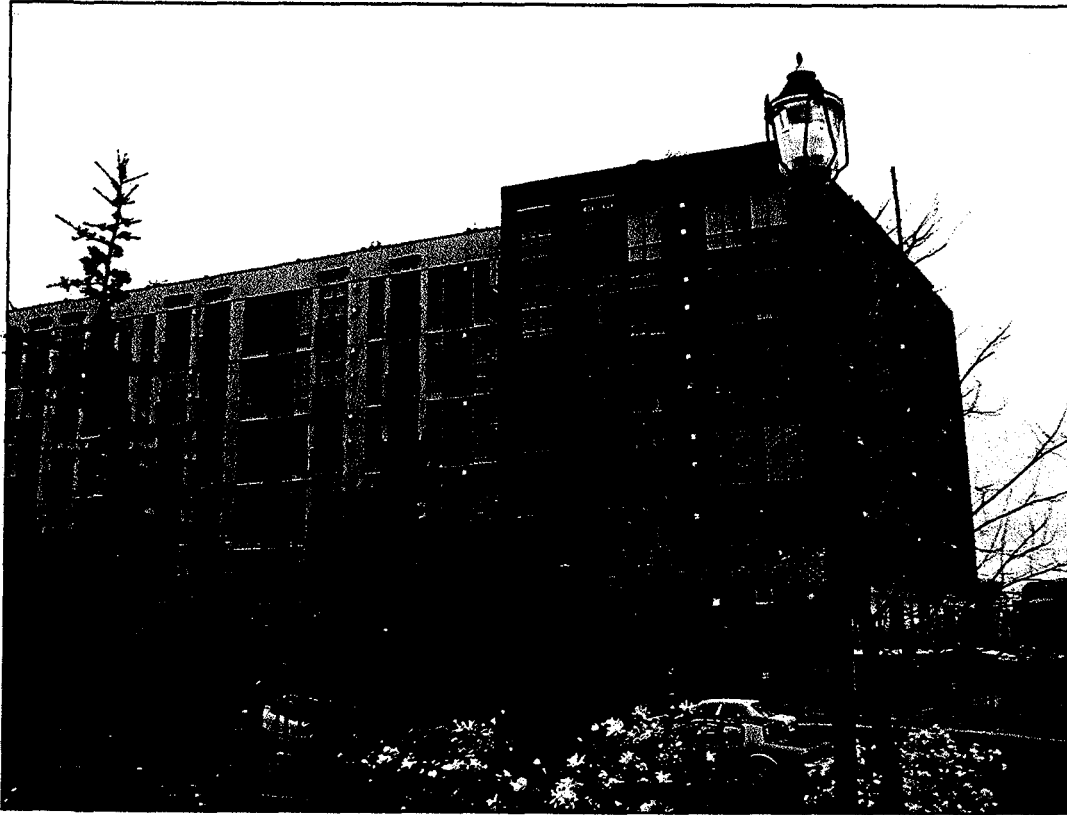
Chinatown, kayaking down at the bottom of Swift Street, and attending yoga in Fan Tan Alley. She expressed a sentiment that seemed to typify the experience of downtown living. "I never leave these few blocks," she said. "Why would I? I have everything here, even my own backyard, on my roof" (Anonymous, 2002).

### Case Two: Mermaid Wharf

ABUTTING STREETLINK AND occupying a waterfront site is Mermaid Wharf, a condominium structure. The dual façade of Mermaid Wharf fascinates me (*Photo 44*). Half the building's exterior is finished in the referential industrial flavour that has come to typify northern downtown. Facing the harbour is another façade of a different style. Rusty orange brick replaces metal, referencing the hues of the nineteenth century industrial architecture that still defines much of downtown. Near Streetlink, the façade changes to corrugated metal siding, cast iron, and oversized bolts and beams in grey and dust red, reflecting the architecture and pallet of Point Hope Shipyards located across the harbour (*Photo 45*).

Although the condominium units were initially offered for sale, many of the owners are not residents, and instead rent their units out, many to tourists. Some of the people living in Mermaid Wharf once used the services of Streetlink themselves, and still use the medical clinic. Others are handicapped and live on disability welfare. There are young urbanites who work nearby in the hospitality industry, but there are also wealthy vacationers for whom Mermaid Wharf is more like a hotel than a home. On the lower floors near Streetlink, one-bedroom condominium units have rented for as low as \$850 a month, affordable to young couples. The condos become more expensive towards the water and on the top floors. On the top floor overlooking the water, one-bedroom condos rent for about \$1,600 per month, plus utilities. These include all appliances, gated parking, a gas fireplace and access to a private rooftop patio via a spiral staircase.

One tenant talked about what had attracted her to Mermaid Wharf.



**(Photo 44) Mermaid Wharf showing the two facades—one in red brick, the other in white and grey corrugated metal.**



**(Photo 45) Point Hope Shipyard provided a palette for the look of much of the emerging Design District including Mermaid Wharf. The colour scheme of Point Hope is grey, red and white, and the materials are brick and corrugated metal.**

We wanted to move to Dragon Alley, but it was too expensive, around \$1,200 a month. So instead we went to Mermaid Wharf. It looked really cool. It had a beautiful view of the black Russian Submarine and the industrial area across the water. Really beautiful! I love industrial things. I love the industrial area. I am going for a welding course and art program at Camosun in the fall. You could see people going by, sailing and rowing through the harbour. All the apartments had built in stackable washers and dryers, a dishwasher and garbage disposal, every wonderful feature. Everything I do is pretty much downtown, so it was really accessible. It had a rooftop with humongous barbecues and wood patio furniture. They were trying to make it a community thing. You could throw a party on the roof and maybe the neighbours were throwing a party too. It is a wonderful idea (Anonymous, 2004).

Like much of the newer residential units found around Victoria's harbour, many of these suites are owned or rented by people who live there only part time. For example, one tenant is an employee of the provincial government. She lives in Vancouver, but likes her Mermaid Wharf apartment because of the view of the harbour and the proximity to the floatplanes and work. A reason for the high level of absentee owners seems to be the size of the suites. One woman called the building "Mermaid Dwarf," saying, "They are too small, too small, you can't use them for [living] they are just secondary living places" (Anonymous, 2003).

Other units are used as strictly vacation spots. Mermaid Wharf is one of the buildings frequently featured by a variety of Internet vacation planning companies who represent the absentee strata titleholders. This type of arrangement has its share of controversy. Concern by the City over proper licenses, taxes and insurance led to an investigation of vacation home companies, including two companies who were offering weekly rental of units in Mermaid Wharf (Curtis, 2003). Because the onus is on the individual property owners to make sure that they are running a legitimate business, finding out which suites are being treated as hotels can be difficult

for bylaw enforcement officials. It is also something of a surprise to other residents in the building. One resident spoke to me about his unease in having a different set of neighbours every week throughout the summer. "I didn't think I lived in a hotel." However, he said, in off-season the suite next to him is often empty, which he enjoys. "Elite Home Vacations" is a company that offers furnished homes over the internet to tourists. Mermaid Wharf fits into Elite's second lowest price category: at \$1401 - \$2000 per week (Elite Home Vacations, 2004) Booking a vacation home on the internet does have its risks. At the Elite Home Vacation's web site, Mermaid Wharf is described as "secure." What is not mentioned is its position directly adjacent to Victoria's biggest homeless shelter:

Mermaid Wharf is a secure building situated on the waterfront in "Old Town" Victoria, minutes from The Empress Hotel and The Causeway. A short stroll will take you to Chinatown, bookstores, fine dining, theatres, antique stores and all the downtown attractions. Everything is brand new, and decorated by a professional interior designer.

The living room overlooks the water where you can relax and watch the water traffic go by. There is a TV/VCR, stereo with CD player, and a gas fireplace for those cool evenings. The patio door opens on to a small balcony where you have full view of the beautiful sunset. The water taxi stops on the dock below and has a number of interesting tours for you to enjoy (Elite Home Vacations, 2004).

When I first saw the construction of Mermaid Wharf in 1998, my immediate assumption was that a residential building located directly behind Streetlink would create friction between the street community and middle-class residents. However, in the years following, that tension has not been manifested in any way that I am able to detect. While some of the residents of Mermaid Wharf that I talked to did refer to Streetlink, not one

suggested any discomfort in dealing with Streetlink's clientele. Three expressed an appreciation for Streetlink's services and told me that they had used the medical clinic. One tenant said, "It didn't bug me that much. It was right there but I thought it would bug me more than it did. I mostly forgot it was there" (Anonymous, 2004). In one case, a young lady who suffered domestic abuse while living at Mermaid Wharf told me that she got out of the apartment and into counselling because of support from Streetlink staff (Anonymous, 2002).

In an interview with Nick Bawlf, an architect who was involved in some of the planning for Mermaid Wharf, Nick explained some of the thought that went into reducing potential conflicts between the residential and street communities. First, there was a lot of attention paid to the building's security system and to parking lot security. A tenant told me, "There was really, really, really high security. Mermaid Wharf was safe feeling. You needed to be buzzed in and then have a code even to use the elevator" (Anonymous, 2004). The parking lot entrance is gated and acts as a buffer between the entrance of the Swift Street Medical Clinic and the residential unit windows. A contract between the property owners and the development company ensures that property owners understand that there will be noise from harbour traffic and that Streetlink activities are part of the site location (N. Bawlf, Interview, July 16, 2002). Developers like Max Tomaszewski and architects like Tom Moore, his partner Bill Patterson and Nick Bawlf subscribe to the idea that it is the vitality and even the grittiness of downtown that urban residents are looking for in a neighbourhood. These factors might keep many suburbanites away, but they do attract a person who appreciates diversity.

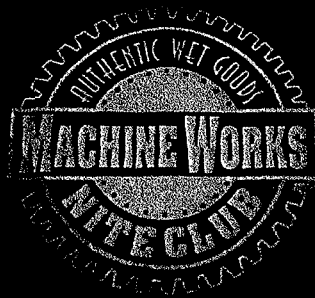
However, downtown "vitality" is a problem for some residents living in Mermaid Wharf. Noise complaints from condo owners and tenants about the presence of a nightclub in the building were sent to City Hall soon after the building was completed - to such a degree that one resident had his email privileges to City Councillors screened (City of Victoria, 2001, p. 6). The situation peaked during an angry meeting of City

Council in March, 2001, when residents of Mermaid Wharf and Cool Aid Society (Streetlink) representatives spoke out against the nightclub, Diesel Cabaret, located at 1630 Store Street. Opponents of the nightclub said that while they expected reasonable daytime noise from the harbour, drunken patrons of the nightclub were disruptive when they left the bar, that the music was too loud, and that a skylight above the nightclub amplified the base sound of music. A representative of Swifthouse Apartments, the subsidized living portion of Streetlink, said that the noise was becoming a health hazard for some of her tenants who have mental health problems that were exacerbated by lack of sleep. Tenants at Mermaid Wharf also shared the feeling that the noise level was becoming a health problem. During my informal interviews in the summer of 2001 with five residents, levels of rancour against the nightclub were so high that it was difficult to get interviewees to consider the implication of living next to a homeless shelter or to the working harbour. Any mention of the neighbourhood immediately brought up the subject of the nightclub, to the exclusion of other topics (*Photo 46*).

The real intent of the March, 2001, City Council meeting agenda item was to look into revoking the business licence of Diesel Cabaret. But those opposing the nightclub were in for a surprise. The owner, Jeffrey Wilson, was not present. In his stead, his lawyer advised Council that Wilson had sold Diesel Cabaret, and that the new owner, Justin Cownden, had applied to transfer the business and liquor licenses. Wilson was willing to turn over his licence, but in reality Cownden would have to apply for a new one. Daniel Scoon, the City's bylaw enforcement officer advised council that he didn't think that Cownden could be held accountable for complaints generated during the time that Wilson owned the nightclub. Cownden told council he was doing some renovations that would mitigate the noise level. Council closed the session to await legal advice. The residents went home even angrier. Cownden was unable to overcome the negative feelings of the neighbours and eventually Diesel closed.

The next business attempt to try to make the site work was much

1630 Store St.



**(Photo 46) Before the construction of Mermaid Wharf Diesel Cabaret was called Machine Works. The name and logo evoked the previous use of the building—a machinist's shop.**

more successful in winning the support of nearby residents. The Saltaire Lounge opened in November 2002 after owner Rob Ward had done improvements to the area around the bar. He also hosted numerous "mixers" with residents, made renovations to increase sound barriers, installed a smaller speaker system, and offered generous VIP discounts for residents of Mermaid Wharf. Ward even moved into Mermaid Wharf for the first months of his business opening. Residents became patrons and even employees of the Saltaire Lounge. Most people seemed to agree that the situation had improved. However, in June, 2003, when Council temporarily granted a request for extended hours of operation for the Saltaire Lounge, there was still resistance from strata title holders. Site manager and resident Jade Sages observed that the three or four percent of people who were against the extension were not residents of Mermaid Wharf, but were owners whose opinions did not reflect those of their sub-let tenants or the building. Only two out of sixteen people spoke out strongly against the new club and both rented out their units. Despite clear support from the Mermaid Wharf Tenant's Association, the Strata Council was not willing to support the project, though many of its members did as individuals. This split of opinion reflects tensions within the building between the landlord and tenant culture (City of Victoria, 2003, pp. 3-5). An understanding of the power imbalance between strata councils and residents of condominiums explains some of the factors behind the sanitizing effects of the new residential landscape, despite the bohemian nature of many residents.

### **Case Three: The Wilson Building**

WHEN THE PHONE RANG on June 3, 1997, to tell us that the Wilson building was on fire, my friend and I walked over to pay our respects to the building and to see the blaze. Others who had worked there, created art there, hung out there, or even lived there illegally, all clustered together and watched. As the firefighters worked, we shared memories of the crazy days

of Buzzard's Lunch and the Meatlockers and said our goodbyes to the building. The fire seemed to formalize the change somehow, marking the end of an era for us, a symbol of our eroded turf at the northern edge of downtown.

In the years before the fire we had seen the building sometimes empty and sometimes inhabited by other artists and artisans (*Photo 47*). We heard rumours that people still lived there illegally and that parts of it were used as a squat. Our neighbour, Paul, had expanded his antique store, *Artifacts Antiques*, to take up more of the front of the building. The fire did not hurt him badly but for many businesses it was a disaster. A photographer lost all his film and negatives. *Etcetera Etc*, a wedding designer's shop, lost not only stock and fabric but also design portfolios. *Kaleidoscope Theater*, which had been storing its props in the building, lost twenty-four years worth of props (Young, 1997, p. 1).

However, the fire also seemed to galvanize the creative energy of owner Chris LeFevre, who had a vision of loft-style studio apartments occupying the building (*Photo 48*). The market was right for new housing downtown and the City was committed to the vision of a downtown where people lived as well as worked and engaged in leisure activities. The City's 10-year Tax Incentive offer for seismic upgrading of heritage buildings made the economics work (City of Victoria, 1998; C. LeFevre, Interview, July 21, 2002). By 1999, CITA construction had already begun gutting the building. *Artifacts Antiques* stayed open for as long as possible behind an exoskeleton of scaffolding. After renovation the antique store moved back into the building.

Todd Dougherty from the Meatlockers band space also stayed with the building. During renovations some of the dirtiest jobs were done by Dougherty, for instance, he remembers that while taking a refrigeration pipe out of the freezer workers realised it was still full of refrigeration gas. He removed it over three days in an extensive process involving gas masks, using large water-filled containment tanks through which it was filtered for disposal. When the new building was finished, Dougherty got his pick of



**(Photo 47) Detail of the Wilson Building entrances in 1998 pre-renovation.**



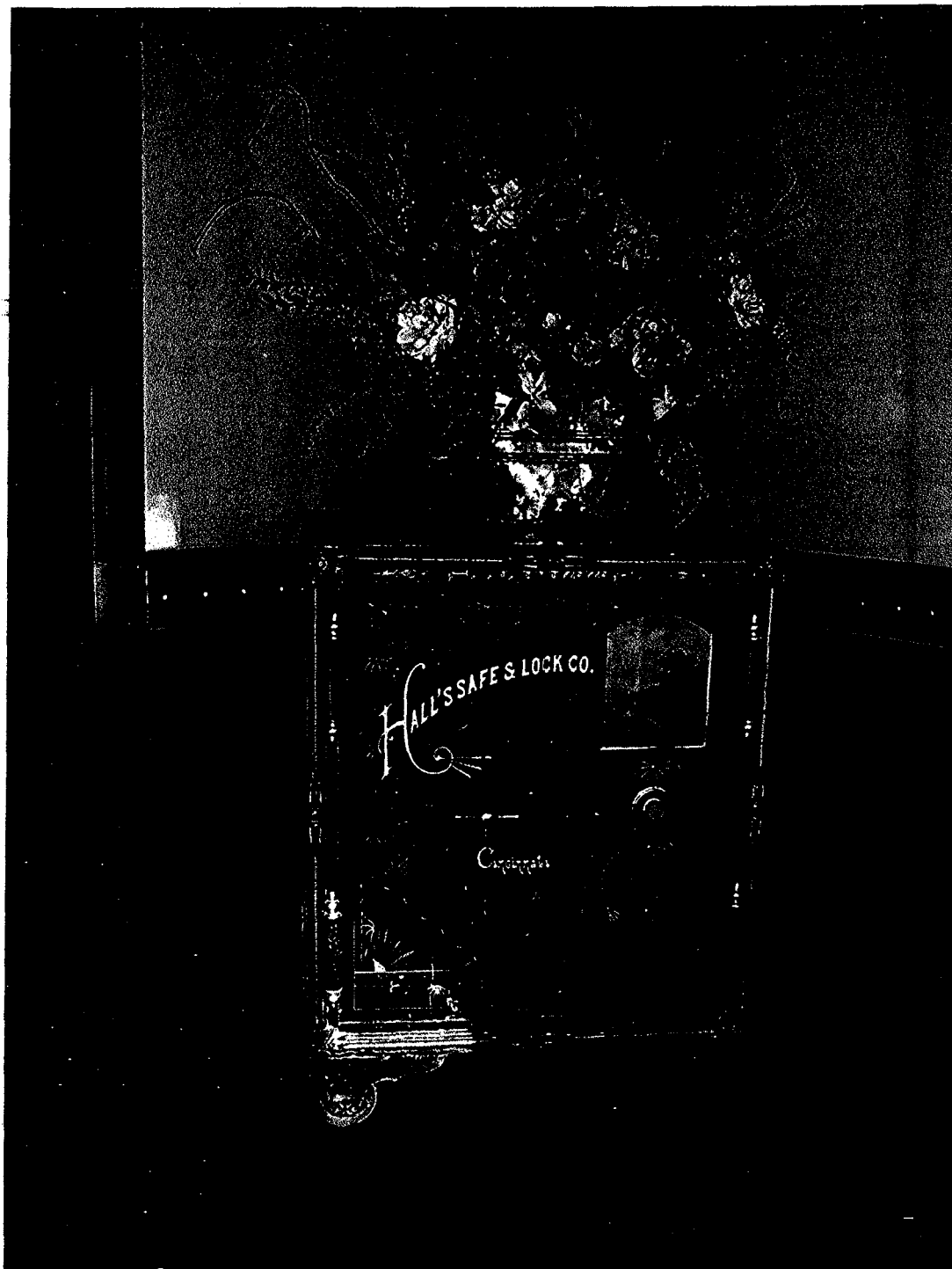
**(Photo 48) The Wilson Building in 2003 after renovation.**

suites, and a monthly salary for staying on as building manager (T. Dougherty, Interview, August 17, 2001).

The newly-renovated building contains rental live/work studio lofts. The units are simple and utilitarian. They cost around \$725 per month, but parking, laundry and utilities are not included. There are no rooms, just open units finished in coloured concrete, some of which have sleeping lofts. They are fully wired for Internet and well ventilated to accommodate paint fumes. The lobby and corridor walls are lined with photos of the building throughout its history; and artefacts from the building's past have become part of the interior and exterior design, for example, an old safe stands in the lobby, while outside the refrigeration pipes have become fencing (*Photo 50*). The door of another safe has become a gate. LeFevre explains:

I have been in the property business since I left school, since I was 16. You keep current with cities around the world with different trends and different vogues, and loft living was certainly not my invention but it had been the trend in many cities as far as new uses for old buildings. In terms of that, I was aware of it in other cities. I worked in the late 60s and 70s in Gastown, and I was very privy to change of use and more particularly there the fact that there it was the change of use that removed residential use.

And so I was very passionately interested in residential use as I had lived in a warehouse myself down here for several years illegally and I knew that there were a kind people who worked hard in the city and they didn't want to necessarily drive out to the suburbs each night as long as they had the right form of accommodation. And their approach to life like that was of a minimalist nature, which is the very essence of a loft, big open spaces with very minimal finishings. And with that I looked at these buildings, which were big cavernous spaces ... So what I am doing here is retrofitting it here [*gestures on a map*] so Herald Street will look as it always did, and in the back which will be studios is a new building in a contemporary hard edge industrial vernacular (C. LeFevre, July 21, 2002).



**(Photo 49) Interior hallway shots of the Wilson Building. The doors and walls are accented with wood, steel, and bolts.**

An artist who was a tenant of the Wilson building in 2003 describes how the industrial look of the design attracted her:

It has the prestige. It was a functional space. There weren't any carpets. There wasn't any fake glamour. I mean this is a loft. So it was functional and comfortable. The design was incredible and keeping it at the cost was quite exceptional. I liked the industrial architecture. It was clean. It felt very clean. They used the beams that had been burnt. They reused the materials and I really liked that. At any rate it gave me the opportunity to express my aesthetics because it was neutral ground (Anonymous, 2001).

For one resident the building's past held its own allure. She told me she had been daydreaming of what she would love to do with the building for over fifteen years. She had been in the building several times over the past decade, and each time was caught up in the ambiance of the building, along with the excitement of the artistic community.

So I had looked at the building and went into it when it was a raw, raw warehouse and looked at the top floor and I just felt like I wanted to make it liveable. So I would let my fantasies fly about that building. My son had a band for a couple years that rented space down at the Meatlockers and I would go and visit him down the alley there and I just loved to see people doing different things in there, you know the air was very exciting, very vibrant. So the minute I heard that Chris was doing something with the building there was no doubt. I needed a place, it was the right time (Anonymous, 2001).

The tenants of the Wilson building described a new and vibrant creative community that evolved within the building almost right away. Friendships formed between the residents, doors were left open, and spontaneous dinner parties became frequent occurrences. The younger tenants, in their twenties and thirties, hung out on the roof top-patios even

through the winter. While showing me her studio, artist Catherine Gamble gave a description of the atmosphere:

As you can see I am a little interested in colour. But see as a sort of teasing thing, Todd challenged me to make one without colouring it. So here it is, and you can see it ... is all white, but I used different whites and textures, so it still got to be varied and different and all the things that fill my criteria and his - that there is no colour. It was like that all the time - I mean [one friend] would come in and he had just seen a movie and painted like mad and I would go up and see his paintings and it was like "ahh those colours" and went back and did something and then I would see [another friend] he was into painting with yellows and suddenly I love all these yellows, and then go down and see something [another friend] had done or go down and see what [a fourth friend] had done right after she had seen my painting and go "Oh look where you took that!" It's fantastic, just fantastic. It has been one of the most stimulating winters of my life. Yeah, yeah, cooking and eating and drinking and painting and laughing, we've had a great time! (C. Gamble, Interview, August 17, 2001)

When asked about living side by side with the street community, Chris LeFevre and his tenants seemed unbothered. LeFevre even seemed to appreciate some of the graffiti. He said that he has never chased people off for painting on his building, or hired a company to remove graffiti. Although he is against the malicious damaging of other people's property, he feels that there are some areas where artistic licence has to be exercised. Graffiti on the brick near his offices is faded and weathered and LeFevre says no one is going to come and blast it away because "It looked kind of cool to begin with" (*Photo 51*). This attitude of tolerance towards the street community is echoed by one of the tenants. "I think that mixed-use means mixed-use, it means there's different incomes, there's different levels of commercial, residential. Street people are part of that. You know people begging, hookers on the corner. You know we do our best to clean it up, but

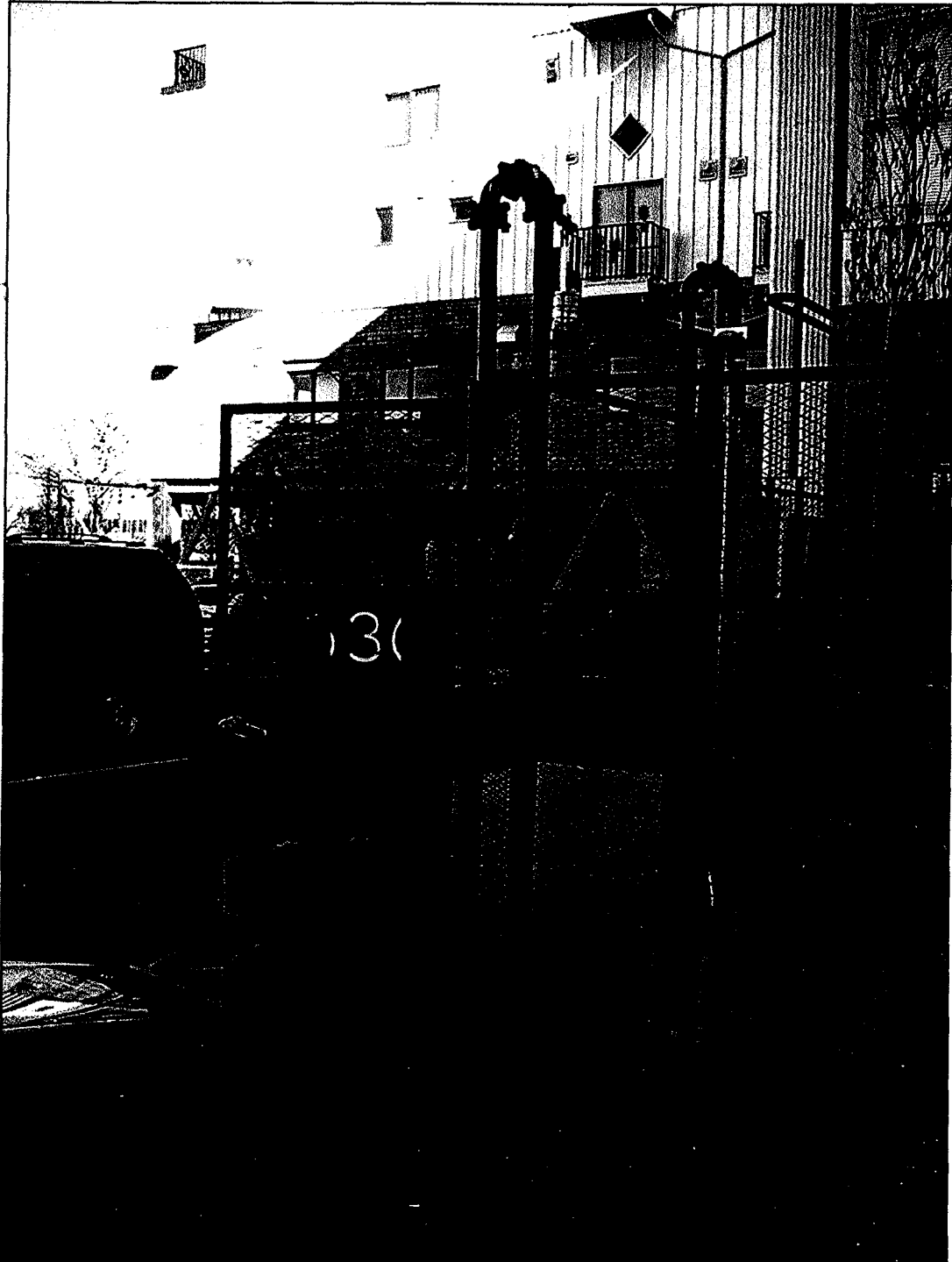


**(Photo 50) Worn down graffiti has become a decorative element along with the old refrigeration pipes which were re-used as railings for the Wilson Building.**

it is part of city life. I don't see them as a problem" (Anonymous, 2001).

However, like Mermaid Wharf, the issue of living near nightclubs was a hot subject for tenants. They reported screaming and yelling, bottles breaking and tires squealing at 2:30a.m. each night as the patrons of Evolution and Diesel nightclubs left the bars. According to the residents of the Wilson building, the patrons of Evolution do not disband at night but instead hang out in the parking lot. Sometimes they continue to drink for an hour or two after the bar closes. One woman told me of being woken up every night by drunk people screaming from the parking lot. "I can't get used to it. I think, "Why is there that screaming?" (Anonymous, 2001). Dougherty says that phoning the police at that hour is futile, because they police are much too busy. At one time there were some people interested in opening a nightclub where Kaleidoscope Theatre used to be, but Dougherty spearheaded a campaign against that. LeFevre says that noise from the bars letting out generates most of the complaints he hears from tenants. He believes that if the proliferation of nightclubs continues in the area it will "kill the golden goose" and people will choose to live on a quieter street.

Cathy and the other tenants that I interviewed were the first to move into the Wilson building, while construction was still ongoing at the Chatham Street side of the block. LeFevre had sold part of his property, which became 555 Herald, a clever post-modern design that uses transmission parts as finishings. 555 Herald Street seemed widely hated by LeFevre's tenants. Cathy called it "the sardine can" because of the silver metal siding. She told me that the noise of construction had been even more maddening because of her dislike of the design. After the construction of 555 Herald Street was completed, another construction project began. The property immediately behind the Wilson building was redeveloped in a hard edge industrial vernacular, adding more live/work units, these ones for sale as condominiums (*Photo 52*). This new building not only uses the metal siding façade characteristic of other buildings in the area, but also used unpainted cement wall and huge steel beams as part of the exterior features. The surface parking lots on the Chatham side are gone, and most



**(Photo 51) A gate behind the Wilson building that was once the door of a safe that stood in a small room in Buzzard's Lunch Gallery. The "safe room" was infamous within a small circle of artists and partygoers.**

of the block is now residential with services, offices and retail on the ground floor.

### Loft Living Downtown

THE RESIDENTS OF NORTHERN downtown show an appreciation for the edgy industrial flavour of their area, but are challenged by the levels of noise. While these residents are more prosperous than the artists that came before them, some are also artists, and share the same desire for a vibrant creative atmosphere to live in. Although these gentrifiers are mostly middle-class, they do not exhibit any fear of the street community with which they share their neighbourhood. The people who moved into Mermaid Wharf, Dragon Alley and the Wilson Building are bohemian, if not poor, and enjoy the lively diversity of downtown. The developers and architects who designed these three buildings were careful to take measures that would enhance feelings of security and minimise tensions associated with living in a diverse residential landscape. However, for these new residents noise has emerged as a major issue. Tensions are especially focused on proximity to nightclubs, and hostility towards their drunken patrons. From the residents of northern downtown the message is clear—downtown is for those who live there, rich and poor. People who come downtown to party are viewed as a source of fear, the cause of sleepless nights, and in some cases, reason to move away from downtown. While in the case of the Saltaire lounge it was possible for the night club owner to placate his neighbours by fostering a sense that the lounge was their territory too, convincing owners and the strata council proved impossible. Tom Moore's solution of creating a walled enclosure that acts as buffer for the noises of the city was more successful. If the City wants to support the addition of more housing downtown, future plans for residential conversion should take solving the issue of noise and particularly nightclub noise as a central ingredient of success.



## ↻ Chapter Seven ↻

### CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE SHAPING OF A DESIGN DISTRICT

We do not remember.

We rewrite memory much as history is re-written.

I am searching for the ghost traces of what has been left behind,  
the silent city within the city – the cracks and passages into the  
heart of time, following the stories of those who have watched  
and remember.

-Rev. B. Pandemonium, unpublished.

MARKED BY SOME AS VICTORIA'S new "Design District," the transition of northern downtown is well underway. Formal acknowledgement of the branding of the area is evident in both City documents and in publications by the private sector. The industrial landscape, the derelict landscape, and the creative landscape are fading in the face of a gentrified district characterized by furniture stores, antique stores, art galleries, home decor boutiques and a growing residential landscape. The Design District sits on the seam between an industrial zone and a mixed commercial/residential zone (see Figure 6). These blocks possess cultural capital resulting from heritage industrial buildings and from the creative energy of artists who lived and worked in the cheap studio spaces that these buildings once offered. I have tried to give an understanding of the sense of place of the Design District by showing the interplay of the various competing landscapes, out of which it is emerging.

I have told the story of over a decade of change in the landscapes of this study area. Each landscape was illustrated by descriptions of places to add depth to the narrative. Each place is a brick in my *bricoleur's* task of expressing the meaning of the character of the northern edge of Downtown. The narrative included not only my own perspectives and memories, but also those of key agents of revitalization, and other voices from various corners of the social spectrum. For instance, interviews with Chris LeFevre

and Tom Moore revealed some of the personal feelings and motivations behind the actions of agents of landscape change. LeFevre's past living in Gastown gave him insight into what kinds of spaces were desirable for artists. Moore's role as a Cool Aid Society board member influenced him in building a structure designed to minimize opportunities for conflict between Streetlink clients and residents of Dragon Alley. By bringing in these key agent voices, I sought to shed light on how personalities as well as market forces contributed to the feel of the Design District.

In Chapter Three, and then again in Chapter Five, I showed how affordable spaces existed because of a process of de-industrialization that has occurred around Victoria's downtown, as in other cities. The artist's community co-existed with the street community, both groups sharing a need for territory where they could be free to go about their lifestyle without interference from public regulations and sensibilities. But these liminal spaces were fragile, and quickly disappeared in the face of encroaching gentrification. In Chapter Four I presented a variety of places that were able to flourish in the period of dereliction, and explained that despite gentrifiers' sympathy for the plight of street people, renovations in the area had meant an erosion of their territory and already tenuous sense of stability. Of the four places I examined in the derelict landscape, only Streetlink remains in the area.

While derelict and abandoned industrial buildings made good homes for artists and street people, active industry around Rock Bay made good neighbours. In Chapter Three I argued that these harbour-oriented industries also serve an important function not only as a source of employment, but also by providing building materials to the central city, reducing trucking costs and pollution, and preventing additional strain on infrastructure the entire city. But contamination in and around Rock Bay has attracted the attention of government, and an initiative to clean up the area leaves questions about the ability of the working harbour to compete successfully with residential land use for desirable waterfront property that connects the downtown core with a recent burst of development around the

Upper Harbour. As I suggested in Chapter Six, the positioning of housing in opposition to bohemian, derelict, and industrial land use may overlook potentials for synergy and compatibility. In fact, downtown residents of the new loft style units in northern downtown say that it is night clubs that make living downtown a challenge, not industry or street people. Security features included in the design of buildings like Mermaid Wharf and Dragon Alley have helped mitigate some of the potential safety concerns of residents, while people who enjoy the edgy industrial aesthetic appreciate the industrial theme used in the architectural design of the buildings.

As the layers of landscape are interwoven in space, the social groups are interwoven in the multiple identities and activities of individuals. I have distinguished between voices from the artist's community, the street community, the gentrifiers, and the working harbour, but I have also showed how these social groups are interconnected. Artists at Buzzard's Lunch and residents of Mermaid Wharf were at times clients of Streetlink. The street kids of Spiral Island were also part of the creative landscape. Discovery Street Station, an artist's co-op, also did small utilitarian welding jobs. Fravashi Iron Works recycled materials from the Wilson Building's warehousing past as decorative elements.

Since my late 2002 Summer *flaneuse* stroll through the streets and alleys at the northern edge of downtown, many of the rougher elements have been obliterated. There is no more graffiti in backstage Herald Street. In fact there is no longer a backstage, as new buildings in the industrial edge style have replaced the hidden courtyard. Chatham Street has received a facelift. On Pembroke, the Open Door is gone, and in 2004 the building stands empty. Discovery Street Station has been painted charcoal grey, and the graffiti beside it has been erased. Herald Street is tidy and sedate compared to its raucous past.

In the window of the "Gallery on Herald" is a small sign. The sign reads:

Gallery on Herald is an intimate and courageous gallery located in the heart of Victoria's Design District.

The mandate of the gallery is to exhibit works by artists who use traditional supports and surfaces in an interesting and challenging manner. Often the works selected are on the edge of normative creative practices, thus recognising that good art must be innovative if it is to be sustainable.

This was the first visible use of the term "Design District" to lend some kind of cohesive identity to this rapidly changing area. The sign has been displayed for several years, its significance mostly unnoticed. Then, in the September 3, 2003 issue of *Monday Magazine*, Seager's Furniture had a half page add boldly declaring, "You'll find it all in Victoria's Design District" (p. 20). This was the first time I had seen the branding of northern downtown referenced in a publication (*Photo 53*).

Until recently tourist and telephone book maps of Victoria's Downtown showed the area ending around Herald Street (*Figure 8*). City documents also draw the border of downtown at Herald. The area beyond was off the collective radar (*Figure 7*). In 2001 a map distributed through Tourism Victoria showed detail all the way north to Discovery Street for the first time. After 2001 most maps had expanded their extent to include Capitol Iron. However, it was the 2004 tourist map by Brad Olthof and Sacha Asfar of Skycorp Investments that first extended north all the way to Rock Bay, and formally labelled the northern edge as "Victoria's Design District" (*Figure 9*). The Design District had made it "on the map." I spoke to Asfar about the change and he explained how his company tries to pick up on easily identifiable district identities, because it helps the tourist navigate through the city, breaking the city down into easily comprehensible chunks. When he first heard the term he incorporated it on his next map. Asfar's insight about tourists brings to mind a body of literature about the way that cities are perceived and about a global trend towards creating distinct themes for different areas of the city (*Figure 8 and*

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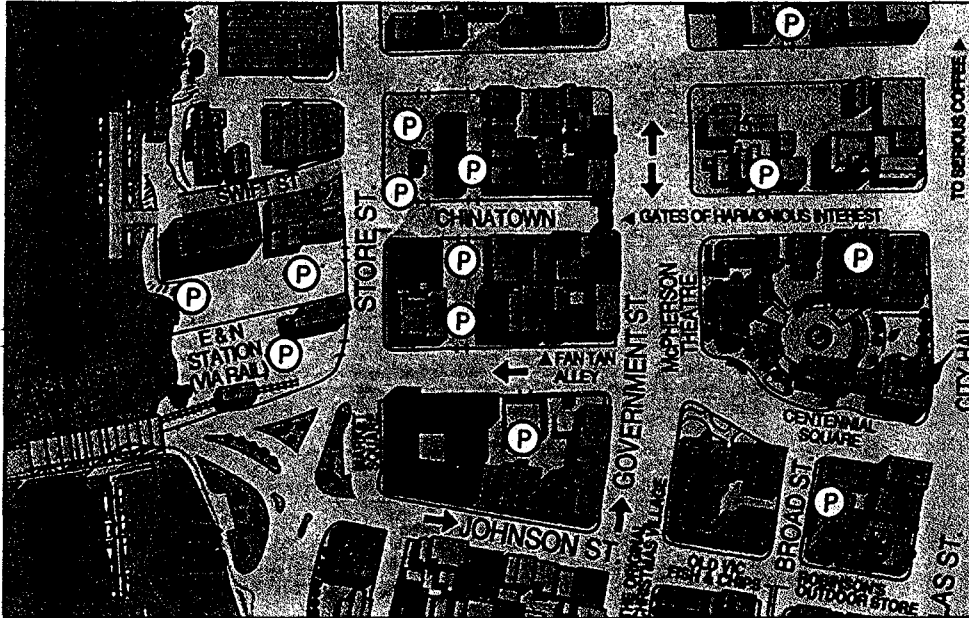
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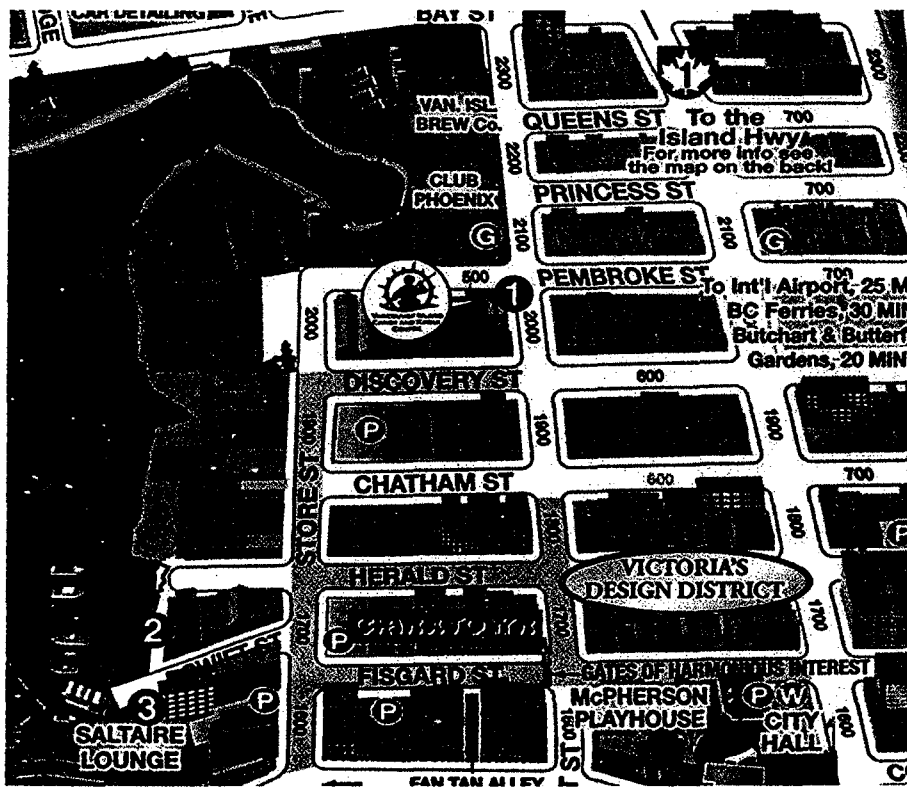
(Photo 52) Seager's Furniture Advertisement from *Monday Magazine*, August 28, 2003, p.20.



(Figure 7) Detail of an interpretive map of Downtown Victoria, 1997, found in UVic's Map Library. Reference #G3514.54. The entire study area has been excluded.



(Figure 8) Attractions Victoria Tourist Map 2003. The northernmost extent of this map is Herald Street.



(Figure 9) Skycorp Inc. Victoria Tourist Map 2004. The Design District is labelled and the shopping streets are highlighted in gold.

9).<sup>16</sup>

The most recent step towards the formalisation of the "Design District" as an entity in the downtown landscape can be seen in a report published by the City on April 20, 2004. *The Rock Bay Plan Draft* is the culmination of a consultative process undertaken by the City to decide the future of northern downtown. In this draft, the phrase "Design District" shows up twice. The first occurrence recognises the evolution of the district, and the links to the creative and artistic implications inherent in its use.

"The area south of Pembroke Street is identified as a transition area leading into north downtown. North downtown has evolved into a mix of specialty retail and residential conversions that could be expanded into the development of a cultural and design district. The area south of Pembroke Street and potentially the Transport Canada/BC Hydro site could contribute through the development of live/work, small performance venues or space for musicians and artists" (pp. 3-4).

Later in the *Rock Bay Plan* the Design District is mentioned again, this time, in relationship to specific stores. "The area south of Pembroke Street is currently a mix of light industrial, retail and surface parking lots. This area has the potential to provide an extension of the 'Design District' that has evolved in the north end of downtown with the advent of Seager's Furniture, Chintz's and the Urban Barn" (p. 6).

The transformation of northern downtown into Victoria's Design District brands a themed environment. Merely labelling a district and drawing its boundaries does not qualify the district as a themed

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<sup>16</sup> In the 1960s geographer Kevin Lynch explored the connection between people's cognitive recognition of their environment and urban structure (Lynch, 1960). By examining the mental maps of city dwellers Lynch formulated the concept of legibility, the way that people perceive cities and orient themselves around them. Lynch said that people understand urban environments in terms of paths, landmarks, districts, edges and nodes. It makes sense then that in order to increase the legibility of a city that mapmakers and planners would want to enhance these elements. By embracing a cohesive and recognisable visual theme and by naming the area as a distinct district the area becomes more legible in the public's cognitive map of Victoria's downtown.

environment. But the cohesive look of the area that has emerged adds content to the packaging. Throughout the area, icons of the industrial create an emerging sense of a distinct area, separate from the surrounding landscape. The agency of artists, business owners and developers has cumulated in the creation of a perceptual district that has the potential to hold its own with other themed areas of Victoria—Chinatown, Antique Row, and Old Town.

The creation of themed urban environments is an international trend, linked to the rise of tourism, the increasing importance of leisure and lifestyle as an economic generator, and a global shift in the perception of urban landscapes. In Mary Hancock's 2002 article about a themed urban city in India, she summarizes:

... entire cities can be packaged as tourist destinations with themed environments consisting of refurbished public and commercial spaces and planned events such as festivals and walking tours. Such themed spaces present selective accounts of local, regional, and/or national histories through carefully wrought montages of visual images, narratives, and built environments. These accounts, usually framed as 'heritage', celebrate and advertise the culturally distinctive, but always safe, comprehensible, and consumable, experiences that urban encounters can offer. Over the past three decades, the marking and marketing of urban heritage have become parts of a global industry. Heritage entrepreneurship underwrites privatized modes of cultural production and supplements increasingly impoverished programs of state-sponsored urban development (p. 693).

John Hannigan presents a highly critical review of the theming of urban environments (1998). His description of the disneyfication of America captures the disdain he shares with other authors for these unauthentic environments where symbolic indicators have replaced the real landscape in order to attract consumers into a "sanitized razzmatazz" (p. 67) that has

no place for the poor and marginalized except to co-opt whatever cultural capital they might possess as visible 'others' (Gottdiener, 1997; Zukin 1995). These themed environments are diverse. Some are actual theme parks; others are malls, individual businesses, heritage festival centres, whole cities, and once derelict inner city areas like northern downtown Victoria. Hunter Shobe in his 2003 presentation to the *American Association of Geographers* said, "Those who write about 'themed space' share three main concerns: corporate control over the production of urban space; the increased surveillance and control of public and civic space; and the creation of simulated 'inauthentic' environments which impinge upon the formation of local place identities (abstract)." While municipal governments and other agents of civic boosterism embrace the theming of urban environments as a tool for revitalization and economic renewal, urban theorists warn of an accompanying loss of public places, local identities and freedoms.

But in Victoria, the authentic public freedoms of downtown have not been totally eroded. Victoria has a particular style of creating themed environments that can be contrasted with the extremes of top-down developments typical of themed and branded districts in larger cities. In Chinatown, heritage preservation efforts by the City and property owners could be said to have enhanced the public sphere, and not detracted from it. Because there was no one corporation behind the creation of Chinatown, the streets remain in the public realm, policing remains the jurisdiction of the city police, not private security companies, and surveillance is for the most part still a matter of community "eyes on the street," not cameras and other high tech measures typical of mall or festival centre themed environments. Like Chinatown, northern downtown's theme has evolved through local history, agency and, as Chris LeFevre put it, "the poetry of the area." While the industrial iconography present in the landscape of northern downtown is certainly a visual contrast to the still active functional industrial areas—quite discernable from the real thing—it is, nonetheless, at least somewhat authentic at the roots, in that it has been produced by local people and by

local cultural processes. To the degree that future re-packaging of the area retains this dependence on people who live and work in northern downtown, and to the degree that policy and economics allow for a fertile creative community to exist in the area, that sense of a locally-generated place identity can be preserved.

Unlike strictly top-down themed districts, no management company or development corporation is removing civic rights from public spaces in Victoria. However, for the most marginalized citizens, more subtle forces have already removed these rights. The creative landscape of the low-income, edgy artist's community has already been eroded by rising property values, and by the redevelopment of dilapidated buildings such as the Wilson Building on Herald. The derelict landscape of the street community has also disintegrated except at the most formal government sponsored level of service provision, simply because of the rise of mainstream attention to this edge of downtown, which had been previously ignored. While the industrial landscape of the working harbour seems to be fighting back, and may still be able to hold some ground against pressure towards residential land use and against the rise of the Design District to its east and south, non-water-oriented industry is becoming no more than historical flavour (e.g., Wilson Building façade).

Each landscape that has lost ground has also played a contributing role in the theming process. It is the industrial landscape that provided the raw material for the new aesthetic. The appeal of nineteenth century industrial architecture to twenty-first century urbanites has encouraged the restoration of heritage buildings. City policy further promotes restoration with financial incentives by including the preservation of buildings at the intersection of Pembroke and Store Streets as a heritage enclave. The *Rock Bay Plan Draft* reads: "Rock Bay has an important industrial history that should not be lost and when possible should be reflected in the future image" (p. 7). For newer buildings, active industry on the harbour has inspired the palette. The grey, red and white corrugated metal façade of Point Hope Shipyard is reflected throughout the gentrified landscape.

Architects and interior designers interacting with their surroundings have created a cohesive aesthetic throughout the district. North of Chatham Street, industrial zoning has preserved space for the dirtier arts, such as welding and carpentry. South of Chatham, mixed residential zoning encourages the construction of live-work units where the tidier arts such as painting still thrive. Fifteen years ago, when loud and dirty arts flourished in Herald Street's derelict buildings, the boundary was at Chinatown's edge; but now creative activities must be sensitive to the needs of residents.

Retail shops selling products for interior decoration dominate street level. At Herald and Government streets, Seager's Furniture has expanded, adding an edgier and trendier department featuring furniture in leather, steel and canvas. The Urban Barn moved in on Herald, selling upmarket household items, brushed steel, oversized bolts and other industrial flourishes. At the head of Swift Street, Chintz and Company has been a success story as artificially-aged interior décor has become more and more trendy. On Store Street, the basement of Capital Iron has become more important to the business, the price of its curios rising to reflect consumer demand. At Pembroke and Government, perhaps too far north to capture the pedestrian flow, a store making and selling "antiqued furniture" opened, and then closed again in what used to be a welding shop. All these stores share a common theme—they sell edgy, avant-garde home décor, all inspired by a nostalgic, yet sanitized heritage industrial aesthetic. This aesthetic has become popular with urbanites worldwide, whose consumption patterns have increasingly reflected a taste for the unique, the authentic and the local. Ironically, the emergence of a market for this kind of home décor has led to the development of similar districts in cities all over the globe.

The industrial landscape provided a historic building stock, a palette, and the inspiration for the look of the emerging Design District simply by its presence. It provided space by its decline. But the role of the creative landscape and the arts community in the theming of the district was more active. The first wave of artists who populated derelict warehouses used the

materials and character of their surroundings as their muse. Artist-welders, heavy metal bands, and other participants in the lively arts community of the 1990s gave the area a layer of poetry that stimulated new energy and interest from among the middle-class. Despite anti-capitalist sentiments and counter-culture identification, these creative people were pioneers in the gentrification of the area. As in other cities, it was the artists who were willing to live and work in crumbling buildings, to share space with the street community and with industry, and to go without the amenities of up-to-code urban living. But it was not only the cultural capital of the arts community that made them active agents of gentrification. The products of the creative landscape were consumed by businesses, architects, and residents, and were used to contribute to the final look of the Design District. As the process of gentrification intensified, more artists were attracted to the area by the market that existed for their work. Thus, Fravashi Ironworks moved into the studio on Chatham Street to work on the exterior details of the Wilson Building while Wrought'n Iron welders were taking commissions from new businesses moving into the area. Finally, a more affluent group of artists was among the first people to moved into the newly-created residential landscape. Artists like Catherine Gamble enjoyed a sense of continuity with the edgy arts scene of the past. At the same time, by their very presence they anchored the identity of the new residential community to the creative landscape, and added prestige to the area.

While it is easy to see how forces of gentrification eroded the derelict landscape, and how the street community lost places as the Design District materialized, the contribution of the derelict landscape to the evolution of the Design District is subtle. But without a phase of dereliction when buildings were condemned and abandoned and when the City's bylaw enforcement attention was directed elsewhere, none of the bottom-up processes that helped to kick-start gentrification could have happened. It was before tourist maps extended their scope north of Chinatown that the seeds of the Design District were planted in the grungy intersection

between creative elements of the street community and impoverished elements of the arts community. Indeed, the street kids of Spiral Island, the artists of Buzzard's Lunch, volunteers at Streetlink, the musicians who used the Meat Lockers, and the clients of the Swift Street Medical Clinic are all known to each other, segments of Victoria's downtown community united by their struggle with poverty, by shared addictions, and by a fertile creative spirit. In my case, the street community and the arts community represent different phases of one life, two identities I have held. The same is true for many of my friends who have worked and lived in the landscapes and places and shaped the landscapes at the northern edge of downtown; and who have been part of the formation of Victoria's new Design District.

The scope of this thesis has recognised limits. The landscapes I identified are determined by my own life experience. Another person might add different layers: the natural landscape, the retail landscape, or the feminist landscape, for example. The time span covered was also chosen subjectively. I focused on the years that I was an active participant in the community of northern downtown. Another person might choose a wider time frame, remembering places from further back in time or placing more emphasis on the area's history. I chose to reveal what I know best, leaving others to flesh out the rest.

I left much of the written record untouched. There exists a profusion of empirical evidence documenting demographic, ownership and land use change; it is waiting to be examined and interpreted. A comprehensive review of media coverage regarding the areas I touched on would also be a means to flesh out what is known about the evolution of the area. But much of the poetry of northern downtown went unrecorded. It was my goal to capture as much of that unwritten poetry as I could, before it is forgotten.

This thesis was also limited by my choice of a very small study area. While I examined the activities of each community in the context of these few blocks, each of the landscapes and social groups I identified could be studied in relation to their true spatial distribution across the Capital Regional District. While I did try to place each landscape in a regional

context, the narrow focus on these few blocks precluded any comprehensive examination of each community as a whole, despite some very interesting stories waiting to be told. The several representative places I chose to explore do give a feel for the character of each landscape.

If I left much unsaid in regards to the regional situation, the same could be said of the international picture. Victoria is only one city among many where a similar process is unfolding. By including the literature on gentrification, de-industrialization, and skid row, I was able to briefly acknowledge that this is a local version of an international phenomenon. A comparative study of the evolution of similar themed areas in cities of various sizes would give a better sense of the role of each landscape layer in the creation of a new sense of place. By tracing similar processes in other places, we could also take a step back from the unique personalities and characteristics that have shaped Victoria's northern downtown, and gain greater insight into general patterns of urban trend setting.



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⇒ *Appendix One* ⇐

**HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS CONSENT FORM**

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled *Interpreting a Changing Landscape* that is being conducted by Cara Segger. Cara Segger is a graduate student, in the department of geography at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by calling 721-7345

As a graduate student, this research is part of the requirements for a degree in geography and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lawrence McCann. You may contact the supervisor at 721-7340.

This research is being partially funded by the Sara Spencer Award.

The purpose of this research project is to explore the changing look of the old industrial area on the northern edge of downtown as it experiences economic revitalization and land use change. I aim to find out how the new heritage industrial landscape relates to the original industrial landscape and to uncover the social dynamics behind the visual changes.

Research of this type is important because it has land use policy implications concerning the role of aesthetics and the arts in creating a successful mixed use area from a previously derelict part of downtown Victoria. It may also assist in understanding the implications of this type of development for the network of inner city social services.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your work has helped change this area's look or because you were recommended to me as someone who could help me understand these changes.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will involve a tape-recorded, unstructured interview about an hour or two long. They will take place wherever is most convenient for you. These interviews will be guided conversations structured around a few key topics. You are encouraged to include anything you think may be of interest. Parts of the interview will be written up in my thesis along with a descriptive paragraph that links you to the aesthetics of change in the physical and human landscape.

There are few potential risks to you by participating in this research. However, it is possible that during the course of an interview a participant may say

something that could be politically damaging, such as expressing negative feelings about one of the other participants or social groups in the area. In case of such an occurrence I will volunteer to strike any comment off the record or ask you to reword it, although I may ask for permission to include it in an anonymous percentage, for instance, 40% of group (x) expressed feeling (y) about group (z). I will create pseudonyms for any individuals who are mentioned by you in the interview. You always have the option to have all or any part of your interview be anonymous. If you do choose anonymity then any identifying statements will be excluded and you will be given a pseudonym. Also, it is expected that people who know me are likely to volunteer more sensitive information. No information that might compromise my friends' job security, criminal record or social well-being will be printed in my thesis.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include adding to the state of knowledge about the role of art and aesthetics in inner city rehabilitation and the recognition of your contribution to the new look of the area.. I hope it will also have implications for economic, land use, and social policy.

You are being asked to provide information on a voluntary basis only. Feel free to withdraw at any time or decline addressing any topic without any consequences or any explanation. If at any point during the interview you would like me to exclude something that you have said from the transcript, just let me know. If you choose to withdraw at any point in this study, you may agree to allow me to use portions of your contribution in my analysis as long as I can promise anonymity and confidentiality. Your interview transcript will be destroyed after the analysis is complete. If you do not agree to this use then I will destroy your transcript immediately and remove your contribution from the analysis.

Should you say anything that I think could be damaging to you during the course of the interview, I will ask you if you want that part on or off the record.

Unless it is specifically requested otherwise, anonymity will be protected for any informants who do not hold positions in the public and semi-public eye (public figures in my study area might include: developers, landowners, artists, architects). Public and semi-public figures will only be identified where the topic being discussed is a matter of public record and I have explicit agreement from you that I may do so. To protect anonymity I will use fake names and edit identifying details.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by

storing tapes, interview transcripts, etc. at my house in a locked cabinet. This is in order to protect any confidential material that might result from the interview. Until the publication of the thesis, my committee and I will be the only people with access to the information you provide.

After the thesis is written the data will be destroyed. Tapes will be erased and documents will be shredded.

I intend to post my thesis on my website, [culturalgeography.com](http://culturalgeography.com) when it is complete. At this time I will email participants to let them know it is up. Graduate theses are also available for review at the geography department upon request.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisor at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice President Research at the University of Victoria (250-721-7968).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**A COPY OF THIS CONSENT WILL BE LEFT WITH YOU, AND A COPY WILL BE TAKEN BY THE RESEARCHER**





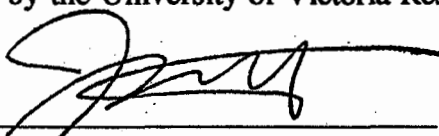
**University of Victoria**  
Human Research Ethics Committee

**CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Cara Segger Graduate Student	<u>Department/School</u> GEOG	<u>Supervisor</u>	
<u>Co-investigator(s):</u> N/A			
<u>Title:</u> Interpreting a Changing Landscape			
<u>Project No.</u> 214-00	<u>Start Date</u> 14 Jul 00	<u>End Date</u> 13 Jul 01	<u>Approval Date</u> 14 Jul 00

**Certification**

This is to certify that the University of Victoria Ethics Review Committee on Research and Other Activities Involving Human Subjects has examined the research proposal and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Subjects.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
J. Howard Brunt,  
Associate Vice-President, Research

**This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions/minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of "Request for Continuing Review or Amendment of an Approved Project" form.**

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